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Dear Haverford,

Welcome to the next generation of the Haverford Journal! Haverford Journal 2.0, if you will. If you're familiar with this little publication, you have probably already noticed a lot of the superficial changes; if this is your first time reading the Journal, trust us, this cover is much cooler than the old one. So, why are we writing to you? Other than to point out the obvious, we, Thea Hogarth and Steve Chehi, wanted to fill you in on what we've been up to for the past semester.

The Journal is a relatively young publication, which really means that every time the old editors graduate, the new editors try to do something new. With no real precedent to guide us (not even the phone number of a printing company), we've decided to preserve what the original editors started, but change our attitudes just a little bit. We won't bore you with all the details, but we'd like to point out just a few of the new features to be excited about.

First, you'll notice the subtitle on the cover, "Myth & Marginality;" from now on we hope to title our issues according to a theme that unites all the papers we select. We don't plan to enter each round of submissions with a pre-determined theme; rather, we find that themes tend to emerge once we've selected papers. If the title we pick intrigues you, or enhances your reading experience, or angers you, we're content.

Our second major change is the inclusion of a freshman paper. That is, of all the freshman papers we receive, we will select one to represent the best work of the freshman class that year. Although we have not included one in this issue, take heart, we have already selected one for the next issue. The Haverford Journal strives to showcase the best academic work at Haverford, and we want to include the entire community. Although in the past the Journal has published senior work exclusively, we accept submissions from every year and will make a concerted effort in the future to represent more than one class per issue.

With these changes, we hope to set a precedent for future development and improvement. For one, we plan to leave a phone number for future editors.

Enjoy!

Thea Hogarth and Steve Chehi
Co-Editors

The Haverford Journal is published annually by the *Haverford Journal* Editorial Board at Haverford College, 370 Lancaster Avenue, Haverford, PA 19041. The *Journal* was founded in the spring of 2004 by Robert Schiff in an effort to showcase some of Haverford's best student work in the humanities and social sciences.

Student work appearing in *The Haverford Journal* is selected by the Editorial Board, which puts out a call for papers at the end of every semester. Entries are judged on the basis of academic merit, clarity of writing, persuasiveness, and other factors that contribute to the quality of a given work.

All works cited as in the original text.

Table of Contents

Editors' Note	3
Who Owns History?	6
<i>The Construction, Deconstruction, and Purpose of the Main Line Myth</i>	
Michael Grant '07	
The Witness in the Martyr's Mirror	28
<i>An Investigation of American Myth and Christian Duty in 'Amish Forgiveness'</i>	
Ryan Pirtle-McVeigh '07	
Colonialist Ideas in an Un-Colonial Place	47
<i>"Terra Australis Nondum Cognita"</i>	
Samuel S. Dalke '07	
Self-Deception in Suburbia	66
<i>Plotting Escape in The Amazing Adventures of Cavalier and Clay</i>	
Emily Taber '07	
Acknowledgments	86

Who Owns History?

The Construction, Deconstruction, and Purpose of the *Main Line Myth*

Michael Grant '07

Introduction: The Main Line and its Myth

IN 1846 THE PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD COMPANY (PRC) MADE PLANS TO EXTEND A “main line” of rail from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh that would allow Philadelphia to compete with New York’s Erie Canal. After the construction of the rail line, the PRC sought to develop the unused land that straddled the tracks west of Philadelphia. At first the PRC constructed summer resorts, which attracted the city’s social elite, amidst these early Philadelphian suburbs.¹ Upon improvements to the PRC’s commuter rail system, however, the elites who originally inhabited the suburbs, or the “Main Line,” during the summer began to establish permanent residences.² Development continued on the Main Line, resulting in what historian Nathaniel Burt, in *The Perennial Philadelphians*, describes as an “exodus” of Philadelphia’s elite.³ Commencing in 1870, this exodus led to the construction of “exclusive mansions”⁴ on the Main Line that supported “large numbers” of servants.⁵ This “Golden Age”⁶ ended in 1930 at the onset of the Great Depression and the dissolution of the country estates.⁷ The corpus of Main Line literature from this period focuses on the elites and their country estates, overlooking the servants of this era—the Main Line’s underclass.

This thesis argues that the Main Line social elites, on account of exclusionary town planning and estate architecture, spawned a myth that masked the existence of the servant underclass -- an underclass that the elites themselves created and sustained through the maintenance of their country estates. The argument poses the questions: what *is* the Main Line myth? *Who* created the myth, and why? What purpose or function does the myth serve, and for whom? Before answering these questions, however, this thesis contextualizes the myth.

As stated above, the erasure of the underclass at the hands of the social elites precipitated a myth. In 1922, John W. Townsend demonstrated consciousness of the myth in *The Old “Main Line”*: “[...] the reading public judges the whole by the few, so that the Main Line seems to some to be largely a land of dinners and dances, of hunters and horse shows.”⁸ Though Townsend, himself a Main Liner, does not deny the existence of an exclusive society—a society that the dinners, dances, hunters, and horse shows distinguish—on the Main Line, his critique incites further penetration into and reflection on Philadelphia’s western suburbs; Townsend’s insights raise questions concerning romanticized Main Line literature. While not necessarily untrue, this literature masks and hyperbolizes facets of Main Line society.

Though the myth does not provide a comprehensive portrait of Main Line society, it retains value as an accepted reality. Main Line historians throughout the twentieth-century, negligent of Townsend’s observations, solely illustrate the Main Line’s elite. For instance, Main Liner and historian William Morrison demonstrates myth-making tendencies in his introduction to *The Main Line: Country Houses of Philadelphia’s Storied Suburb, 1870-1930*:

For us, though, ‘Main Line’ will refer to the gently undulating landscape on either side of that railroad right-of-way and the distinguished, often elegant, and sometimes improbable, country houses that rose upon it between 1870 and 1930.⁹

Defining “Main Line,” Morrison limits his discussion to the landscape and estates of the elite, an interpretation representative of typical or popular Main Line histories. Michael P. McCarthy critiques the historical value of myth, which he frames as stereotype, in *Corrupt and Contented? Philadelphia’s Stereotypes and Suburban Growth on the Main Line*:

Stereotypes are something else that we urban historians are no longer quite so comfortable with. To be sure, we never consciously base our assumptions on stereotypes, but in reality we often do, by using a point of view popularized by a respected authority who was ‘on the scene,’ so to speak, way back when history was being made.¹⁰

The authors and historians from the Main Line’s Golden Age, oftentimes elite, represent this “respected authority.” Documenting a socially segregated society, as seen in Chapter 3, these historians illuminate the elites’ history while they disregard the underclass’ existence. As a result, subsequent historians popularized an elite perspective of Main Line history: an exclusive society impenetrable to non-elites.

Only a thin body of work confronts the Main Line's underclass. One such text, Marvin E. Porch's 1938 *The Philadelphia Main Line Negro: A Social, Economic, and Educational Survey*, studies the Main Line's black community during the 1930s. While he notes the "countless beautiful estates" on the Main Line,¹¹ he writes of an underclass that moved to the Main Line, "[...] purely for economic reasons, where there would be opportunity to secure employment as domestics, gardeners, landscapers, butlers, chauffeurs, or laborers."¹² Thus, while the myth portrays a society that did actually exist, it ignores the population that catered to the elites.

Chapter 1: Constructing the Main Line Myth

THIS CHAPTER CONSTRUCTS AND ANALYZES THE MAIN LINE MYTH THROUGH CINEMATIC depictions and written histories of the Main Line's 1870 to 1930 Golden Age.¹³ In creating the myth, these sources represent an elite society impenetrable to social and geographical outsiders. The movies *Kitty Foyle* and *The Young Philadelphians*, though fictional, advance Main Liners' self-perceptions of their society. Elite Haverfordian Christopher Morley authored *Kitty Foyle* in 1939 and famously romanticizes the Main Line in his poem "Paoli Local." Philip Barry, who wrote *The Philadelphia Story*, also in 1939, gained inspiration from visits to his friend Colonel Robert L. Montgomery's Main Line estate Ardrossan; he similarly fashioned Katharine Hepburn's lead role after Montgomery's wife Hope Scott.¹⁴ These two movies reflect the attitudes of elite Main Liners, revealing the myth as a product of the Main Line itself. Accounts of the Main Line during the Golden Age, and those written in romantic retrospect, resonantly advance the perspectives of elite Main Liners.

Mark Alan Hewitt writes in his "Remembering the Philadelphia Story," which serves as the introduction to William Morrison's *The Main Line: Country Houses of Philadelphia's Storied Suburb 1870-1930*, that the Main Line "[...] began to have a cachet of exclusivity and even mystery in popular culture."¹⁵ *Kitty Foyle* and *The Philadelphia Story* accentuate Hewitt's notion of exclusivity through their repeated enforcement of social impenetrability. Furthermore, Hewitt's title, "Remembering the Philadelphia Story," demonstrates the utility of constructing the Main Line myth through movies, as he associates the Main Line's actual Golden Age with a fictitious account: to Hewitt, the myth blends with reality.

Within this myth there exists a social class duality: elites and non-elites. Throughout the movies and other fictional and non-fictional accounts of the Main Line, elites conform to their society's standards and deny the entrance of non-

elites. An array of Main Line historians, including Nathaniel Burt, John Groff, and William Morrison, though writing about the non-fictional society, reinforces the myth presented in the cinematic depictions; their interpretations of the Main Line's history illustrate a similar society of social and geographical exclusion. With an underlying message of social impenetrability, both *Kitty Foyle* and *The Philadelphia Story* depict the intersection of elites and social outsiders.

The theatrical adaptation to Morley's *Kitty Foyle: The Natural History of a Woman* narrates the relationship between Kitty, a working-class girl from Philadelphia, and Wynnewood Strafford, an elite Main Liner. While Wyn initially hires Kitty as a secretary at his publishing company, their relationship extends beyond the workplace. Early in the movie, Kitty's father Tom Foyle warns her of Main Liners' rejection of social outsiders, but Kitty chooses to ignore him. When Wyn's business fails, he returns to his family and Main Line society, where he stands subject to elite conformity. Despite Kitty and Wyn's mutual desire to marry, the Straffords denounce Wyn's marriage to a non-elite. Ultimately, these class barriers prevent Wyn and Kitty's union. *The Philadelphia Story* presents a similar scenario.

Written the same year as *Kitty Foyle*, Barry's *The Philadelphia Story* entered theaters in 1940. In *The Philadelphia Story*, the lead character Tracy Lord navigates class boundaries as she chooses a groom. Presented with three men from an array of social strata, Tracy reinforces her social class when she re-marries C. K. Dexter Haven, a fellow elite Main Liner, despite their previous divorce. The other prospective grooms, white-collar Macaulay Connor and nouveau riche George Kittredge, lack the social status necessary to enter Main Line society. Set the day before the Lord-Kittredge wedding at the Lords' Main Line estate, the movie narrates Tracy's interactions with the grooms. The three men converge when *Spy Magazine* publisher Sidney Kidd, determined to photograph the elite wedding for his magazine, lures Dexter into a blackmail plot. Kidd, who possesses adulterous photographs of Tracy's father, Mr. Lord, sends reporters Macaulay Connor and Liz Imbrie to the wedding posed as Dexter's friends; if the Lords refuse the reporters, Kidd threatens to publish the photographs of Mr. Lord. The night before the wedding, Tracy, while inebriated, takes a swim with Macaulay. George reacts judgmentally to Tracy's actions, and they ultimately choose to cancel the wedding. With the wedding guests waiting inside the Lord estate during this affair, Dexter re-proposes to Tracy, and they decide to re-marry. Whereas Kitty and Wyn cannot overcome barriers that keep them apart, Tracy and Dexter cannot fight the forces that eventually bring them together. *The Philadelphia Story* thus illustrates the Main Line from an elite perspective, whereas *Kitty Foyle*, though representative of elite perspective, narrates from a non-elite point-of-view. An undercurrent of so-

cial geography parallels these elite and non-elite perspectives of the Main Line, for in both movies non-elite *Philadelphians* attempt to penetrate *Main Line* society. Geographical impenetrability, therefore, mirrors social impenetrability. Despite differing perspectives, however, both movies depict a socially impenetrable Main Line.

Morley's *Kitty Foyle* demonstrates the parallel between social and geographical separation. *Kitty Foyle* introduces Main Liners with a scene at the Philadelphia Assembly, an elite ball that Kitty attends not as a participant, but as a spectator from the street. Tom Foyle first uses the term "Main Liners" to describe these elite who capture Kitty's imagination through what Mark Alan Hewitt's describes as "mystery." In fact, Tom uses the terms "elite" and "Main Line" synonymously, identifying the Main Line as an exclusively elite society. Kitty's continued attraction to elite society provokes Tom to describe the "rich Main Liners" as "monkeys," while Kitty, enmeshed in the mystery of Main Line society, views them as "princes and princesses," Members of a socially, economically, and geographically segregated working class, the Foyles represent a non-elite perspective of the Main Line and elucidate the social separation that the Main Liners sought. Thus, portrayed not only as working-class, but also as city dwellers, the Foyles relate geographical and social separation when they label the social elite as "Main Liners" and not "Philadelphians." Similarly, *The Philadelphia Story's* "*Spy Magazine*," geared toward a non-elite readership, writes of a separate and distinct "Main Line Society" in order to attract public interest; *Spy*, like *Kitty*, consumes the myth's mystery. The consumption of myth and mystery recalls Townsend's quote about the reading public, who judge the Main Line as an exclusively elite society of theatricality. Through the above acknowledgements of the Main Line's social and geographical exclusivity, the non-elites demonstrate the myth's purpose: the representation of an impenetrable society. Additionally, this demonstration advances a Main Liner's—Morley's—conception of the Main Line. Morley and Barry thus construct the myth through their representations of non-elite.

Wynnewood Strafford, whose name reveals his Main Line status, represents Kitty's "prince charming," or means of entrance into Main Line society. Wyn, who employs Kitty's father, offers her a position at his magazine *Philly: A Magazine of Philadelphia for Philadelphians*. Though himself a Main Liner, Wyn retains his "Philadelphian" title because he refuses to dissociate Main Line and Philadelphian society. Hence, Wyn's treatment of geographical and social labels contrasts Tom Foyle's. Himself an elite Philadelphian, Nathaniel Burt describes this phenomenon, known as "elastic Philadelphianism," in *The Perennial Philadelphians: The Anatomy of an American Aristocracy*. Chapter 2 develops this

term as it relates to Philadelphia's elite families:

The oddest aspect of Philadelphia suburbia, and one that often strikes observers from out of town, is the fact that no matter how far the Philadelphia suburbs spread beyond the official bounds of the city, the inhabitants always seem to think of themselves as Philadelphians.¹⁶

For Philadelphia's elite, "The Main Line became an extension of the urban social world, essentially moving Society a few miles west along the railroad [...]"¹⁷ This view of Philadelphian society allowed for Burt's elastic Philadelphianism and also opposed non-elites' perceptions of social relations. For instance, while *The Philadelphia Story* portrays Main Line families and society, it uses "Philadelphia" in its title—not "Main Line"—because it advances an elite perspective. Thus, despite attempts of the non-elite to separate Main Liners from the city (i.e. Tom Foyle and *Spy Magazine*), the suburban social elites retained their Philadelphian title. The Main Line elites gained the façade of separation and distinction that they sought, but remained atop Philadelphia's social ladder.

Kitty remains fascinated with the exclusive Main Line society after taking a position at Wyn's *Philly Magazine*. A friend of Kitty's remarks that Wyn's elite society "was all that she had ever dreamed of." Burt claims that the Main Liners themselves conceived of their society as a "dream world," which suggests that Morley uses Kitty to advance his vision of the Main Line.¹⁸ Ultimately, the Main Line's social and geographical impenetrability upholds its exclusivity and mystery, and the resulting social segregation allows for Kitty's dreams.

Outsiders' failed attempts to marry into elite families and enter Main Line society reveal the Main Line's social impenetrability. Tom Foyle's statement that "Main Liners always marry each other" embodies manifestations of the Main Line myth in both movies. John Groff's dissertation *Green Country Towns: The Development of Philadelphia's Main Line 1870-1915* reinforces Foyle's claim when he acknowledges "The clear definition of social circles and behavior, and the incessant intermarriage among the elite [...]"¹⁹ *Kitty Foyle*, in tandem with Groff's—himself a Main Liner—observations, demonstrates the role of intermarriage in forcing social conformity. For instance, Wyn founds *Philly Magazine* in search of independence from his family. However, when the magazine fails, Wyn returns to his family because a family will demands that he remain on the Main Line in order to receive his inheritance. At the same time that *Philly* fails, Wyn and Kitty approach his family with their marriage proposal, which includes a move to Chicago. When confronted with the obligatory Main Line residence outlined in the will, Kitty realizes that, based on their class differences, she cannot marry Wyn. *Kitty Foyle*

therefore portrays the Strafford family, and all Main Line families, as social institutions that require conformity and inherited cultural capital for acceptance.

The Philadelphia Story differs from *Kitty Foyle* in that it advances an elite perspective on the Main Line, which it accomplishes through its Main Line setting and elite central character, Tracy Lord. Despite its difference in perspective from *Kitty Foyle*, *The Philadelphia Story* constructs a similar myth; threatened with the near-entrance of non-elites into elite society, the Main Line remains impenetrable. In order for non-elite *Spy Magazine* reporters Macaulay Connor and Liz Imbrie to enter the Lord estate, they must pose as Dexter's friends. Without the guise of elite status (Dexter), they cannot enter the Main Line. William Morrison affirms this perception when he quotes an early twentieth century Main Liner who remarks, "[...] the Main Line is not so much a location as a state of mind [...]" where "[...] everyone here knows everyone else, or, if they don't they never will."²⁰ In essence, the elites in *The Philadelphia Story*, along with the non-fictional Main Liners that Morrison describes above, remain ever-ignorant of social outsiders. *The Philadelphia Story* shows that, despite his recent financial success, George Kittredge's nouveau riche status prevents his entrance into Main Line society. George demonstrates the difference between old and new money through his lack of sailing knowledge (a sport that Dexter masters), and his inability to mount a horse—two elite recreational pursuits. Similarly, Macaulay Connor's white-collar status negates his relationship with Tracy. Thus, of the three men vying for her affections, Tracy chooses to remarry Dexter, the only true member of her Main Line society. Once again, a Main Line insider—Barry—portrays the Main Line as an impenetrable, exclusive society through intra-class marriage. Tracy and Dexter's marriage, in addition to Tom Foyle's views on the issue, illustrate the mythic Main Line society. In *Kitty Foyle* and *The Philadelphia Story*, the geographical separation facilitates the above social distinction.

The scene at the Strafford estate, the only physical representation of the Main Line in *Kitty Foyle*, reinforces the family's impenetrability. Upon Kitty's initial entrance into the Strafford's main parlor, the elite family circle around her for inspection. After learning of Wyn and Kitty's planned marriage, the Straffords remain silent in their disapproval. Then, having contemplated the marriage proposal, the Straffords explain to Kitty their plans to familiarize her with Main Line custom and, ultimately, conform her. The forced acceptance of Main Line society, both socially and geographically, demonstrates the conformity of elite Philadelphia. In reference to geographical impenetrability, Burt describes Main Line estates:

[...] Philadelphians from 1880 to 1930 built up their private dream world,

a rural fantasy, first of vast estates surrounded by miles of walls, with miles of driveway leading to great craggy mansions [...]. [...] the Old Philadelphians tucked themselves into an impenetrable green maze.²¹

Desiring social exclusion, elites moved to the Main Line to physically escape the city. Chapter 3 analyzes cases of geographical and architectural exclusion on the Main Line. The Main Line myth thus encompasses both social *and* geographical exclusion, conformity, and impenetrability.

The "craggy mansions" that Burt describes, when represented in *The Philadelphia Story*, embody elites' views of non-elites. In *The Philadelphia Story*, Imbrie and Connor's initial reactions to the Lord estate, which Barry based on the actual Main Line mansion Ardrossan, reveal their intrusion of elite social space.²² Describing the South parlor as inhospitably "cold," Connor and Imbrie demonstrate their social discomfort in Main Line society. After leaving the South parlor, Connor wanders down a hallway and inspects a table of antiques. Soon after handling a silver piece, a servant appears over Connor's shoulder, causing Connor to leave the room. This scene illustrates Main Line estates as exclusive through their social discomfort. Just as Connor and Imbrie do not belong in Main Line estates, they do not belong in elite society.

As demonstrated above, the cinematic depictions of the Main Line construct a society of social and geographical exclusion. Family networks guard against the entrance of non-elites into elite society, and the geographical separation of the Main Line from the city reinforces the elites' social separation. As elite Main Liners authored both stories, both *The Philadelphia Story* and *Kitty Foyle* advance a Main Line conception of this elite society. Hewitt's "Remembering the Philadelphia Story," in title alone, demonstrates the influence of movie portrayals in shaping the historical depiction of the Main Line; even today, the families and estates depicted in *The Philadelphia Story* characterize perceptions of the Main Line's Golden Age.

Chapter 2: The Sources of the Myth

THE BRYN MAWR ESTATE GLENMEDE STANDS AS AN HISTORIC RELIC OF DOMESTIC architecture on the Main Line. The first of his family on the Main Line, Joseph Newton Pew purchased Glenmede in 1908. John Groff, in a recent lecture entitled "The Pew Family and Their Houses on the Main Line," reflected on the Pew family: "Growing up on the Main Line, the name Pew always had a special meaning to me. [...] it was the name that belonged to the owners of many of the mansions that

crested hilltops [...].”²³ According to the Main Liner Groff, the Main Line’s families, in addition to its estates and landscape, symbolize exclusivity. In a demonstration of this exclusivity, elites in *Kitty Foyle* and *The Philadelphia Story* fortify their society through intra-class marriage and thereby illustrate family as the basis for impenetrability. This chapter analyzes the role of family in sculpting the Main Line as a social and geographical entity. Ultimately, the centrality of family in elite Philadelphia spawned the Main Line and its myth. While many credit the Pennsylvania Railroad Company with the Main Line’s growth, an analysis of the elites’ attitudes concerning family, Philadelphia, and the emergent concept of suburbia reveals that the railroad simply *facilitated* the elites’ move to the Main Line.

This chapter first constructs the meaning and definition of family to elite Philadelphians. When considered along with incipient conceptions of suburbia in the nineteenth century, these definitions reveal suburbia’s embrace of ideal Philadelphian family values. Furthermore, Philadelphia’s nineteenth century industrialization threatened the city’s elite social space, which increased the suburbs’ attraction. Concurrent with the emergent suburban ideal and Philadelphia’s industrialization, the Pennsylvania Railroad Company laid its main line to Pittsburgh and encouraged development along these tracks. The initial migration of railroad executives to Philadelphia’s “ideal” suburbs granted the Main Line social acceptance, and the exodus of Philadelphia’s elite ensued. Amidst this process of push and pull stood the elites’ family ideology.

Family in Elite Philadelphia

IN PHILADELPHIA, RECOGNITION AS A SOCIAL ELITE DEPENDED ON ONE’S NETWORK OF friends and family. The ultimate determinant of social status—family name—established a society in which marriage and social reproduction secured elite status. E. Digby Baltzell qualifies “elite” status in *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class*. Baltzell bases his analysis on family names—a generational process—and two biographical indices, “Who’s Who” and the “Social Register.” These two indices list a given city’s elites on the basis of occupation, residence, religion, education, and club membership.²⁴ Elites also shared social activities, intermarriage, and race (the Main Line elite consisted of whites).²⁵ The Main Line’s original elites drew from this population of Philadelphians whose names appeared in the “Who’s Who” and the “Social Register.” As The Lower Merion Historical Society notes in its history of the Main Line, “Once upon a time, the population of the Main Line (between roughly the 1870s and 1930s) was clearly layered and labeled [...].”²⁶ In elite Philadelphia, family name determined this layering and labeling. Main Liner Nathaniel Burt²⁷ states in *The Perennial Philadelphians* that,

[...] the ideal Philadelphia in-group, the group Philadelphians above all want to be in the middle of, the ultimate club, is the Family; not the immediate family circle but the total family of in-laws and connections—‘kin.’²⁸

Above Burt describes the dependence of an individual’s status on family status during the Main Line’s Golden Age. The social hierarchy in Philadelphia therefore rested primarily upon relations with established social elite, not necessarily fortune or occupation. Within this kin system, “[...] everyone knows everything about everyone [...].”²⁹ This acute mutual awareness of fellow elites, which “Who’s Who” and the “Social Register” instilled, ensured societal conformity, for as Morrison claims, elites refused to accept those they could not recognize. Elites’ investment in family name thus encouraged intra-class marriage (as seen in Chapter 1), along with “The clear definition of social circles [...],”³⁰ which fortified elite society and ensured impenetrability.

Elite social reproduction demanded not one generation of intra-class marriage, but successive generations of societal conformity. Burt quotes Richard Powell, author of *The Philadelphian*, in reference to social reproduction among elites: “Marrying well was part of it, but Philadelphia wanted to find out if the blood lines would run true from generation to generation.”³¹ Therefore, elites married with the intention to breed their children as future socialites because Philadelphia society scrutinized each generation. As Groff writes, social reproduction embodied the elites’ “[...] attempt to be assimilated into what was viewed by many as the ultimate reward of wealth: ‘Proper Philadelphia’ Society.”³² Though Philadelphia adequately facilitated the elites’ social reproduction throughout the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, an alternative site of reproduction arose in the mid-nineteenth.

An Industrializing Philadelphia

PHILADELPHIA’S MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY INDUSTRIALIZATION PRECIPITATED SOCIAL upheavals that ultimately resulted in the development of the Main Line. Sam Bass Warner discusses the forces of industrialization in *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of its Growth*. Categorizing 1860 Philadelphia as a “modern big city,” Warner emphasizes the relationship between industrialization and immigration in reshaping Philadelphia’s urban fabric.³³ Warner frames his study of Philadelphia’s industrialization between 1830 and 1860, an interval during which the city’s population rose from 161,410 to 565,529.³⁴ According to Warner, “[...] no large stock of old housing existed to absorb and to ghettoize the waves of poor immigrants,” who consequently “[...] flooded into every ward.”³⁵ The immigra-

tion inherent in industrialization subverted existing social segregation and forged a heterogeneous Philadelphia.³⁶

The flood of immigrants into the city eventually forced the elites to the suburbs, as the increasing presence of immigrants threatened the elites' guise of impenetrability. John Groff writes that immigrants penetrated the elite enclave of Washington Square in the 1830s and '40s, which thereby pushed the elites westward to Rittenhouse Square in the 1850s and eventually the Main Line in the 1860s.³⁷ Fishman upholds Groff's claims when he argues that railroad suburbs, like the Main Line, resulted from the bourgeoisie's need to distance themselves from the industrial city.³⁸ Elites thus retreated to the Main Line in response to the social pressures of industrialization and immigration within Philadelphia.³⁹

An Emergent Suburban Ideal

AN ANALYSIS OF NINETEENTH CENTURY SUBURBAN PHILOSOPHY, IN LIGHT OF THE elites' emphasis on social reproduction and the industrialization of Philadelphia, reveals the impetuses behind the exodus of elites to the Main Line. Margaret Marsh's article "From Separation to Togetherness: The Social Construction of Domestic Space in American Suburbs: 1840-1915" discusses the rise of a "new domestic ideal," which portrayed the suburbs as an ideal environment for family and social reproduction.⁴⁰ As an ideal environment for families, the suburbs attracted elites because they emphasized the social reproduction essential to elite society and social status.

Suburbs served as an escape of the city in addition to their role as a utopia for families. Marsh, in quoting Charles Loring Brace, embraces a "greene-country town" ideology in the formation of suburbs, for elite men in the late nineteenth century, "[...] 'looked to the past, to a rural republic, to solve the problems of the modern city.'"⁴¹ These men, fathers of the suburbs, sought to separate themselves from the social threats of the city, namely immigration and industry, in order to breed socially elite families. Marsh offers further insight into this process: "The new suburbs, lushly landscaped, safe, homogeneous, and purged of the poor, the radical, and the ethnically suspect, offered a seemingly foolproof environment for the creation of family harmony."⁴² Therefore, elites left the city because immigration threatened the family environment and impeded social reproduction. Robert Fishman's analysis of Philadelphia's railroad suburbs in *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* supports Marsh's notion of suburbia as an escape: "Suburbia expressed both the increasing concentration of people and resources in the inhumanly crowded, man-made world of the great cities and kept alive an alternative image of the relationship of man and nature."⁴³ As Fishman notes,

the city's rising population pressured the elites, who in turn sought an alternative environment of nature. So, while conditions within the city *pushed* elites out, the suburbs presented an ideal place to raise one's family, and thus *pulled* them out of the city.

A tension arose when Main Liners sought to retain their Philadelphian status despite their self-segregation in the suburbs. In the cinematic depictions of the Main Line, only members of non-elite classes refer to "Main Line Society," as the elite Main Liners consider themselves Philadelphians. William Morrison and John Groff agree that, "The Main Line became an extension of the urban social world, essentially moving Society a few miles west along the railroad [...]." ^{44, 45} Morrison and Groff illuminate Burt's term "elastic Philadelphianism," wherein elites consider themselves Philadelphians and the Main Line as a stage for Philadelphian society. In addition to salvaging their status as Philadelphians, Main Liners retained their city occupations.

Elastic Philadelphianism essentially illustrates the Main Line as a utopia for families. While Fishman writes, "If suburbia was the bourgeois utopia, it existed in an inevitable tension with the bourgeois hell—the teeming world of the urban slum—from which suburbia could never wholly escape because the crowded city was the source of its prosperity,"⁴⁶ he mischaracterizes suburbanization in Philadelphia, for the Main Line elites never sought to *wholly* escape the city—just a geographical separation that complimented existing social separation. Fishman does, however, accurately elucidate both the elites' desire to escape the physical city and their dependence on the city's industries for wealth. This paradoxical relationship underlines the state of elastic Philadelphianism that characterized the Main Line's Golden Age. Additionally, elites' retention of their Philadelphian titles reinforces the Main Line as a place of social reproduction—a suburbia based on family; essentially, only elites' *families* moved out of the city.

Elites sought a pastoral society on the Main Line that stood in contrast to the industrial city that they shaped. Nathaniel Burt believes that Main Liners "[...] were able to cultivate the illusion that they really were country folk, and forget the ugliness and contradictions of the industrial civilization that supported them."⁴⁷ Hypocritically, Main Liners derived their wealth from the industrialization that they sought respite from in the suburbs – purged of the city's immigrants and demonstrated the myth—a society devoid of social "ugliness." Burt reflects on the relationship between the elites and the city:

The 1920s saw the almost complete removal of upper- and middle-class Philadelphia from the city to the suburbs [...]. The owners of the city ab-

icated. Safe beyond the range of city taxes and city politics, they lost all interest in city reform. Since they didn't have to see what was happening, they didn't care; Philadelphia became another demonstration of the dangers of absentee landlordship.⁴⁸

As illustrated above, Main Liners "owned" the city. This ownership stemmed from elites' economic and social prominence in Philadelphia. Despite their ties to the city, however, Main Liners geographically separated themselves from Philadelphia, though as "absentee landlords," they still governed the city.

Once removed from the city, Main Liners prevented the intrusion of industry. George Langdon, in an article regarding the growth of the Main Line around transportation, remarks, "One of the outstanding characteristics of the core of the Philadelphia Main Line Region is the scarcity of industrial development."⁴⁹ Thus, even twenty-three years after the Golden Age concluded, the Main Line remained an exclusively residential area for families.⁵⁰ Also in reference to the relationship between the Main Liners and industry, Morrison writes that the elites separated themselves "[...] by their own highly developed and enduring sense of belonging to a place apart, a serene and eternal island of genteel stability [...]."⁵¹ This "place apart," devoid of industry, illustrates the ideal that Marsh identifies. Morrison and Langdon both highlight the Main Line's impenetrability to the industrial forces of the city. In addition to the relief that suburbia provided families from immigration and industrialism, elites superimposed a cultural ideal on the Main Line.

The Main Line Ideal

THE PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD COMPANY (PRC) INITIATED THE TRANSFORMATION OF the Main Line from country farmland to elite suburb. Initially, the PRC developed the Main Line as a summer resort for the city's elite. Bryn Mawr native Barbara Alyce Farrow romanticizes the PRC's Bryn Mawr Hotel, which during the 1860s and '70s maintained a "[...] guest list [that] read like the 'Who's Who' of Philadelphia."⁵² Similarly, Philadelphia's male nouveau riches spent their summers on the Main Line in order "[...] to establish their social credentials [...]" before returning to the city in autumn.⁵³ Therefore, even during its nascent stages of development, the Main Line represented an escapist ideal for the city's elite.⁵⁴ Expanding their social networks at the Main Line's resorts, Philadelphia's elites granted these suburbs social acceptability.⁵⁵ As a result, when PRC and Baldwin Locomotive executives constructed permanent estates on the Main Line in the 1870s and '80s, a wave of urban elites followed.⁵⁶

According to Marsh, the idea of a suburb as a "home town" first arose in

the mid-nineteenth century due to advances in transportation technology.⁵⁷ This idea of suburb as hometown deviated from the Main Line's traditional function as a resort, granting Philadelphia's western suburbs the potential for year-round occupation. While the Main Line embraced the suburban ideal and drew elites from the city, its residents also emulated an English country archetype. Groff stresses the influence of "English country life" on Main Line society during the Golden Age in his dissertation.⁵⁸ This mental framework for the Main Line—"country life"—demonstrates Main Liners' efforts to mask their society's industrial base, which Burt notes above. Writing, "The country life offered by the Main Line was an idealized concept of English gentility [...]," Groff adds a further layer to the myth—a country ideal. The Main Line thus served as a "stage" upon which the Main Liners performed their societal ideals.⁵⁹

When Philadelphia industrialized in the 1850s, immigrants flooded into the city, threatening the elites' social spaces and impeding social reproduction. For elites, the emergent suburban ideal provided an alternative to the city's social space, which no longer facilitated social reproduction. The PRC's construction of the "main line" in the 1850s allowed the elites to realize this ideal in Philadelphia's suburbs, though as Chapter 3 shows, a paradox arose.

Chapter 3: The Reality of Social Conditions on the Main Line

THE SYNTHESIS OF PHILADELPHIA'S INDUSTRIALIZATION AND THE EMERGENT SUBURBAN ideal precipitated the Main Line. Thus, on the Main Line, Philadelphia's elite sought a pastoral society that offered respite from the city's social threats. The ultimate result of these social forces: the Main Line myth. Beneath the myriad accounts of Main Line estates and countryside, however, lies the history of an underclass that supported this society. This history shows that the suburban elites faced a social paradox, for they could not sustain country estates without, at the same time, creating an underclass of servants. In response to this situation, elites forced geographical segregation along the Main Line and subsequently erased the underclass from their romanticizations of the Main Line. Essentially, the elites excluded the underclass—comprised of their servants—from the Main Line's history because it stood contrary to idealized suburbia.

In addition to literature, elites excluded servants through planning and architecture. The planning of exclusion confined servant housing to slums along the railroad, hidden from the estates, and prevented servants from interacting with elites. Meanwhile, the architecture of exclusion—operating within the estates—delimited socially hermetic interiors so that the elites minimized their families'

exposure to servants. Ultimately, elites' desire to escape Philadelphia's underclass forced this social segregation along the Main Line; still in search of a suburban ideal, the elites conjured the Main Line myth.

Few historical sources on the Main Line's Golden Age document the underclass, but those that do base their analyses on the myth. Perhaps the first official study of Main Line "slums," Marion Bosworth's *Housing Conditions in Main Line Towns*, reveals the existence of underclass developments in Ardmore, Haverford, Bryn Mawr, Rosemont, and Wayne. Bosworth, an employee of the Main Line Housing Association, conducted her research between 1910 and 1919. Marvin E. Porch also investigates the Main Line's underclass in his 1938 dissertation *The Philadelphia Main Line Negro: A Social, Economic, and Educational Survey*. Though analyzing race and not necessarily the underclass, Porch notes blacks' dependence on service sector employment, which therefore assigns the majority of blacks to the underclass.⁶⁰ While focusing on the underclass, both Bosworth and Porch acknowledge the myth's inherent reality:

From Overbrook on out, town after town is made up of beautiful houses in large grounds with winding, well-kept roads, through woodland and private parks all well kept and attractive; each town an ideal appearing town in which to live.⁶¹

Bosworth illustrates a Main Line of country estates, which she labels an "ideal," in order to construct an image that she can contrast with the slums she investigates. Once again, the mythical Main Line—the Main Line expunged of non-elites—becomes an ideal. Bosworth demonstrates the Main Line's aura of social impenetrability when, after presenting the mythical image of the Main Line, she writes, "It would seem, indeed, an incongruous place in which to seek for housing reform."⁶² Realizing that her conclusions contrast with popular conceptions of the Main Line, Bosworth reveals the myth's effectiveness in shaping the Main Line's image. Bosworth diverges from other myth-building accounts of the Main Line, however, when she proceeds to discuss the Main Line's non-elite society.

Bosworth and Porch's investigations necessitated description of the myth as they argue that the underclass emerged on the Main Line in order to sustain the elites' estates. Porch writes that blacks settled on the Main Line, "[...] purely for economic reasons, where there would be opportunity to secure employment as domestics, gardeners, landscapers, butlers, chauffeurs, or laborers."⁶³ The elites thus created and sustained the underclass through their dependence on labor. Here arose a state of mutual dependence, for while the underclass depended on

the elites for subsistence, the elites in turn depended on labor in "large numbers" for the maintenance of their estates.⁶⁴ Though Bosworth does not delve into population statistics, Porch cites the Main Line's 1930 black population at 6,073, or 7.45% of the total. In need of inexpensive housing, the Main Line's underclass constructed slums that stood contrary to the idealized Main Line.

Elites, in need of the underclass' labor, could not expunge the Main Line of its slums, but proper planning enabled them to mask these underclass nodes. Bosworth argues that the interactions between elite and non-elites on the Main Line arose from forced proximity.⁶⁵ For instance, while the elites could afford to commute to and from Philadelphia, servants could not and thus required housing on the Main Line.⁶⁶ Bosworth writes,

With these three reasons:—health and desire, and the proximity to work, drawing poor to the country, and the expulsive power of bad living conditions and insufficient work in the city, the most logical place in the world to look for poor houses would be in a wealthy community.⁶⁷

Though counter-intuitive, Bosworth argues that wealthy communities precipitate underclass developments. Bosworth additionally illuminates the process of push and pull that forged the Main Line, though she applies this process to the underclass and not the elite. Consequently, the underclass, in following the elites to the Main Line, encountered exclusionary planning:

If in the city the well housed are uninterested in the badly housed because the juxtaposition is so obvious that they have become accustomed to it, in the country a more dangerous situation rises by which the proximity is so concealed by large grounds shutting off all immediate surroundings, and out of the way districts, nearby, yet off the ordinary road of travel in which the poor are only too often packed in with all the worst evils of city conditions existing in the middle of wide fields and woodlands.⁶⁸

Above, Bosworth relates a situation wherein the elites' estate grounds visually shielded them from the slums, and the Main Line's underclass thus remained purposefully hidden from the elites. When Bosworth reflects upon "[...] the widespread ignorance on the part of the well-to-do of everything which is beyond their immediate vision [...],"⁶⁹ she reveals that elites remained intentionally ignorant of the Main Line's underclass on account of visual segregation. Exclusionary social planning sustained this ignorance.

Amidst the Main Line's country estates, Rosemont's Garrett Hill represented geographical segregation on the Main Line. Ellis Kiser and J.M. Lathrop's

1913 real estate atlas delineates properties on the Main Line, and examination of these atlases reveals the stark property contrasts between the elites and the underclass. Figures 2, 3, and 4 in the Appendix depict the towns of Bryn Mawr and Radnor. Rosemont, a section of Radnor, borders Bryn Mawr. In their respective studies, both Bosworth and Porch cite Rosemont's Garrett Hill as an underclass node. Confined to the area between Lowry's Lane, Old Lancaster Road, and John W. Converse's property, Garrett Hill orbited the Garrett Hill Station on the Philadelphia & Western railway. The narrow lot divisions contrast with the elite estates on the opposite side of Old Lancaster Road. Converse's house "Chetwynd" symbolizes the elite Main Line, for his father John H. Converse, a Baldwin Locomotive Works executive, constructed the house in the 1880s during the initial exodus of elites to the Main Line. The elites' demand for domestic servants, however, soon encouraged the growth of "slums" like Garrett Hill, which arose along the railroad tracks. The result of the Main Line slums, according to Bosworth: "[...] the connection between these two extremes of society [...]."70 Here Bosworth elucidates the class duality on the Main Line, wherein those outside elite society—whether white-collar or working-class—comprised the non-elite underclass.

Unlike Converse, most elites built their estates beyond the rail lines and turnpike, and the atlases reveal this trend. A comparison of properties reveals this "extreme." For example, Mrs. William F. Dreer's ninety-eight-acre "Wentworth," along Old Lancaster Ave, contrasts with the lots in Garrett Hill. As Bosworth notes, however, the elites' estates concealed this proximity and allowed social separation:

As in the other towns the poorer section is immediately surrounded by the finer homes of the community, and one sees the filthy yard and garbage-strewn surrounding of houses like this little group [Garrett Hill] in the alley only a stone's throw from beautiful houses with spacious lawns and grounds which alone separate the one from the other.⁷¹

While in physical proximity to the underclass, the elites maintained their social segregation and reinforced their society's guise of impenetrability. Bosworth's insights recall Burt's description of "an impenetrable green maze," into which the elites "tucked themselves."⁷² Therefore, despite the physical proximity of elites to the non-elite underclass, the elites remained segregated and ignorant.

Property values dictated this planning of exclusion. For instance, when developing the Main Line in the 1870s, the PRC consciously forged "an upper class image" through deed restrictions that required houses on Montgomery Avenue to cost more than \$8,000, and greater than \$5,000 on surrounding streets.⁷³ John Groff contextualizes these values, noting that \$8,000 provided five bedrooms, a

library, music room, study, and servants' quarters.⁷⁴ In contrast, row houses on Garrett Hill rented for \$13. Bosworth provides context for such houses:

Here a group of four houses has been evolved from some old stables. They are mere boxes, two consisting of a room down stairs and two very small bed rooms up stairs, one approached through the other. The other two have more rooms and more definite yards which contain in the rear, privies, a hydrant, and cesspool full to the brim and roughly covered with boards.⁷⁵

These four houses that Bosworth describes, all overcrowded with Italian families, represent the Main Line's slums. Elites sought ignorance of these slums, and in response the slums further deteriorated, a process that social planning facilitated. This relationship that formed between elites and the underclass on the Main Line mirrored the Main Line's relationship with Philadelphia, for while suburbia retained contact with the city, "[...] its lavish use of space set it off from the working class and (more pertinently) from the aspiring members of the lower middle class."⁷⁶ Thus, whether separating the Main Line from Philadelphia or its own slums, the planning of exclusion allowed for social segregation despite physical proximity.

Architecture demonstrated exclusionary planning on a micro-level. Within the \$8,000 estates described above, the architecture of exclusion ensured a hermetic social space despite the physical proximity of elites and the underclass. Take, for example, the floor plans of the Main Line estates Ardrossan (1912) and Hillhouse (1926), respectively. Ithan's Ardrossan, the estate upon which Barry based *The Philadelphia Story*, and White Horse's Hillhouse demonstrate Robert Fishman's testimony to the architecture of exclusion: "Servants, however, remained carefully segregated in the Victorian mode, with backstairs connecting the back door, kitchen, and servants' apartments."⁷⁷ In Ardrossan, the first floor "servants' hall" stood behind the pantry and kitchen, removed from the social and family space of the estate. Directly above the servant's hall, the "maid's room" remained hidden behind a staircase, which permitted access to the kitchen and servants' hall, and the linen room. Hillhouse exaggerates the exclusion present in Ardrossan. Though servants occupied an entire wing of the estate, the dining room, pantry, kitchen, and two staircases separated them from the family on the first floor, and the second floor mirrors this layout. Thomas Nolan describes interior segregation in *Architectural Record*: "The family living rooms are well divided from those for the help, and the men's and maids' quarters are completely separated, so that each one is a comfortable home in itself without interfering with the other."⁷⁸ Elites thus planned their houses to prevent social interaction with the servants, bearers

of underclass values. While the elites depended on servants for the maintenance of their estates and lifestyles, they segregated themselves because their servants stood contrary to the suburban ideal.

Main Line estates mirrored geographical exclusion through the “architecture of exclusion.” The estates cultivated the Main Line’s impenetrability through their floor plans, which masked the presence of servants. Marsh’s notion of the family guided this domestic architecture, and she notes how interior plans, “[...] epitomized the interconnected values of suburbanism and familism.”⁷⁹ Observing that familism dominated such architecture, Marsh reveals the centrality of family to the Main Liners and their estate design. Servants, who represented the underclass, posed a social threat, albeit a necessary one, that elites separated their families from. The elites’ paradoxical dependence on servants, in addition to the family, shaped their estates’ designs; while servants represented the socially threatening underclass, elites relied upon their servants’ domestic labor. Thus, in a reflection of the geographical relationship between the Main Line’s elite and underclass, elites designed segregated servant spaces.

The physical structure of the Main Line, therefore, encouraged the physical segregation of the elites from the underclass. Though social scientists Bosworth and Porch recognize the myth—the exclusive Main Line society of country estates and social elite—they also uncover the underclass that other Main Line historians cannot recognize. The nature of planning and architecture during the Main Line’s Golden Age conditioned this ignorance, as the invisible underclass supported the elite society from the shadows. Recalling the arguments made in Chapter 2, the elites excluded the underclass from their society because the existence of this class stood contrary to the suburban ideal—a socially homogeneous society.

Conclusion: Processing the Main Line Myth

WHEN THE PRC BUILT THE FIRST RESORTS ON THE MAIN LINE IN THE 1860S, IT established this nascent suburbia as a place of escape, and Philadelphia’s social elites spent their summers on the Main Line solidifying their social status. Therefore, when the PRC encouraged its executives to build permanent residences in the countryside surrounding the resorts, the Main Line had already earned its cultural capital. Throughout the exodus of elites from Philadelphia to the Main Line that ensued from 1870 to 1930, the Main Line retained its escapist identity.

Before the mid-nineteenth century, the summer heat, mixed with the city’s crowds, drove the elites to the Main Line, but only for those summer months. Not

until Philadelphia’s industrialization, which took root in the 1850s, did the elites look to the suburbs for permanent residence. The resulting industries altered Philadelphia’s social fabric, not primarily through their physical manifestations, but through immigration. The wealth of labor attracted workers from across the United States and Europe, flooding the city with underclass laborers. As the existing housing stock failed to absorb the population influx, immigrants penetrated historically exclusive social and geographical boundaries.⁸⁰ This penetration particularly threatened the city’s elite class, which retreated westward as Philadelphia’s population expanded.

A suburban ideal emerged at the same time that Philadelphia industrialized, providing an alternative to the city. When PRC’s commuter trains enabled Philadelphians to populate the suburbs, the elite retreated from the city and imposed their suburban ideal on the nascent Main Line. The elites’ suburban vision manifested as an idealization of the British countryside, which Main Liners emulated through their sporting activities and estates. In constructing this society, however, Main Liners relied upon the labor of a servant underclass. The resulting state of mutual dependence—a paradox—inspired the elites to incorporate exclusionary planning into their society; because the existence of the underclass stood contrary to the idealized Main Line, elites sought to mask the underclass’ slums, and quarters within the elite estates, to generate the illusion of ideal.

On account of the planning and architecture that masked the underclass, the Main Line’s servants failed to imprint history, which elites like Nathaniel Burt, Christopher Morley, and Barbara Alyce Farrow forged from an elite perspective. Yet again, William Morrison’s quote, “[...] everyone here knows everyone else, or, if they don’t they never will,” proves pertinent, as the physical and social structures of Main Line society prevented elites from interacting with social outsiders.⁸¹ The myth therefore serves as a representation of the Main Line’s *elite* society, for the exclusionary planning and architecture, operating in tandem with institutionalized social conformity, masked the underclass and ensured the ignorance of the authors and historians referenced throughout this thesis.

Alas, this thesis confronts its initial question: who owns history? On Philadelphia’s Main Line, the elite class that constructed country estates along the PRC’s tracks between 1870 and 1930 owns their society’s history through the perpetuation of myth. This myth, though not untrue, ignores the society’s underclass—the laborers who, through their physical toils, supported the ideal of the Main Line’s elite. The Main Line’s social and physical structure throughout this period reinforced the ideal of exclusion and impenetrability, though in reality the ideal did not exist. Through intra-class marriage and exclusionary architecture and planning,

the elite Main Liners constructed a society that, despite the physical proximity of the underclass, remained socially impenetrable.

Endnotes

- ¹ Farrow 40.
- ² Langdon 1953 328.
- ³ Burt 533.
- ⁴ Farrow 29.
- ⁵ Bosworth 4.
- ⁶ Kramer July 19, 1979 17.
- ⁷ Wallace 209.
- ⁸ Townsend 105.
- ⁹ Morrison 1.
- ¹⁰ McCarthy 112.
- ¹¹ Porch 15.
- ¹² Porch 20.
- ¹³ Kramer July 19, 1979 17.
- ¹⁴ Morrison 135.
- ¹⁵ Hewitt xvi.
- ¹⁶ Burt 535.
- ¹⁷ Groff 87.
- ¹⁸ Burt 534.
- ¹⁹ Groff 87.
- ²⁰ Morrison 1.
- ²¹ Burt 533-4.
- ²² Morrison 135.
- ²³ Groff 2005.
- ²⁴ Baltzell 8.
- ²⁵ Baltzell 7.
- ²⁶ The Lower Merion Historical Society 3.
- ²⁷ Draper 53.
- ²⁸ Burt 40-41.
- ²⁹ Burt 41.
- ³⁰ Groff 87.
- ³¹ Burt 42.
- ³² Groff 58-60.
- ³³ Warner 49.
- ³⁴ Warner 50.
- ³⁵ Warner 56.
- ³⁶ Warner 57.
- ³⁷ Groff 4, 16-17.
- ³⁸ Fishman 141.
- ³⁹ Groff 94.
- ⁴⁰ Marsh 522.
- ⁴¹ Marsh 508.
- ⁴² Marsh 522.
- ⁴³ Fishman 135.
- ⁴⁴ Morrison 2.
- ⁴⁵ Groff 87.
- ⁴⁶ Fishman 135.
- ⁴⁷ Burt 534.
- ⁴⁸ Burt 533.
- ⁴⁹ Langdon 1953 333.
- ⁵⁰ Langdon 1953 333.
- ⁵¹ Morrison 1.
- ⁵² Farrow 40.
- ⁵³ Groff 3.

- ⁵⁴ The Lower Merion Historical Society 80.
- ⁵⁵ Groff 19.
- ⁵⁶ Groff 3.
- ⁵⁷ Marsh 514.
- ⁵⁸ Groff 62.
- ⁵⁹ Groff 4.
- ⁶⁰ Porch 20.
- ⁶¹ Bosworth 3.
- ⁶² Bosworth 20.
- ⁶³ Porch 20.
- ⁶⁴ Bosworth 4.
- ⁶⁵ Bosworth 4.
- ⁶⁶ Bosworth 4.
- ⁶⁷ Bosworth 4.
- ⁶⁸ Bosworth 4.
- ⁶⁹ Bosworth 5.
- ⁷⁰ Bosworth 5.
- ⁷¹ Bosworth 37-38.
- ⁷² Burt 533-4.
- ⁷³ Groff 32.
- ⁷⁴ Groff 32.
- ⁷⁵ Bosworth 37.
- ⁷⁶ Fishman 151.
- ⁷⁷ Fishman 150.
- ⁷⁸ Nolan 1911 238.
- ⁷⁹ Marsh 515.
- ⁸⁰ Warner 57.
- ⁸¹ Morrison 1.

The Witness in the Martyr's Mirror: An Investigation of American Myth and Christian Duty in 'Amish Forgiveness'

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(Edited for the Haverford Journal by Nick Lotito)

Introduction

IN OCTOBER OF 2006, CHARLES ROBERTS IV, A NON-AMISH MAN, WALKED INTO A one-room Amish schoolhouse. He separated out the boys, sending them away, and then shot ten girls. Five of them died on the spot or soon after. As police closed in on the scene, Roberts shot himself. Once the news of the shootings broke, national and local media rapidly descended upon Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, the village in Lancaster County where this occurred. In the days following the tragedy, Amish families reached out to Roberts' family in their grief, and a sensational news blitz continued for the next three weeks, spreading word of 'Amish forgiveness' offered to the deceased Charles Roberts and his family. Media inundated the public with images of the school, the Amish, Charles Roberts, and "Amish Country." With each new development in the story came a new wave of media coverage, articles, commentaries, and editorials. Donations and letters flowed in from around the globe, the money totaling over one million dollars.

I was a mere hour and a half away from Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania when word first got out about the shootings. Upon hearing the news that Amish families had reached out to the family of their assailant, I was touched by the depth of compassion in this response to tremendous grief. I saw something admirable and praiseworthy in these families' forgiving response, as did the national, local, and global media. I wanted to know more about these events, most of all: what did forgiveness mean to the Amish themselves? Living in an American society

that, in our courts and in our entertainment industry, has normalized responses of vengeance and retribution that act totally in opposition to forgiveness, I wanted to know: what were the social conditions that allowed a whole community to respond to violence with forgiveness?

In the pursuit of such questions, I commenced with an examination of the media stories. I examined the Amish as everyone else did, through the murders and their aftermath, as narrated by the media and by local individuals. Looking in at the Amish, I recognized that it is we who are reflected in the news, and I decided to look even more intently at American culture, fantasy, and myth. Still curious about what happened, I began my own investigative research about the events, work that compelled me to look at Amish culture, the Amish religion, and Amish stories, in literature and ethnographic fieldwork. Yet, after hearing local perspectives on the events and their major theme of forgiveness, I looked back again at how Americans reacted to the news stories. I returned to see both the stories and the reactions in light of their dissonance and consonance with local perspectives, and to regard them in conversation with philosophical thought on forgiveness.

Having presented my findings, I aim to separate forgiveness from the compassionate response, which comes from a sense of Christian duty to love one's neighbor and one's enemies radically through deeds and actions. I hope to rescue the compassionate acts of people within the Nickel Mines community from two forces: one distorting and delusional, the other unjust and uncompassionate.

An Account of the Shootings, the Aftermath, and the Media Story

ON THE MORNING OF MONDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2006, THIRTY-TWO-YEAR-OLD Charles Carl Roberts IV walked his three children to wait for the school bus at the edge of the road by their home, and kissed them each. He waved goodbye, but then he called them off the bus, and kissed them again, saying, "Remember, Daddy loves you," before letting them go off to school. Later that day, Roberts loaded his truck with weapons, ammunition, and implements for sexual assault, and drove from his home to an Amish school, isolated in the middle of a field, in the nearby village of Nickel Mines. It was an area he knew well from his job, collecting milk from Amish farmers. Stepping out of the vehicle, Roberts walked up to the door of the one-room schoolhouse, and entered.

Emma Mae Zook, twenty years old, had been teaching German and spelling to the class when Roberts appeared at the door and spoke to her unintelligibly for a brief moment. He then went outside to fetch a gun from his pick-up, which

he had backed up to the schoolhouse door. He pointed it at the twenty-six terrified boys and girls aged between six and thirteen. As he ordered them to line up, Emma grabbed the chance to raise the alarm. She said: "I saw my chance so I ran for help." Emma's two sisters had been in the school with her. Sarah, twenty-three, said Roberts panicked when Emma fled and ordered a young boy to chase her. She added: "He said he would shoot everyone." As the boy left, his nine-year-old sister Emma Fisher escaped with him in a move that police say saved her life.¹

Sarah Fisher described how she and her other sister, twenty-one-year-old Lydia May—who was at the time eight months' pregnant—then tried to calm the sobbing children as Roberts ordered them to line up against the blackboard. She had her two-year-old daughter and newborn son with her. Roberts told both women: "You ladies can leave. Those with children." Sarah said they were torn over whether to go. She said: "We didn't want to stay. We wanted to take them all out with us." The women waited in the playground and within minutes the boys filed out of the classroom after Roberts told them to go. As they were leaving they heard him "pounding" as he nailed boards across the school doors to barricade himself inside with the ten remaining girls.²

Roberts then called his wife, Marie, explaining his actions to her as a response to the grief of losing their first child, Elise, a premature baby who died just twenty minutes after being born. He said he was angry at God for taking her. Soon after, police arrived, and Roberts warned them to leave, or else he would begin shooting. The eldest girl, Marian Fisher, volunteered herself, saying to shoot her first, apparently hoping the others would be spared. Then, her younger sister Barbie, who survived, offered her life second. Roberts bound the girls and lined them up in front of the chalkboard. As police closed in, he opened fire, shooting all ten girls, and then turned the gun on himself, ending his life. Five survived their wounds, but four of the girls died soon after, and a fifth died in the hospital.

Two days after the shootings, family members of the victims met with the Roberts family at a gathering arranged by the Pennsylvania State Police at the Bart Township Firehouse. Some members of the victims' families visited a few days later with Shirley and Jacquie Hess, Marie Roberts' sister and great-aunt, expressing common sorrow and saying prayers for the man who had murdered the five girls. Others contacted Lloyd Welk, letting him know they held no ill will against Roberts' family. In turn, Roberts' parents and grandparents visited the victims' families. When the day came for Roberts' funeral, as many as thirty members of the Nickel Mines Amish community reportedly attended, including parents of the girls killed. They all made a point, it seems, of keeping off to the side in a humble and respectful show of support. Additionally, at least one family invited Marie

Roberts to attend the funeral for their daughter.

Indeed, several reports coming out of Nickel Mines showed an astonishing level of compassion not only for the grieving family of Charles Roberts, but for the killer himself:

A grieving grandfather told young relatives not to hate the gunman who killed five girls in an Amish schoolhouse massacre, a pastor said on Wednesday.

"As we were standing next to the body of this 13-year-old girl, the grandfather was tutoring the young boys, he was making a point, just saying to the family, 'We must not think evil of this man,'" the Rev. Robert Schenck told CNN. "It was one of the most touching things I have seen in 25 years of Christian ministry." (*Watch how the Amish have already forgiven the killer -- 2:46*).³

Such regard for a man who had killed their loved ones astonished many people, in the press and the public. Accordingly, other stories gave an indication of how Amish people, even those affected by the event, saw Roberts; offering a possible explanation for what beliefs motivated the grandfather's words:

Sam Fisher [is] the Amish manager of an auction house that has served as de facto headquarters for members of the world media....Fisher, like many members of the community, appealed for forgiveness for the gunman....He said Roberts may not have been ultimately responsible for his crime. "The devil took control of him," Fisher said. "I would hope that that's the way that people feel."⁴

This view of Roberts served as a backdrop to the Amish response to the tragedy. And, in fact, not only did the media report appeals for forgiveness, but many sources reported the Amish had already achieved and expressed forgiveness in the days following the shootings, for example in the video link mentioned above, which states: "Watch how the Amish have already forgiven their killer."

Some articles reported on forgiveness given to Roberts through prayers, and in other cases they reported forgiveness offered him through his surviving loved ones. In one article, Jack Meyer, a member of the Brethren community living in Lancaster County near the Amish, told a CNN reporter that local people were:

Trying to follow Jesus' teachings in dealing with the terrible hurt. I don't think there's anybody here that wants to do anything but forgive and not only reach out to those who have suffered a loss in that way but to reach out to the family of the man who committed these acts.⁵

Reading article after article that investigates the aftermath, it seems to be the case that the Amish were united in their forgiveness of their killer, and that forgiveness was the only response. In many articles, reporters told the story of their journey into Amish country, in search of the Amish and their response to these murders. Charles Gibson, of ABC News, told one such story. What he found, he said, was forgiveness:

We arrived in this community of Nickel Mines, Pa., curious about how the Amish, who live differently than most Americans do, might react to what was an unthinkable act of violence....It didn't take long for us to learn that the Amish families most affected by this tragedy have responded in a way that might seem foreign to most of us: They talk about Monday's school shooting only in terms of forgiveness.⁶

To bridge the gap between his public audience and such a foreign response to violence as forgiveness, Charles Gibson offered the words of the victims' relatives and their efforts to make sense of this tragedy theologically:

"We're just trying to support each other and trying to let it sink in," said 17-year-old Dorothy King. Two of her cousins were shot, and one is in critical condition, but like so many in the Amish community, she forgives the gunman, Charles Carl Roberts.

"We think it's all in God's hand," King said. "If this wouldn't have happened, something still would have happened ... because their time was up. God's hand was in control."⁷

Someone from outside the Amish community might well be perplexed by such a statement coming from a teenage girl. So, in an effort to explain this theodicy, Gibson also gave a brief summary of Amish relevant religious belief:

Such are the minds of the forgiving. Passages from the New Testament are taken literally in this community, and the Amish believe they need to love their enemies, which may be beyond the ability of most people, especially so close in time to the murders.⁸

Surely any expression of love, in a time as dark as this, was welcome news to everyone. No doubt there was something remarkable about this response to such a brutal act of violence, something rather beautiful about the way the families came together in a shared grief. Soon, what had been a horrifically brutal and heart-breaking story of violence was transformed into one of compassion, healing, and courage.

Why Americans, in Particular, Are Attracted to Forgiveness

LET US ASK WHY THE AMERICAN PUBLIC WAS SO TAKEN WITH 'AMISH FORGIVENESS.' AS we attempt to answer that question, another arises: might forgiveness be related on a deeper level to the very process of returning nostalgically to a mythic past? And, in an investigation of that matter, I want to know if there is something timely about a longing for forgiveness, particularly in present-day America.

Americans flooded online blogs and message boards, and wrote editorials to their local papers with their reactions to the news of the forgiving response to the shootings, often expressing a mixture of awe and fascination that we saw earlier in media news articles and commentaries. So, in service of addressing these questions, I will turn to those words of individual Americans. I will also look to philosopher Hannah Arendt, whose writings on forgiveness provide a potential explanation for such widespread interest in the news of 'Amish forgiveness.' As another lens for these questions, David Weaver-Zercher's discussion of the Great Depression and the 'saving remnant' is significant for how it maps onto the current time and Americans' widespread anxieties about terrorism, globalization, and international relations. Once again, America's imagined agrarian past comes back to life amidst the shopping mall, highway, internet, and television, in these fleeting moments, when it is suitable.

In her classic work *The Human Condition*, philosopher Hannah Arendt writes of forgiveness as related to action. Her central claim is that forgiveness is uniquely related to action because the power of forgiveness lies in its capacity to free actors from the past, allowing them to act anew, not bound by the wrong that prompted forgiveness. This view of forgiveness is particularly relevant here as a light shed on why a story about 'Amish forgiveness' is one that so many people want to hear. Marie Roberts' pastor, Reverend Dwight Lefever, articulated a view much along these lines, describing how he saw the power of forgiveness in the Roberts family's lives.

Forgiveness relates to freedom. When we are forgiven, we experience a genuine freedom from the guilt and shame that often plague us when others have things against us. The Roberts family continues to feel the pain of what happened. They have had to grieve, and cry, and mourn the loss of their son and the awful pain that the Amish families have endured.

However, they are able to have a hope for the future because of the grace and forgiveness the Amish families have extended to them, and because of their own relationship with Jesus Christ....They were left to rebuild their lives with the love and power of God working in them, and the love and grace of the Amish sharing with them.

This sort of process is what many Americans found moving and laudable about the Amish response to the shootings. To understand the American public's attraction to forgiveness, we ought to turn to the definition Arendt gives for forgiveness: "The possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility—of not being able to undo what one has done though one did not, and could not—have known what he was doing—is the faculty of forgiving."⁹ This is an undeniably attractive faculty for any human individual or social group, especially one which has faced the horror of death or another form of suffering borne out of irreversible action. "Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we would never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever."¹⁰

What I will now reveal more plainly is the fact that many Americans, in reacting to the news articles about Amish forgiveness, referred to the attacks of September 11th. So many Americans connected 9/11 to the Amish response that I contend we ought not dismiss the trend as coincidental or aberrant. The argument that follows is this: if the mythic 'Golden Age'—a purer, simpler time when innocence reigned—cannot be achieved, then the public longs for forgiveness because it offers the kind of freedom of which Hannah Arendt speaks. "The freedom contained in Jesus' teachings of forgiveness is the freedom from vengeance, which encloses both doer and sufferer in the relentless automatism of the action process, which by itself need never come to an end."¹¹ When Americans speak of a gift or a lesson coming from the Amish of Nickel Mines, I believe that, consciously or unconsciously, we seek this end.

Within this discourse, some people made the Christian Amish into foils for Muslim terrorists, in service of claims about sacrifice, revenge, and hateful destruction. In one example, Dave Barker, retired member of the Air Force of Mount Vernon, PA, used the events as a stance from which to critique terrorist justifications of sacrifice. He wrote:

There is a report that some of these Amish girls asked to be shot first in order to give their friends more time. I think it is important to recognize that terrorists sacrifice themselves to kill others. These little girls sacrificed themselves trying to save others. A difference between faiths.¹²

The implication of this statement seems to be that Christianity encourages individuals to sacrifice themselves submissively and non-violently, whereas Islam presumably encourages individuals to sacrifice themselves aggressively and violently. The truth of this claim is not my focus here, but what is relevant is to pay attention to how the Amish serve as foils for terrorists, and vice versa. Notably, this comparison between the Amish and Muslim faiths arose a number of times, for

instance, in a letter by a man writing to Greta Van Susteren in defense of celebrity alcoholics:

Greta,

I don't mean to be a pest but, I am an alcoholic and I have said and done things that I have regretted....Whether Mel or Danny harbor these thoughts rests with them and only them. I can also say that they are in the spotlight and sometimes as we see, they are human....We should really go back to our roots and do as you mentioned be more forgiving (as the Amish) and move on and not be as the radical Islam believers and continue to hate and want to run down or destroy anything which does not agree with them or their state of mind.¹³

Perhaps most telling about this man's statement is the phrase, "go back to our roots," which participates in a common American discourse that exemplifies precisely Eliade's category of 'origin myths' wherein: "the narrators respectfully refer to 'the beginnings,' i.e. the inception of the principles of the very culture which should be preserved as the most valuable treasure."¹⁴ In this case, the blogger repeats the very form of this nostalgic myth that Weaver-Zercher delineates, a fantasy in which the Amish are equated with agrarian-Christian American origins, and consequently taken as a living embodiment of the most fundamental American values.

The 'radical Islam believers,' on the other hand, are not only violent and destructive, but furthermore, insofar as they are the perfect foil for the Amish, they are chiefly the messengers of anomie (in both Durkheim's and Berger's senses of that word), who pitch the population into a state of disorder and terrifying chaos. They are representative of the fear of insecurity, an unknown foreign religion that threatens the destruction of the very ideal of "America" the Amish seem to embody.

Another blogger made the Amish/Muslim comparison more bluntly, writing: "One observation about the Amish: they didn't run around going nuts and declaring a Christian jihad on all milkmen, did they?" The significant assumptions of this post seem to be: that Charles Roberts is to the Amish as the terrorists are to America, and that the Amish proved the worthiness of Christianity above Islam, by responding as they did.

Writing on the same message-board, another person made a similar statement, in a more hostile manner, saying: "These little Christian girls make the violent Islamic terrorists and their selfish 72 virgin 'martyrdom' look like pansies." Here, the Amish are not praised for their forgiveness, but for their non-violent, courageous acts of self-sacrifice that this person contrasts to suicide bombers. Yet

these glorifications of Amish forgiveness and sacrifice say nothing of our nation's response to terrorist attacks, prompting the question of whether justice, non-violence, or compassion really have anything to do with why the Amish response is so esteemed.

Many Americans employed the Amish similarly, but in the service of an opposite political stance, wistfully casting themselves in place of the Amish, with the Islamic world playing the role of Charles Roberts. These people saw 'Amish forgiveness' and lamented the lost opportunity for a forgiving response to the 9/11 attacks. This position is summarized in the words of one blogger, who wrote:

Even in their own pain, knowing more than we do about the situation—they chose to forgive....they chose love. They chose something so powerful that we are talking about it in blogs and on TV News shows. I have often believed that most of us who claim to be Christian would never follow Jesus if he came back now—could we listen to a Christ on 9/11 who told us to turn the other cheek?¹⁷

As they spoke with regret of the vengeful responses that are now ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, these Americans exposed the guilty conscience lurking in a nation's collective unconscious.

In the publication *Pax Christi*, Catholic nun Joan Chittester evoked these sentiments very well, identifying the 'real problem' for which we Americans seek a solution, in reaction to the news of 'Amish forgiveness.'

Here they were those whom our Christian ancestors called 'heretics,' who were modeling Christianity for the entire world to see....The real problem with the whole situation is that down deep we know that we had the chance to do the same. After the fall of the Twin Towers we had the sympathy, the concern, the support of the entire world...."Too idealistic," you say. Maybe, but since we didn't try, we will never know, will we?¹⁸

In an online article, a man named Derek Flood described a disturbing corollary to Chittester's problem of recognizing the lost opportunity to forgive. Flood's corollary is that the shootings were, in fact, a product of non-Amish American society: "So many worried over how the Amish, without our modern grief counselors or emergency services would survive when the ugliness of the modern world invaded their little parish. But it turns out that those 'backwards' Amish have something that we in our post-9/11 post-Columbine world desperately need."¹⁹ Because we thought we were responsible, in the first place, we Americans received their forgiveness as a gift given to us personally, and felt relieved by it. This feeling of relief then prompted a reemergence on the conscious level of a repressed memory of the 9/11 attacks. Consequently, we saw forgiveness as something attractive.

If this reading, heavy in the language of psychoanalysis, seems far-fetched, then consider the words of Evie Yoder Miller. She is uniquely positioned as a Mennonite—a population that belongs to American society yet is also nearest kin to the Amish. As such, we might regard that group as being closer than any others not only to the 'real' Amish communities, but also closer to the Amish imagined as Eliade's primordial time of beginnings. We might locate them just east of Eden, and accordingly filled with great nostalgia.

Forgiveness can happen if the perpetrator's behavior changes, but in the Amish schoolhouse killings there's no perpetrator left to forgive. There's only a 'fallen' society with multiple individuals (and whole groups of misguided people) capable of doing what Charles Roberts did, if given the right triggers....If the Amish indirectly forgave us all for a messed-up world, then we all need to ask forgiveness for our parts in allowing a world to exist where children aren't safe.²⁰

While these words have a special significance coming from a Mennonite, that status is merely a heightened degree of a sentiment that seems common to many Americans. If we can understand what compels a Mennonite to ask forgiveness of the Amish for joining the 'fallen' society, perhaps that compulsion extends in varying degrees out to all the Americans we have been discussing.

Later in her article, Miller casts 'Amish forgiveness' in language of creation, and contrasts this Christ-like rebirth with the Christian model of Eliade's mythic time of origins: "Returning to the perfection of the Garden of Eden doesn't seem viable to me. I'd rather focus on this new thing—"Behold, I make all things new"—this creation work that the Amish have shown us."²¹ How, we might ask, does the process of rebirth relate to forgiveness. For an answer to this question, we can turn back to Hannah Arendt.

Arendt also ascribes to forgiveness the quality of natality. For her, this is a kind of birth, or rebirth, in the social sphere that connects back directly to Eliade's function of cosmogonic myths, origin myths and their prestige. She writes, "Forgiving, in other words, is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven."²² If this is indeed the case, then we have established a powerful link between mythic conceptions of the Amish and the media's focus upon forgiveness.

In a sense, the Amish are not just actors in a mythic time of idyllic harmony, but when violence threatens their bucolic world, they respond in such a way that could hardly be more consistent with the historical representation of Amish

society as offering rebirth through mythic narrative. One could read the public's mythic fantasies in this way, as a longing for freedom from the cold and unforgiving world of modernity through an escape to the mythic time of unity lost in the past. Yet insofar as it relates to natality, the current representation primarily reveals a longing for freedom from vengeance.

As the final step in analyzing why Americans are attracted to 'Amish forgiveness,' I will turn to the realm of symbol. Not long after the shootings occurred, the Amish (most likely the bishops²³) decided to demolish the one-room schoolhouse, and let the site return to being a green field. To borrow the clever language of Georges Bataille, one might say that, in this event, we have a perfect allegory, in space, for what forgiveness is in time.

In *Myth and Reality*, Mircea Eliade writes that the 'Perfection of Beginnings' has an intimate relation to destruction and rebirth—themes which, until now, we have been discussing purely in the context of forgiveness. He lays out these ideas in the chapter, "Magic and Prestige of 'Origins.'"

The idea of the perfection of beginnings tends to imply a complementary idea: that, for something genuinely new to begin, the vestiges and ruins of the old cycle must be completely destroyed. In other words, to obtain an absolute beginning, the end of a World must be total....The obsession with the bliss of the beginnings demands the destruction of all that has existed—and hence has degenerated—since the beginning of the World; there is no other way to restore the initial perfection.²⁴

Revealing a similar line of thought, Americans seem to see significance in this event of demolishing the school-building. Back in October, a woman named Susan Behrens, of Brooklyn, wrote a letter to the editor of the New York Times, titled "The Amish Way of Mourning." In her letter, she made a telling comparison, one that crystallizes the comparison other Americans made between forgiveness and the events of 9/11:

A week after the violence, the Amish have cleared the site of building and planted various grasses and clover to return the site to the pastureland. What a contrast to another site of violence, ground zero, where the bickering and gawking continue five years later. Perhaps it's as simple as the vast difference in the value of the two financially, but the Amish seem to have the right values about moving on.²⁵

In comparing the one-room schoolhouse to the World Trade Center, Behrens attributes to the Amish the very role Americans want the Amish to play in their mythic drama: that of the *planters*—harkening back to nearly everything I have tried to show in this chapter—*who return the site to pastureland*.

This articulation of the Amish role in the American mythic narrative clarifies, that the media story conceived of 'Amish forgiveness' as an instructive lesson, a transformative gift, precisely so that those of us in the 'outside world' of modern America do *not* have to take on this role. To use Weaver-Zercher's language, some consider the Amish a 'saving remnant' amidst the fallen and continually falling world of mainstream America. This view prompts the question: "From what might the Amish save America?" In short, they save us from the role of the planter, the role of the one who accepts some form of destruction and then breathes new life. Because the Amish forgive *for* us, we can return to our vengeful, violent, and retributive responses to tragedy. This articulation also clarifies why I feel it is so problematic for news articles to portray the Amish as stoic and without emotion, so strange in their capacity to forgive that one must be reminded of their humanity. If the Amish indeed play the burdensome role of the planter for us, let us at least recognize them as humans and acknowledge their pain.

Lastly, this articulation of the imagined Amish role clarifies why we need to understand that forgiveness in the Amish community is *not* a gift given freely, but rather a *duty* that the Christian faith calls everyone to enact, in words and in deeds. The grandfather of a murdered young girl *must* answer, "Yes," when a reporter asks him "Have you forgiven?" When we, Americans, ask that question of the Amish, we need to understand what the very *question* does. In other words, unwilling or unable to forgive, we ask them to play role of the planter in our stead. And we see that as an offer they can accept or decline of their own free will. Having a conveniently vague notion that the Amish are Christians, we accept their 'Yes,' as an expression of love. And perhaps it is an expression of Christian love. But *still* we do not understand the act, because we misrecognize the nature of the offer. We ask for forgiveness from a people who *cannot* refuse.

Another Story of 'Amish Forgiveness,' and Conclusion

BEFORE MOVING ON, I WANT TO BEGIN THIS CHAPTER WITH WHAT HANNAH ARENDT writes of forgiveness and love. In short, Arendt's words clinch the difference between the kind of forgiveness Americans long for post-9/11 and forgiveness as it is actually lived by the Amish. Many non-Amish Americans spoke of love expressed to the Roberts family by members of the Nickel Mines Amish community, envisioning a worldview perhaps not unlike this one authored by Arendt:

Love, by its very nature, is unworldly, and it is for this reason rather than its rarity that it is not only apolitical but antipolitical, perhaps the most powerful of all antipolitical human forces...only love can forgive because only love is fully receptive to who somebody is, to the point of always be-

ing willing to forgive him whatever he may have done.²⁶

Yet, by now it should be clear that we cannot claim so simply that love, even qualified as Christian love, is what motivated the Amish to forgive Roberts. In fact, Arendt presents a reading of the Gospels that would seem to condemn what the Amish have done as a blasphemous attempt to usurp the authority and duty of God at the time of revelation:

The reason for an insistence of the duty to forgive is clearly 'for they know not what they do' and it does not apply to the extremity of crime and willed evil...according to Jesus, they will be taken care of by God in the Last Judgment, which plays no role whatsoever in life on earth, and the Last Judgment is not characterized by forgiveness, but by just retribution.²⁷

This is a significant point of disjuncture with the Amish understanding of the duty to forgive, in that for the Amish, human forgiveness clearly applies to crime and willed evil, along with more mundane trespasses.

Arendt makes this distinction because she is concerned with the relationship between power and justice. From her statements quoted in the previous chapter, we know that she sees forgiveness as an extraordinarily powerful action. Because of this power, she links the action of forgiveness to the action of the promise. As forgiveness releases people from the past, the promise binds them to each other in trusting relationship, able to move forward into the future. The promise is an important complement to forgiveness, in Arendt's thought. While she does not explicitly mention justice, her distinction between human forgiveness and the Last Judgment leads me to conclude that the promise is a safeguard against the power of forgiveness to ignore or even prevent justice.

To better understand Amish forgiveness, as opposed to Arendt's view, here is a story. It is another story of 'Amish forgiveness,' the story of Mary Byler. She is an ex-Amish woman who was repeatedly raped by her brothers; hundreds of times, she estimates, over the course of her childhood and adolescence. Family and church authorities urged her to forgive her brothers, and when the violence persisted, she disobeyed her parents' urgings and went to the legal authorities outside the community. For this refusal to forgive, she herself was not forgiven, but instead shunned and looked down upon, while her brothers were seen as victims by the community, when arrested and sentenced to serve jail time.

Her story casts the Biblical injunction of Mathew 6:14 in an unspeakably sinister light: "For, if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly

Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."²⁸ The media story of this event also spoke of forgiveness, but of course without any of the glowing language of the recent articles:

Had she not reported them, the crimes may never have come to light. In the Amish culture, punishment — even for serious crimes — is determined by the church. "If they have a choice, they are going to handle it within the church," said Ruth Irene Garrett, author of *Born Amish*. "It is supposed to be forgiven by the church, and you move on. You forgive and you forget and that's it."

Dan Miller, a local Amish bishop, told ABC News that the Byler brothers received the most severe punishment under Amish tradition. Both were banned from church activity for several weeks and made to publicly ask for forgiveness.²⁹

In addition to my earlier claims that the media story is based on a mythical, romanticized view of the Amish, this sort of case makes me question the wisdom of the media's most recent celebration of 'Amish forgiveness.' What I am most disturbed by is precisely what Arendt speaks to in her reading of the gospels: that human forgiveness should not be applied to wrongs of so great a nature that they ignore justice. For this reason, I cannot be in agreement with media and other Americans who glorify 'Amish forgiveness' as something they possess that we ought to receive as a gift or learn as a lesson.

Perhaps there is a lesson here about compassionate responses to grief. That, however, is a different thing than a kind of forgiveness that would allow such a horrific wrong as rape to go on endlessly, to become, as Mary Byler put it, 'a way of life.' Along these lines, Arendt recognizes that, "The alternative to forgiveness, but by no means its opposite, is punishment, and they have in common that they attempt to put an end to something that without interference would go on endlessly."³⁰ Roberts' acts of murder seem to be the kind of wrong that would not have gone on endlessly, most conclusively because he turned the gun upon himself, an act which swept away any considerations of just punishment.

Byler's experience of rape, however, seems to have been ongoing, within a system where wrongs are dealt with through a process of repentance and forgiveness. Taking Arendt's claims about forgiveness and freedom to heart, this case does not make sense, chiefly because these news articles about Mary Byler *also* misinterpret 'Amish forgiveness.' Looking at the Amish through the lens of the American legal system, the media conceives of forgiveness as a process whose end is justice. But the connection within the Amish community between forgiveness, duty and theodicy reveals that this is not the case.

Turning to Peter Berger's thought on Christian theodicy, we can see why. Berger's text *The Sacred Canopy* proves a useful frame for understanding the role played by religion in the construction of reality. For Berger, religion is part of the social process by which groups create and maintain a worldview. So long as they live within the order of this worldview, individuals can derive a sense of security and meaning from their social condition. Theodicy plays the essential role, Berger says, of re-establishing that order in the face of anomic chaos, most often precipitated by a tragic event like death. Through his read, we would see it is a system that gives a masochistic answer to the problem of theodicy, institutionalizing a duty to submit totally to the will of God. Like everyone else in her community, she is not called to forgive because this will bring justice, but because Christ forgave all humanity.

While such a reading is not conclusively relevant, what is relevant to the story of Mary Byler is Berger's assertion that theodicy is intimately linked to power and privilege. In this case, power and privilege run along the lines of gender. Seen in this light, not only will forgiving reestablish the social order, but to refuse would disturb that order on the fundamental level of its gender hierarchy. When she refuses to forgive, she steps out of both the social order and her assigned gender role. Once outside that order, she can no longer be a part of the community. For, were she allowed to remain, her presence would call into question fundamental aspects of the Amish worldview. That is, her presence would be profoundly anomic.

Dirk Willems is a 16th-century Anabaptist Martyr well-known and revered within every Amish community. Fleeing prison, Willems was pursued by a government agent, a thief-catcher. When his pursuer fell through the ice, Willems famously turned back to rescue him from certain death, thereby sacrificing his own life. His story is detailed in *The Martyrs Mirror*, a fundamental Dutch Anabaptist tome.



Figure 1. In an engraved illustration to the *Martyrs Mirror*, Dirk Williams rescues his persuer from certain death.

The story of Dirk Willems suggests to us that, as Mary Byler was instructed to forgive repeatedly, she was also called to bear the burden of suffering. For Willems, the Christian faith leads him to a self-sacrifice that compassionately ends in death. For Mary Byler, this was not the case. Forgiveness had failed to end her suffering, in part, because—in stark contrast to Arendt—that was never its intended purpose. Repentance asserted the nomic quality of violence, calling her to do her part to reinstate the social order. In this context, her duty to forgive could do nothing but complete that process. And so she sought the alternative offered by Arendt: punishment by law.

It is crucial, therefore, to separate forgiveness from the compassionate response, which comes from a sense of Christian duty to love one's neighbor and one's enemies radically through deeds and actions. As mentioned in my introduction, my work is an effort to rescue the compassionate acts of people within the Nickel Mines community from two forces, one distorting and delusional, the other unjust and uncompassionate: on the one hand, the naïve view of the media and the public, which construes forgiveness within a context of idealized fantasy and romantic myth; and, on the other hand, the potential for rigid and violent dogmatism in whatever might be called 'Amish forgiveness.' I am most troubled by the latter as it is portrayed in Mary Byler's story: disastrous neglect followed by unforgiving scorn.

Mary Byler has created a webpage since leaving the Amish. It is primarily geared toward survivors of sexual assault and rape and also toward people interested in the Amish, about whom Byler wishes to reveal the darker side. On this website, Byler comments on the Nickel Mines shootings, herself, writing:

They can forgive a murderer but not me or my brother that left the community?...Not for one second did I cherish the thought that they were [in court] to support me. They showed up to support my brothers. They testified on my brothers behalf and cried for them. They dragged little children into the courtroom to get their dad a lighter sentence hopefully. You see it was me who wronged them as I didn't "forgive," and I left. The Amish have a messed up notion of forgiveness...."If it happened many times, it's not rape anymore." My step-dad William Kempfs exact words....Was it rape after that many times? Yes absolutely. There is no doubt in my mind that it was; the way he feels is wrong....The plain people who are such great Christians often find it easy to forgive a stranger but not their own. I find this very sad.³¹

David Weaver-Zercher wisely notes, at the end of his book, that "assertions of Amish complexity...should not be interpreted to mean that 'the Amish' are 'just like the rest of us.'"³² In this respect, I mean to suggest that 'Amish forgiveness' is a way in which they are not 'like the rest of us.' Most importantly, in the face of

Mary Byler's story, I cannot advocate that we ought to learn from the Amish about forgiveness, in order to save modern America. While the kind of brutal silence and victim-shunning that Mary Byler experienced with regard to rape can occur in any society, it is significant that, according to this news story, it was the non-Amish legal authorities who expressed the most concern for Byler and the most outrage at the wrongs done to her. Certainly, I would be foolish not to acknowledge that unfairly negative representations of Amish society and Amish people may be in play here—the saintly now fallen, the archaic, or the severely restrictive. Yet, this account counter-balances the globally inspirational one we have been discussing to such an extent that 'Amish forgiveness' becomes, at best, too complicated to uphold as an example for the world.

Make no mistake; the compassionate actions of those within the Amish community of Nickel Mines are laudable. This is, in fact, precisely why I am compelled to be so harshly critical of the media in their stories of forgiveness. I was touched by the deeds of offering comfort and companionship to Marie Roberts such that she was convinced to stay in a place where she and her children could conceivably be demonized many years into the future. That story went beyond my romantic views of the Amish, and pushed me to see them as caring, thoughtful human beings who responded to grief and terrific sorrow with grace and generous concern for others whom they could have easily held at a distance in anger and cold rebuke.

Marie Roberts' pastor Reverend Dwight Lefefer wrote to me, describing what has gone on since the shootings. He says the families have remained in contact, and that they have continued to support one another:

The Roberts family continues to visit the Amish families even after all the cameras are gone, and all the media is out chasing some other story. In fact, they have been into the school with all the surviving classmates, and are committed to staying in touch with all of these families as the months and years go by. Their families will always be bound together by this event they will never forget. But, the great power of restoration and healing is that they can come together and support one another as time goes by, and love one another in some very important ways.

In the midst of their mourning, this response allows the living to look around and find solace and inspiration in each other's presence. As for any 'gift of Amish forgiveness,' I would choose to leave it in the news archives to gather dust, turning instead to stories of hardship. They are stories without end; stories of a long, dark and fitful journey that the families of five young girls brutally murdered and the family of their murderer have begun together through the unknown, and perhaps to a place of peace.

Endnotes

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- ¹² Dave Barker, email respondent on Greta Van Susteren's website for Fox News (<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,234182,00.html>)
- ¹³ Unnamed email respondent on Greta Van Susteren's website for Fox News (<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,234182,00.html>)
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- ¹⁵ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/susan-henderson/freygate-round-2-and-a-1_b_31340.html
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Colonialist Ideals in an Un-Colonial Place: "Terra Australis Nondum Cognita"

Samuel S. Dalke '07

The southward aye we fled.

And now there came both mist and snow,
And it grew wondrous cold:
And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
As green as emerald.

And through the drifts the snowy clifts
Did send a dismal sheen:
Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken—
The ice was all between.

The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound!

Samuel Taylor Coleridge
The Ancient Mariner, Section I

Polar exploration is at once the cleanest and most isolated way of having a bad time which has been devised...it is more lonely than London, more secluded than any monastery, and the post comes but once a year... a member of Campbell's party tells me that the trenches at Ypres were a comparative picnic...take it all in all, I do not believe anybody on earth has a worse time than an Emperor penguin.

Apsley Cherry-Garrard, Opening Paragraph of *The Worst Journey in the World*

"We achieved a first-rate tragedy," wrote Sir Robert Falcon Scott just hours before his death. "Had we lived, I should have had a tale to tell of the hardihood, endurance, and courage of my companions which would have stirred the heart of every Englishman. These rough notes and our dead bodies must tell the tale" (542). After three years sledging through the Antarctic on low rations, facing ghastly conditions of unabated winds and biting colds, Scott reached the South Pole only to find that a party of Norwegians had gotten there first. Along the return march of 1766 miles, the five explorers of Scott's party watched one another become weaker, losing control of their minds and bodies. The first crawled along on frost-bitten hands and knees until comatose, and was not revived. The second voluntarily walked to his death in a blizzard, hoping his sacrifice would mean his companions' survival. Two others died, exhausted, side-by-side in their tent, snowed in by a ten-day blizzard while their Captain heroically awaited his own death.

The British have since romanticized this horrific tale, heralding it as a post-colonial achievement that justified the nation's previous 'adventures' and 'discoveries'. As Lisa Bloom writes in *Gender on Ice*, "the absence of land, peoples, or wildlife to conquer gave polar exploration an aesthetic dimension that allowed the discovery of the [Poles] to appear above political and commercial concerns" (2). Yet as we will see in Apsley Cherry-Garrard's literary memoir, *The Worst Journey in the World*,¹ polar exploration was actually rife with colonial tendencies, impulses and desires. The exploration of the South Pole, I will insist, is one of the few moments in history in which colonialist motives and ideals have been expressed in a seemingly un-colonial place. This narrative, set in a blank space without any colonial devices or instructions, displays the constructs of colonialism unobstructed. As a result, the underlying political unconscious of colonialism can be seen through a study of the maps, literature and travel writings kept by these explorers. I will look at what happens when an exploration party, fueled by colonialist motives and intents, arrives at a place that can neither structurally uphold nor naturally provide the sacrifices necessary for colonialism. As A. Alvarez argues in *Ice Capades*, Antarctica was the stage upon which heroic failure emerged as a very British specialty that quickly became a national obsession: "the poles were England's Moby Dick—an impossible quest, a killer fantasy that

demand sacrifice" (15). Imbued with colonialism and exposed by the Antarctic, Cherry-Garrard's travel narrative functions as a paradigm of this heroic failure, and for the first time in history, the relationship between colonized and colonizer is laid out in narrative form, contained within the same writer.

During the heroic ages of geographical discovery in the 15th-18th centuries, the darkest corners of the globe were gradually unfolded to European eyes. Exploration of the unknown was supported by the burgeoning commercial nations of Europe and fueled by the large profits it brought them. By the dawn of the 20th century, only the great Polar Regions remained unmapped. With temperatures below -80 degrees Celsius, winds that exceed 100mph and an ice sheet that covers 95% of the total area, these spaces remain virtually uninhabitable even today, millions of square miles beyond the gaze and reach of man. Yet the presence of this expansive incognita had always instilled desire and fascination in the minds of Englishmen; the works of Shelley, Milton and Coleridge, among others, indicate imaginings of the unknown polar spaces. The power that drew these writers and explorers to this awful yet sublime geographical region is the same desire that promotes my own interest.

Intertwined with myth and speculation well before their discovery and throughout the annals of history, polar regions have been fictitious spaces far longer than they have been known places.² Because its main location throughout antiquity was the human imagination (human minds constantly projected their own thoughts and images upon this space), the large empty place at the southern end of a map has hardly ever been an empty space, figuratively speaking. The polar regions have long provided a mythical home for writers who have used these spaces to help explain some extraordinary or un-human event. Mary Shelley's romantic novel *Frankenstein*, for example, is narrated above the Arctic Circle; the isolation and paralysis that Captain Robert Walton experiences while his ship is frozen in the ice-pack opens him up for an extension of the imagination he needed to believe Victor Frankenstein's passionate and brutal story of creation.³ I will use *The Worst Journey in the World* to gain access to the heroic and abject world of polar discovery in the early 20th century. Drawing on recent scholarship about mapping impulses, literature, and travel writing, this paper will demonstrate how polar exploration functioned as a belated extension of the colonial imagination.

Having boarded the Terra Nova and left the green pastures of England on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, Scott's exploration party was set on having "a real adventure on an uninhabited and unknown island" (11). For their exploits, they chose the "mysterious" South Trinidad, an island 680 miles off the coast of Brazil. Upon landing, the men set about collecting and extracting specimens,

performing a thorough scientific survey of the island: “Everything was to be captured” wrote Cherry-Garrard, “alive or dead, animal, vegetable or mineral” (12). In their pillage, the men display the makings of science—and of colonialism; the natural spontaneity of their enthusiasm and passion of discovery was paradoxically enacted, and overshadowed, by the systematic manner in which they invaded the island. They split up by task, each man covering some particular detail, “so altogether [they] were ready to ‘do’ the island” (17). However, their revelry in their successful conquest was short-lived as most of the haul capsized on its way back to the ship.

While the impulse to explore and research the island was a naturally impelled by curiosity, the deft, punctual completion of these desires was part of a larger construct manufactured by England. While it is different to imagine polar exploration as a form of colonialism because it lacks an interaction with an uncultured other, it is important to note that the British antarcticists were filled with the same imperialist impulses as their colonialist predecessors. These men both systematized spontaneous acts and forwent further tropical conquest in order to map colonialist desires onto an uninhabited place.

Even the earliest histories of the Antarctic region are ugly ones, similar to colonialist practices in regard to their “systematic plundering of its only natural wealth, [seals]” (15, King). After Shackleton (1907-09 & ’14-17) and Scott (1901-04 & ’10-13) finally found their way to the heart of Antarctica and made territorial claims for England, no less than eight nations followed in carving out their own claims to the southern polar region. As if enacting Walter Benjamin’s suggestion from *The Arcades Project* that ‘every epoch dreams the one that follows it,’ the natural impulses and global mapping of the 16th and 17th century explorers were a defining characteristic in the 18th and 19th centuries’ territorial acquisitions and colonial masquerades, which in turn have engraved imperial reach in 20th century polar exploration. However, the pioneering ideals that antarcticists wore as badges of heroism are now tarnished with the atrocities of colonialism,⁴ and the polar explorers of Scott’s journey did embody and employ the notorious and hegemonic practices of colonialism. Although the Scott tragedy has been celebrated as a national historical event for almost a century, the maps, literature, and travel writings of his expedition demonstrate the extension of colonial impulses and practices across three different epochs.

I. Mapping Blankness

BLANK SPACES ON A MAP HAVE TRADITIONALLY FOSTERED THOUGHTS OF COLONIALIST enterprise, and the practice of map-reading, which kindled desires of “exploration” and “invitation,” was the basis for many stories of heroic colonialist adventure. Maps have long been widely produced, disseminated and employed as versions of history and forms of knowledge. Yet early cartographers often relied upon their pictorial artistry to augment limited factual knowledge, writes Svetlana Alpers in *The Mapping Impulse in Dutch Art*: “mapmaking [w]as a form of decorative art belong[ing] to the informal, pre-scientific phase of cartography. When cartographers had neither the geographical knowledge nor the cartographic skill to make accurate maps, fancy and artistry had free rein” (126). In attempting to remedy their lack of geographical knowledge, cartographers would artfully re-imagine the blank places on a map as exotic and eroticized spaces.

Maps and paintings are often ideological presentations of illusionary accounts of the real landscape. As Ann Bermingham explains in *Landscape and Ideology*, a map alludes “to the actual conditions existing in it,” neither reflecting or directly mirroring reality, but also not completely dispensing with it (3). As a result, these blank polar places can be used as extensions of the believable, transformed into spaces that the human mind can reconfigure in whichever way it pleases. Just what is the world like, asked Cherry-Garrard, “at the spot where the sun does not decline in the heavens, where a man loses his orbit and turns like a joint on a spit, and where his face, however he turns, is always to the North?” (544). Because of its physical immensity —“why, there are [crevasses on Cloudmaker] you could put St. Paul’s into, and that’s no exaggeration,” (460) — and its indefinable quality—“a black indefinite mist, which seemed to pervade everything,” (139) — polar space is the perfect place for this extension.

As Alvarez explains, the mapping impulse was useful in providing the initiative to escape when British society became overwhelming: British pen-pushers “represented the England [Cherry-Garrard] had gone south to escape from. And that, of course, is one of the attractions of places that are blank on the map. People go to get away” (26). Yet upon arrival, Cherry-Garrard found that the blank place on the map was indeed empty: “very cheerless...it is difficult to keep hope alive... uniform white sky...there could scarcely be a more dreary prospect for the eye to rest upon” (63).

The polar experience was the very opposite of civilization, a direct “polarization” of the complex and overwhelming cities of the Westernized world, a place without boundaries, without defined spaces or shaped identities: “The grey

limitless Barrier seemed to cast a spell of cold immensity, vague, ponderous, a breeding-place of wind and drift and darkness. God! What a place!" (262). Cherry-Garrard and his companions entered a place whose whole history of space had still to be written. Nor did the immense mountains and limitless spaces of the Antarctic come with the sort of human guide who helped their forefathers shoulder the work, provided affirming company and recognized identity.⁵ Not only was this southern continent physically terrifying and still un-coded at the time of Scott's expeditions, but the unknown blank space was capable of producing anything, including expansions as yet unimagined in the minds of the explorers.

Lawrence Lipking notes that many authors used these blank spaces for colonial ends:

Many Renaissance authors shared similar territorial interests. In an age of expansion, poets, like nations, often defined what they wanted to be by artfully redrawing or reimagining the map. Nor is this hobby innocent; as recent scholarship has insisted, map reading kindles thoughts of ownership, of empire, of rules of trade and invasion (205).

Whether used for artistic or colonial purposes (as a place to forget, escape to or romanticize), the blank unknowns on the map have been constantly colored in before their discovery. These empty places have always been identified and filled with the imaginary, creating temporary illusions that replace the unknown with a fictional space.⁶ Yet the descriptive literary depictions of the polar party, unlike their blank maps, are illustrative and evocative in their portrayal of polar space. While the explorers of *The Worst Journey in the World* brought many maps and atlases with them (in which their desire to encounter this blankness is evident), the impulses that drove them southward were trumped by their actual encounter with the blankness.

II. The Double Embodiment of Literature

THE CHAPTERS OF *THE WORST JOURNEY IN THE WORLD* ARE ALL PREFACED BY QUOTATIONS, many from the paradigmatic canon of British literature. Cherry-Garrard evokes Herbert, Milton, Browning, Huxley, Tennyson, Shaw, Wells, Stevenson, Spenser, and Shakespeare, among others, to direct the spirit of adventurous exploration. Cherry-Garrard also draws occasionally on American Literature to capture the *chutzpah* that these Western explorers exhibited in tackling the unknown world. For example, he quotes a section from Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1900):

All the past we leave behind;
We debouch upon a newer, mightier world, varied world;
Fresh and strong the world we seize, world of labour and the march,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

We detachments steady throwing,
Down the edges, through the passes, up the mountains steep,
Conquering, holding, daring, venturing, as we go, the unknown ways,
Pioneers! O pioneers!⁷

Whitman's pioneers, who leave their past and limited boundaries behind in order to face an unknown expanse, do not do so in peace or tranquility—rather, they are 'conquering', 'venturing', 'pioneering' and 'seizing' this "new" world. Their desire to colonize, subjugate and dominate the unknown overshadows their natural spirit of adventure and discovery. As recent colonial theory has suggested, the manifestation of the colonial mindset in literature is not unique to Whitman:

Many great works of English literature promoted beliefs and assumptions regarding other geographic regions and other ethnic groups—from Shakespeare's Caliban to Bronte's Mrs Rochester – that created the cultural preconditions for and no doubt enabled the work of empire (1072, Rivkin & Ryan)

Pre-colonial English literature provided more than the epigraphs for Cherry-Garrard's narrative. Many polar explorers carried classic literary texts with them to the Antarctic: as Cherry-Garrard testifies, "with regard to books we were moderately well provided with good modern fiction, and very well provided with such authors as Thackeray, Charlotte Bronte, Bulwer-Lytton and Dickens" (198-9). These volumes became so well-read they were soon "learnt by heart" and repeated during the blank hours of the daily march. The patriotic and imperialistic sentiments of these novels became ingrained in the mindsets of the explorers, who, fighting against colossal odds and unknown terrors, wanted to picture themselves achieving the same wondrous glories as their idolized novel-heroes. As C. C. Eldridge argues in *The Imperial Experience*, the jingoism and celebrations of belligerent expansionism in the works of British writers "contributed directly to discussions of the main imperial problems" of the late 19th century (1093). Eldridge directly cites the very same authors Cherry-Garrard mentions in his narrative, Thackeray, Bronte, Bulwer-Lytton and Dickens, as problematic in this respect. He later mentions other authors to whom Cherry-Garrard refers, Kipling, Tennyson, Carlyle and Coleridge, as contributors to the glories of imperialist practice.

The literature of English colonialism infiltrated the very text of *The Worst Journey in the World*, displaying a double imbeddedness: Cherry-Garrard imbedded within his text representative examples of the tradition in which his own

text is imbedded. Cherry-Garrard used Browning to describe a fellow comrade, Bowers: "One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward; / Never doubted clouds would break; / Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph; / Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better, / Sleep to wake" (210).⁸ He twice quotes from Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* to describe the spirit of the landscape (232). And to emphasize their current plight, he observes that "Defoe could have written another Robinson Crusoe with Hut Point instead of San Juan Fernandez" (161). Instead of simply noting that their subsistence at main camp was dependent upon the only natural resource, seals, for food, fuel and light, Cherry-Garrard references the canonically colonialist novel *Robinson Crusoe* to explain his own situation.

Reliance on English literature to describe sights, events, and as we shall see, deaths, became paramount to these explorers as they were unsure of how to act in the uncivilized, uninhabited, and undiscovered world. The English language, primarily in the form of excerpts from novels, provides the necessary protocol and touch of civilization needed to make meaningful acts in an uncharted world.

When confronted with death, the explorers drew on the Bible as well as English literature to mark the loss. Although Antarctica quickly covered up past remnants, absorbing and digesting any sign of human existence,⁹ the explorers felt strongly about providing a proper burial and service for their deceased comrades:

I do not know how long we were there, but when all was finished, and the chapter of Corinthians had been read, it was midnight of some day. The sun was dipping low above the Pole, the Barrier was almost in shadow. And the sky was blazing—sheets and sheets of iridescent clouds. The cairn and Cross stood dark against a glory of burnished gold (483).

The landscape, which caused the adventurers' deaths, fittingly played a dramatic part in their burial. Yet a natural marker was not enough—In addition to Corinthians, a Biblical excerpt was left over the bodies of the men: "The Lord gave and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord" (484). As they left the continent, the remaining members of the polar party constructed a great cross in memory of the deceased, a permanent fixture that attested to their human conquest rather than their submission to the desolate place. This time their inscription was the concluding line of Tennyson's "Ulysses": "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield" (566).¹⁰ Before sailing for home, they gave the cross representing their dead comrades "three cheers and one more" (567).

When the existence and persistence of empty space became paramount, as in these passages of death and loss, Cherry-Garrard and his companions futilely did their best to fill them with literature, religion, physical edifices and thoughts of England. The explorers exemplified the human compulsion to fill in empty spaces (*horror vacui*).¹¹ They were left using the bare threads of civilization to cover up the "unknown waste" of empty space that endlessly stretched out in every direction. Their only solace was in writing of their own story onto this blank landscape, using inscriptions and remnants of literature and history to give their adventures (and deaths) weight and meaning. Ironically, this natural compulsion to fill in these blank spaces was exacerbated by the British nation-state—in fact, it was what brought these explorers from their 'blessed plot' of green valleys to face such horrible blankness in the first place.

III. Travel Writing

THE PLACE OF WRITING WAS OF PARTICULAR IMPORTANCE TO THE COLONIALIST ENTERPRISE. Not only did travel writing act as a medium through which the rest of the world could experience foreign regions, but as Michel De Certeau argues in *The Writing of History*, writing itself is an act that conquers, using the "New World as if it were a blank, 'savage' page on which Western desire will be written" (xxvi). In inscribing British nationalism and desire onto the blank space of the polar landscape, *The Worst Journey in the World* transformed Antarctica into a colonized place, making it a paradigmatic example of the travel narrative: "*The Worst Journey in the World* is to travel writing what *War and Peace* is to the novel or Herzen's *Memoirs* are to autobiography," writes Alvarez: "the book by which all the rest are measured" (23). Travel narrative works to fill up the empty space inherent in the polar landscape by projecting Euro-centric codes, customs, meanings, and ways of life upon the continent. Travel writing, comparable to fictional literature and mapping in its provision of exotic fantasies and surreal depictions for a Western readership, also helps an author code a foreign place by placing a grid of Englishness and structure upon the wild, unknown landscape.

As Edward Said has suggested in *Orientalism* (1978), the colonial trends in popular novels represent a larger movement within European discourse that denotes other people as inferior and in need of European assistance. De Certeau also suggests that colonialist travel narratives have succeeded in forming a series of stable oppositions that work to separate primitive from civilized: The fantastical colonialist stereotypes that emerge through travel writing often build upon an 'over here over there' dichotomy, portraying the 'cultured' European in contrast to native peoples, 'primitive' others with animalistic desires feeding upon forbidden

pleasures (228). Yet in the British excursions to the South Pole, perhaps for the first time in colonialism, the space that the colonized “other” normally frequents is left empty. With no native peoples to enact Western phantasms of cannibalism, bestiality, primitive festivities, and other ‘common’ acts of the other, the polar explorers are without the native counterparts typical of colonialist literature. What becomes of their civilized acts and fine English manners, when there is no native son to upstage? The earlier European explorers relied upon their ‘cultured’ ethics to protect themselves from any vestiges of ‘primordial’ otherness. The polar explorers repeatedly relied upon similar principles to provide camaraderie and companionship against the harsh landscape:

They were gold, pure, shining, unalloyed. Words cannot express how good their companionship was...no single hasty or angry word passed their lips. When, later, we were sure, so far as we can be sure of anything, that we must die, they were cheerful, and so far as I can judge their songs and cheery words were quite unforced (246).

Up until their cold end, the polar explorers remained cordial and proper in every aspect; both taking care to act civilized and abide by an ethical code while also writing these activities and mentalities down to historicize their gentlemanly manners and heroic actions. In using their Englishness to oppose the stringent conditions of the Antarctic, the polar explorers idolized their choice of defense: the British homeland.

Writing was one aspect of culture and civilization that colonial explorers could easily bring with them and use to set themselves apart from the un-civilized, un-cultured, even partially un-human native other. As philosopher David Hume argues in *Of National Characters*, “negroes and in general all the other species of men were ‘naturally inferior to whites’, on the basis that blacks in ‘our colonies’ and throughout Europe lacked the ‘civilized’ arts, in particular, of writing” (Walder, 1083).

The absence of writing is seen as a mark of inferiority and otherness, often used to justify colonialism. Travel writing allows the explorer to ‘save’ himself from the supposedly primeval landscape and from regressing towards the allegedly baser, more animalistic past. This impulse may well explain Scott’s compulsion to write up until his very death: an attempt to preserve himself and his companions as British gentlemen, who died in a civilized manner as any cultured Englishman might:

It seems a pity, but I do not think I can write more. For God’s sake, look after our people (539).

Although Scott repeatedly commented, during his final few weeks, on the difficulties of writing, he kept his pen on the paper until the very end, always careful to record his exertion against the Antarctic continent. As De Certeau explains, speech never leaves the place of its production, but writing can be detached and exported from its author (216). It became imperative for the polar explorers to keep literary accounts of their travels, both to partake in the colonial acts of naming and enunciation¹² and to produce signifiers that would exist beyond their own collective body. Through their travel narratives and journals, the polar explorers were able to fill the blank place that opposed them, while documenting their travels and historicizing their adventures, leaving a physical record for the empire to later recognize their struggles.

As De Certeau asserts, it is writing that “produces history” (215). Through writing, we can see the colonialist tendencies becoming manifest. “The peak of Terror opened out behind the crater of Erebus,” wrote Cherry-Garrard, “and we walked under Castle Rock and Danger Slope until rounding the promontory, we saw the little jagged Hut Point” (107). These points of interest in the Antarctic landscape are described in a fantasy language, named by their colonial discoverers. Through travel writings such as Cherry-Garrard’s and expeditions such as Scott’s, the European explorers filled in the physically empty place of the south pole with definite, identifiable, named landmarks and their own adventure stories, as narrated by themselves.

IV. A Travel Writing Paradigm: *The Worst Journey in the World*

THIS IS HOW CHERRY-GARRARD DESCRIBES THE EXPERIENCE: FOR TWO MONTHS THE Cape Crozier party¹³ double sledged in complete darkness, carrying only “a naked lighted candle back with [them] when [they] went to find [their] second sledge. It was the weirdest kind of procession, three frozen men and a little pool of light” (240). These three men, alone on the Antarctic continent, stumbled single-file for miles through treacherous territory in complete darkness, steered only by Jupiter and a solitary candle flame. The sheer magnitude of blankness—thousands of miles of ice, four months of complete darkness, total bodily numbness, meant the lack of past or future thought:

Our conditions forced themselves upon us without pause: it was not possible to think of anything else. We got no respite. I found it best to refuse to let myself think of the past or the future—to live only for the job of the moment, and to compel myself to think only how to do it most efficiently. Once you let yourself imagine... (242).

It also meant that the inability to communicate was absolute: "Our breath crackled as it froze. There was no unnecessary conversation: I don't know why our tongues never got frozen, but all my teeth, the nerves of which had been killed, split to pieces" (292).

Always surrounded by "an unknown waste of snow with no landmarks to vary the rough monotony" (xxxix), Cherry-Garrard began to welcome death as a good friend. For these polar explorers, even the unknown space of death seemed preferable to their unending march into an infinity of blankness: "Death comes for you in the snow, he comes disguised as Sleep, and you greet him rather as a welcome friend than as a gruesome foe" (188). The unknown blankness of death came to seem the only respite from the un-fillable Antarctic expanse.

"This journey had beggared our language" wrote Cherry-Garrard as he continued to drag himself across the inexpressible: "no words would express its horror" (298). The suffering was not just physical, and the explorers' minds began to play tricks on their bodies, imagining their own tracks as hills standing in their path:

These holes became to our tired brains not depressions but elevations: hummocks over which we stepped, raising our feet painfully and draggily. And then we remembered, and said what fools we were, and for a while we compelled ourselves to walk through these phantom hills. But it was no lasting good, and as the days passed we realized that we must suffer this absurdity, for we could do nothing else. But of course it took it out of us (241).

Why did the explorers continue to suffer such physical exertion and mental absurdity? They may have been falsely lured to this blank space by jingoist literature and the mapping impulse, but why did the antarcticists decide to continue their heroic fight when a peaceful morphine-induced sleep was readily available? Indeed, Cherry-Garrard imagined how nice his own death would be in this manner (237).

"The first object of the expedition had been the Pole", Cherry-Garrard explained. "If some record was not found, [the dead explorers'] success or failure would for ever remain uncertain. Was it due not only to the men and their relatives, but also to the expedition, to ascertain their fate if possible?" (442). Just as it became a necessity for the search party to leave a record of their deceased comrades, they themselves needed a physical record of what they had been through and what they had accomplished. Cherry-Garrard explained that the memories

of the explorers often blanked out. They did not ever want to recall their atrocious experience: "The horrors of that return journey are blurred to my memory and I know they were blurred to my body at the time...I had not cared whether I fell into a crevasse or not...we slept on the march" (295). The narrative of *The Worst Journey in the World* mimics the structure of trauma, recording the experience of the body and mind as it became permanently numbed by the journey. Given their faulty memories, they needed photos, drawings and diaries to encapsulate where they had journeyed, what they had seen, and most importantly, why they had traveled where they did.

In leaving Cape Evans, Cherry-Garrard wrote that he had no regret, but "I never want to see the place again. The pleasant memories are all swallowed up in the bad ones" (565). Although the traumatic events drained the bodies and hampered the speech of the antarcticists, they continued to record their adventures in writing. Scott believed that a successful record of the journey would validate all the work done, securing a place for the expedition in history: "the scientific public, as well as the more general public, will gauge the result of the scientific work of the Expedition largely in accordance with the success or failure of the main object... with failure even the most brilliant work may be neglected and forgotten" (350). Yet the confirming and legitimizing aspect of the explorers' writing is only a by-product of the colonialist nature of the travel narrative, historically used to write itself (and Eurocentric ambition) upon the foreign landscape.

V. English National Project & its Turn in the Absence of an 'Other'

THE ENGLISH NATION ATTEMPTED TO USE POLAR EXPLORATION AS ICONIC OF THEIR larger enterprise, an embodiment of adventure and science untarnished by the exploitation of empire. The empty space of Antarctica allowed nations to reconstruct their self-images, reworking their past and celebrating empire without the troubles historically associated with authentic colonialist endeavors. However, colonialist impulses undercut any desires for innocent adventure and science these men might have espoused, the natural ideals of the explorers having become imbued with imperialist desire.¹⁴ Colonialism was more than an ideology; it was a culture that dominated the British mindset, infiltrating the smallest aspects of the nation. English art and literature embraced, romanticized and advocated British colonialism.

The horrifying accounts, however, of Cherry-Garrard show that no individual whim, financial promise or national craze could keep these men alive as they endlessly marched through the "unimagined cold and darkness" (xli) of the

Antarctic. Were these forays into the polar unknown *acte gratuities* (“impulsive actions ultimately warranted by their pointlessness” (Jacobson, 39), trivial in their physical gains but heroic in their conception, execution and intention? Just as the shooting of the albatross in Coleridge’s *The Ancient Mariner* is a pointless act that holds deeper meanings than the bird’s life, polar exploration became synonymous with heroic failure, a fruitless quest that demanded the best England had to offer.

Yet polar exploration, having emerged from the social and economic milieu of colonialism, was not an innocent quest for science or adventure. As the eras of unbounded prospect and endless conquest faded, it was no longer possible for a nation to imagine its destiny through colonialist appropriations. The nostalgia carried over from this earlier epoch, however, still provided force to the later Antarctic movement. Shaped by the needs, tastes and desires its imperialist upbringing, the polar movement of the 20th century projected the deepest and darkest secrets of colonialism onto the vacuum that is Antarctica. On this blank slate, England’s desire to maintain its dominion of the past while reinventing its image for the future came to the foreground, exposing the imperialist ideologies embedded in polar fascination.

Yet what happened when the colonial movement carried humans to a place that was unable to support the existing colonial structure? As a non-fictional travel narrative, *The Worst Journey in the World* allows a study of the power and space in an abject landscape through the mind and body of Apsley Cherry-Garrard; his body acted as the recording instrument through which his audience could receive this foreign place. Cherry-Garrard and his companions adventured per se, traveling in an unknown space for an unknown amount of time for a possibly unknown purpose. Polar experts have suggested that these explorers journeyed for commercial advantage, private ambition, scientific knowledge and political one-upmanship (15, King), but I believe these men followed an impulse to discover and conquer that had been instilled in them by the literature, schooling and very orientation of English life. Upon their arrival, these men found that Antarctica harbored “the most stringent conditions for life. It is the coldest, the highest, the windiest, the most isolated, and the least inhabited of all the continents. Here is the twilight of life with a delicate balance between habitable and uninhabitable areas” (351, Hatherthon). This expansive incognita offered the polar explorers nothing more than a liminal life in the twilight border space between their own will and the worst journey in the world. The polar explorers of Scott’s expedition were left without the classic colonial confrontation between colonizer and colonized. Mary Louise Pratt argues that these “contact zones” are imperative to the colonialist structure, working as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and

grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (4).¹⁵

The absence of a colonial interface may have been more crucial than it appears in *The Worst Journey in the World*; “to wait idly is the worst of conditions” (73), notes Cherry-Garrard as he and his fellow colonizer-explorers are left facing their own thoughts, which often turn to death. Stuck in his tent as “the earth was torn to pieces: the indescribable fury and roar of it all cannot be imagined” (276), Cherry-Garrard is so beragged and ruined that he happily turns towards death: “thus impiously I set out to die...not a bit heroic, and entirely true! Yes! Comfortable, warm reader. Men do not fear death, they fear the pain of dying” (281). Within this turn, the polar explorers themselves experience what Paul Gilroy suggests to be the defining trope of cultural production for the other: the replacement of identity with in-betweenness. That is, colonialism has been historically defined by the placement of the colonized in a space of almost but not quite. Without a cultured other to provide this tumultuous and asymmetrical border space (in which the racialized other is subjugated by ambivalence, mimicry and other forms of suppression), the clashing/grappling/domination inherent in contact space was transferred in the Antarctic expeditions, onto the solitary minds and bodies of the polar explorers. The very same torque that drives the vibrant discourses that have emerged from this cultured border space¹⁶ also drives *The Worst Journey in the World*.

In *Landscape and Power*, W.J.T. Mitchell suggests that landscape works as a medium through which identities are formed, a space in which humans lose or find themselves, through which evil is veiled or naturalized, and in which the human confronts himself: “landscape always greets us as space, as environment, as that within which ‘we’ find—or lose—ourselves” (2). Since their own unwanted and uncivilized impulses could not be mapped out upon a colonized other, the explorers’ desires were reflected back upon themselves by the landscape. The endless “impenetrable gloom” (122) of Antarctica is a “pretty awful locality” (551) which forced the polar traveler to show both great physical and mental fortitude: “the monotonous march: the necessity to keep the mind concentrated to steer amongst disturbances” (377). Faced with this unending blank space, the polar explorers relied upon overt examples of their Englishness and culture to demonstrate their humanness in such an un-human place. If colonialism has normally functioned as a “systematic negation of the other person” (Walder, 1088), a denial of all culture, history and value outside the colonizer’s frame, then *The Worst Journey in the World* gives an articulate account of how this negation functions. The overwhelmingly positive and cheerful tone in which the journal entries are written displays the polar explorers’ own negation of the abject landscape. Rather than portraying

an absence of culture, history or value in the other, the polar explorers are careful to outwardly display examples of their own history, ethic and civilization against the empty landscape, both as an answer to the unending emptiness and to satisfy the colonialist interaction that is necessitated by their expedition.

The Greek philosopher Hecataeus (c. 550-476 BCE), who was the first human to write in prose, is also credited as the founder of mapmaking. Since his time, blank spaces have been imagined and created through literature. While it is natural to be fascinated with empty spaces, the British nation cultivated these natural inclinations for their own benefit through such devices as canonical literature, the mapping impulse and travel writing. Using empty spaces as a trigger for these impulses, England was able to promote their national ideals through early forms of mass media.

Colonialism has long been traced through the transferal of these impulses on the earth and its people, and Antarctic exploration, functioning as a belated extension of the colonial imagination, is no exception. "Explorers are driven by the unappeasable need to peer over the next horizon," writes English biographer J.R.L. Anderson, a drive he called (with Tennyson in mind) "the Ulysses factor" (14, Alvarez). The British nation manufactured and filled empty spaces as systematic recreation, exacerbation and harvesting of natural impulses to adventure and discover. Polar exploration was rife with colonial tendencies, impulses and desires, transferred onto a continent that was unable physically or socially to uphold the colonialist practice. As result of their non-encounter, the polar explorers were forced to turn inward; the continent mirrored their colonialist practices back upon themselves. Sacrificed to their own national ideals, these British explorers were heroicized by the empire as the new emblem of England. Yet their tragic story reveals more about the English narrative and history of spaces than the nation supposed: Not only was polar exploration inherently colonialist, but because of the blank polar space, the constructs of colonialism appeared, perhaps for the first time, unobstructed. As result, the submerged ideas that had formed the political unconscious of colonialism became exposed in the narrative of a writer who was himself both colonized and colonizer.

Endnotes

¹ This travel narrative was an account of Robert Falcon Scott's second and final polar expedition between 1910 and 1913.

² For my purposes, a 'place' is an actual geographical location that exists physically. A 'space', conversely, is an unbounded fictional region that carries whatever characteristics are attributed to it. Haverford, PA is an example of a place. Heaven and death are examples of spaces. Before Antarctica became a known, physical place, it existed as an imaginary space (portrayed in literature, philosophy, maps, etc), in which it was constantly morphed and assigned various qualities.

³ The unknown polar landscape provides a space in which the human imagination can drift and hallucinate without constraint. Amid the endless "vast and irregular [mountains &] plains of ice" (17) which stemmed out in every direction, Captain Walton's men are quite willing to believe they have traversed to some mythical land of "giants" (18). Shelley's plot is dependent upon the harsh un-humanness of the polar space for its own credibility. Polar exploration (like Frankenstein) is just as much of a story about the adventurer-creator's own exploits and turmoil as it is about the fantastic, brutal and un-human landscape.

⁴ Dan Jacobson explains in *The New York Review of Books*: "The ideal of 'discover[ing] new land and new life' which Cherry-Garrard celebrates in *The Worst Journey in the World* has lost much of its allure since his day. In fact, because of its notoriously 'hegemonic' and 'Eurocentric' connotations, the word 'discovery' has become virtually unemployable in most fields of inquiry" (41).

⁵ As first thought out by G. W. F. Hegel in "Lordship and Bondage": understanding the self in terms of the polarized other, any entity is dependent upon acknowledgement from another in the formation of their own self-consciousness.

⁶ Aetiological myths (stories that explain the origin of something: The Homeric Hymn to Demeter, for example, accounts for the existence of seasons) are good examples of this human compulsion to fabricate some fictional answer or belief to substitute for what the human mind cannot know or fathom.

⁷ Whitman, "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" *Drum-Taps*, 1865, Chapter 13 of *The Worst Journey in the World* (408).

⁸ From Robert Browning's poem "Epilogue" (1889).

⁹ On page 109 of *The Worst Journey in the World*, the Antarctic Barrier has all but consumed the remnants of Shackleton's 1907-09 polar expedition.

¹⁰ Tennyson's poem was originally dedicated to the 19th century polar explorer Sir John Franklin.

¹¹ A term associated with Italian Mario Praz: the over-filling of an entire space with artwork, leaving no space unornamented.

¹² This act of designation is similar to the mapping impulse described by Alpers in *The Art of Describing*. The Antarcticists' acts of labeling, recording and referring to the phenomena of the continent parallels the desires of dominion that, according to Alpers argument, can be instilled by maps (which visually code and construct foreign places).

¹³ This exploration party had the task of collecting an embryo of an Emperor penguin (such an embryo was wrongly believed to be "the missing link between birds and reptiles" (234)). The party consisted of Bowers, Wilson and Cherry-Garrard, and their absurd travel across the Antarctic in midwinter (the egg-incubation period for the Emperors), became what Cherry-Garrard called "the weirdest bird's-nesting expedition that has ever been or will ever be" (234).

¹⁴ This idea of natural adventure and science is important to distinguish from the later saturation of these impulses in a nationalist ideology. As Browning asked in *Andrea fel Sarto* (and Cherry-

Garrard re-questions in his own narrative (230)), 'what is heaven for but to allow a man's reach to exceed his grasp?' It should be reiterated that the polar explorers were driven by an impulse that was pure at its core, their quest for science and knowledge kept them going even though their journey had no rationale with the outside world. In his exposé on polar exploration, Fridtjof Nansen wrote that the struggles and desires associated with discovery, adventure and knowledge are what defines humankind: "The history of the human race is a continual struggle from darkness towards light. It is, therefore, to no purpose to discuss the use of knowledge; man wants to know, and when he ceases to do so, he is no longer man" (368, Cherry Garrard). Unknown to the explorers, the English nation thoroughly entangled these innocent spirits of adventure and knowledge with the nationalist colonial imagination.

¹⁵Michel De Certeau and W.J.T Mitchell also center their colonialist theory around this interaction between dissimilar cultures. Indeed, most of the colonial dialogue has existed in the complex interface between the colonizer and colonized—for good examples see Bhabha's *The Empire Writes Back* or Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*.

¹⁶Every colonized nation has attempted to deal with colonial ramifications by producing their own body of literature that deals with the cultural identity that emerges from the contact spaces: For examples, see the works of Americans Toni Morrison & Langston Hughes, Caribbeans Jean Rhys & Derek Walcott, and Africans Wole Soyinka & Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

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Self-Deception in Suburbia: Plotting Escape in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*

Emily Taber '07

Suburbs are a space characterized by their potentiality. Located between densely populated cities and rural open areas, suburbs offer their residents a blend of the urban and rural that cannot be found anywhere else. One text that highlights the liminality of suburbia is Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*. The text takes place from the period immediately before the United States' involvement in World War II to the mid-1950s. The novel's timeline provides the reader with a larger context for the narrative happenings. The latter portion of the novel is situated in a post-war suburb, and this setting of peace after a war complements the characters' own discovery of relative peace after undergoing personal trauma. Although the suburb presents a particular image of ordinary comfort, both the historical reality and the text's events demonstrate that while living in suburbia may appear to be the culmination of the ideals of American freedom, suburbs also place a set of constraints on their residents. The result is a setting uniquely positioned to facilitate an exploration of escapism on a large and small scale.

The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay concerns itself primarily with the issue of escape. The thread of escape runs through the novel in the forms of physical escape, magical escape, imagination, and denial. One of the ways in which Chabon explores this subject is through the novel's protagonist, Sammy Clay, a comic book writer. Sammy escapes from reality as it manifests itself in terms of history and his own identity, with diverse results. Critic Lee Behlman identifies comic books as one of the novel's major interrogations of escapism. He writes that comic books "show, in a phenomenological way, how fantasy feels, and

how it may assuage pain" (62). Immersed in the world of comics, Sammy uses fantasy to assuage his pain, and his denial of his homosexuality is the direct result of such an impulse to avoid a potentially harsh reality. The novel uses the terms of self-deception to frame the larger themes of fantasy and escape as they present themselves in the domains of comic books, sexuality, suburbia, and the novelistic enterprise.

To understand the full scope of the novel's interrogations, one must have a basic understanding of the plot before the point at which the novel turns to suburbia. Chabon's protagonists, Sammy Clay and Joe Kavalier, are cousins who create a collection of superheroes for Empire Comics. Their main character is the Escapist, a Superman-type hero and a member of the League of the Golden Key whose goal is to liberate innocents from the oppression of the Iron Chain. Sammy and Joe find great professional and personal successes during the Golden Age of comics in the 1940s.¹ When their boss requires Sammy and Joe to give up drawing comics in which the Escapist fights Germans, Sammy and Joe take the comic book industry in a new direction. In the early comics, the Escapist fights crime in a gritty, urban setting that uses "Empire City" as a stand-in for New York and focuses on the criminal activity that takes place there. The new comic books, on the other hand, explore the traditional themes of good and evil as told by new narrators: the ordinary citizens of Empire City. The city is still clearly an urban space, but by focusing on "the everyday heroics of the powerless" (Chabon 368), Sammy and Joe domesticate the city and form the kind of community that Sammy will eventually discover in the suburbs. This focus on the more quotidian elements of the comic book universe revolutionizes comic book narratives for their makers, and the comics become more attractive to an adult audience that is too sophisticated for simple tales of beat-'em-up heroism. Using inventive artwork that employs filmic visual effects, the new comics accomplish "the total blending of narration and image ... the fundamental principle of comic book storytelling" (362). This appeal to both children and adults causes the circulation of *Kavalier and Clay* titles to double.

Their success is short-lived, however. At the onset of the United States' involvement in World War II, Joe runs away to join the army and spends the better part of a decade in isolation, refusing to contact anyone from his past. Left behind are Joe's girlfriend, Rosa, and Sammy—Rosa pregnant with Joe's child and Sammy the survivor of a sexual assault after a brutal run-in with a vice squad. These events make Sammy desperate to find a place where he can escape the reality of his life that is marked by suffering and abandonment. In the aftermath of the attack, Sammy decides "that he would rather not love at all than be punished for loving" (420). This decision constitutes a denial of his homosexuality, and a willingness to repress his identity in favor of social acceptance. As a result, he marries Rosa and

when her son, Tommy, is born, Sammy adopts Tommy as his own child. Mirroring the move made by the comic books from an urban sphere to a domestic one, Sammy chooses a domesticated suburban existence where the denial of his homosexuality is a necessity, but where he can live without fear of recrimination. The crucial difference between the comic book move to a domestic realm and Sammy's move to the suburbs, however, is each character's ability to freely express their identities. In the comic books, a superhero is still a superhero who is merely transported from one setting to another. The Escapist is still able to appear in his superhero form and that of his alter ego, Tom Mayflower. Sammy, on the other hand, is unable to appear in the many forms that define him. By choosing suburbia, Sammy cannot express his sexual identity and he therefore limits himself in ways that do not apply to his comic book superheroes.

Such a limitation may at first seem attractive to Sammy, who has been punished for expressing his sexuality. Denial and repression of the freedom to express himself will permit him to participate in a social space that does not readily tolerate homosexuality. Such integration through denial is a technique often used by trauma survivors, explains Bruno Bettelheim, but it is a form of fitting in that is "somewhat shaky and incomplete" (31) because the energy spent perpetuating denial diverts energy from coping with real life.² In other words, Sammy is too caught up in the appeal of a fantastic new suburban and "straight" life, in which he is a husband to Rosa and stand-in father to Tommy, to consider fully the negative consequences of his choice. Most notable about Sammy's choice is that he turns to suburbia as his protective space. There, he believes he can surround himself with the promises of a peaceful suburban life and forget the painful world of homophobic violence associated with the urban space that he previously occupied.

The fact that Sammy chooses suburbia as the locus of his new life speaks to his use of the superhero model (the dual nature of the alter ego and the secret identity) to facilitate his continued denial of his sexuality. Suburbia's distance from the city where he works permits him to create dedicated spaces for his alter ego and secret identity. Additionally, with its promise of a better future, suburbia appeals to Sammy's desire to leave his past behind. This fantasy, however, is thwarted by the inability of these dual roles to protect Sammy effectively from his past. The longer Sammy lives in suburbia, the more he comes to realize that the promise of escape from one reality contains within it the inexorable obligations to another.

Section I: Suburban Promises

The promise that suburbia makes to those who live there is one of a better life, where one is independent and self-reliant enough to own a plot of land and a piece of the American Dream. Such ownership is connected to the idea of an increased quality of life, as the novel's narrator describes the urban dwellers' move to suburbia as a search for peace and quiet not found in the city:

Their families were chaotic things, loud and distempered, fueled by anger and the exigencies of the wise-guy attitude, and since the same was true of New York City itself, it was hard not to believe that a patch of green grass and a rational floor plan might go a long way to soothing the jangling bundles of raw nerves they felt their families had become. (Chabon 474)

Unlike the chaos of the city, suburbia becomes a soothing zone where what Jean Baudrillard calls "radical thought" can flourish, where consciousness of a fantasy world beyond reality sustains the individual. The belief that grass and a floor plan can improve one's quality of life is inherently fantastic, yet an awareness of the fantasy as such does not diminish its power because the American Dream relies, to a certain extent, on the firm belief in fantasies coming true through the individual's mastery of reality. Sammy is not immune to suburbia's promise, and when he sees a chance to escape his demons, he purchases a house in the development community of Bloomtown, Long Island.

Chabon's choice of Bloomtown for the novel's model of suburbia is particularly fitting because Long Island is one of the most famous sites of suburban development in the United States. The mass movement to the suburbs began in the late 1940s when private building companies began building homes for returning World War II veterans and their families. The best locations to build new homes were in the areas of largely undeveloped land outside major metropolitan areas. Of course, the new suburbs had to be marketed correctly to entice hordes of Americans to buy when they could rent or live in government-funded housing (Baxandall 79). While government-subsidized homes came with many comforts, they did not come with the promise to improve the lives of American families as the suburbs did.

The fact that many Americans were ready to buy what the suburbs were selling aided marketers' efforts to lure people to suburbia. After the deprivation and inconvenience of rationing and other home front obligations, Americans wanted to return to the personal freedom that had existed before depression and war besieged the country. Long absent from middle class life, the ideas of safety, convenience, and friendliness attracted many families to the suburbs (Martin-

son 31). The locations for development, especially on Long Island, were carefully chosen to attract such consumers, which contributed to the widespread appeal of suburbia. Parts of Long Island had been a haven for wealthy Americans, so the new residents could claim some of the social cachet originally associated with living there (Baxandall 13). This image of social mobility was another selling point for suburbia: though many suburbanites struggled to make their house and car payments—expenses they did not have while living in the city—suburban living was still a sign of success (147). Indeed, it is this sense of “having arrived” that Chabon’s narrator refers to when Sammy and a group of other New Yorkers make plans to move to Bloomtown: “They sighed, and felt that one of the deepest longings in their hearts might someday soon be answered” (474).

While financially strapped post-war suburbanites may have been fooling friends back in the city into thinking that life in suburbia was effortless, they were also deluding themselves. After all, the image of the American Dream only lasts as long as Americans buy into it. Not only did suburbanites often mislead themselves as to the ease of their new life, but they also had to support the delusions of others in order to make suburbia the dream location they needed it to be. This support most often came in the form of face-value acceptance of a projected image of success.

An unspoken agreement among suburbanites to support each other’s attempt at achieving the American Dream resulted in the formation of strong communities. Community-building is an example of the kind of tactical undertaking outlined in Michel de Certeau’s essay “Making Do: Uses and Tactics.” According to de Certeau, the dominant order is capable of producing and imposing order on spaces through the use of strategies, while an individual can in turn manipulate those spaces through the use of tactics (30). In a suburban example of strategy as defined by de Certeau, many neighborhoods were governed by the same development companies that constructed them (Baxandall 144–145). The developers established strict rules that regulated new residents’ behaviors (for example, mandating the frequency of lawn care). The developers thought of the new residents only as consumers, as this strategy allowed them to focus on producing homes quickly and inexpensively without taking into consideration any time-consuming or costly needs the individual homeowners may have had. Suburbanites responded tactically by banding together to meet their need for networks of support. Neighborhood groups made informal arrangements for childcare and formed parent organizations for the local schools (154–155). In this way, residents could balance their identities as individuals in private homes with their need to have a “sense of attachment to a covenanted community” (Dolce 3), while simultaneously taking control from the developers wherever possible.

This context of suburbia—a space where fantasy, individuality, and a sense of community were used as forms of resistance against strict regulations—offers a backdrop against which to read the series of deceptions Sammy employs in his attempts to become invisible. As opposed to using tactics to reassert power as some of the early homeowners did, Sammy uses tactics to become invisible to his suburban peers; rather than manipulating the system imposed by others (the developers) outside of the suburbanites’ realm, Sammy struggles to control the perceptions of the people around him. In order for his homosexuality to go undetected, no one can know or suspect it. Therefore, while suburban housewives were able to form support networks for each other by meeting for coffee and sharing child care responsibilities, no such network exists for Sammy in suburbia. As a result, Sammy’s maneuvers rely on the use of an additional space and the leading of a double life. To avoid suspicion, Sammy only expresses his homosexuality in the city during discreet lunches with men. At home in the suburbs, he appears to be just like everyone else, but that appearance is actually a deliberate act to deflect attention from any behavior that could connect him to his secret life.

As a result of his move between two locations, Sammy draws a clear line between his earlier life in the city and his new life in the suburbs, as well as a line between his present suburban existence and his stolen time in the city. The strength of these lines is akin to the line drawn between superheroes’ secret identities and their alter egos. Clark Kent lives a very different life from that of Superman, just as Tom Mayflower, crippled from birth, is not capable of performing the feats of derring-do that the Escapist does. Yet, in each case, the superhero and the alter ego are two roles played by the same man. Somewhere within Tom Mayflower is the ability to walk without a limp, just as Clark Kent can throw off his glasses and see through objects when he is Superman. Similarly, as much as Sammy would like to keep his two lives separate, it is impossible. He must navigate the space between his alter ego (husband and father) and his secret identity (gay man). The alter ego is a persona developed to protect the secret identity from discovery. Having the alter ego allows a superhero to go through life disguised as a “normal” person, only using the secret identity when the situation warrants it. In the case of some superheroes, like Superman, the secret identity is the “actual” identity. Superman is really Kal-El, the last son of Krypton, and Clark Kent is the human disguise he assumes to avoid being Superman at all times. For other superheroes, like Batman, the alter ego is the actual identity. Bruce Wayne is a mortal human being who fights crime dressed as Batman. In each situation, however, the more mundane alter ego is the everyday self, and the secret identity is employed only when needed. Accordingly, the superhero’s friends and loved ones cannot be targeted by enemies, and the superhero does not leave himself open to attack.³

By outfitting Sammy with his own secret identity and alter ego, Chabon makes a direct connection between comic books and the novel, between suburbia and “the real.” Behlman identifies Chabon’s use of comic books as “a form of fantasy that resolutely avoids the real, for it seeks to resolve history either by overcoming it through neat, miraculous reversals or by escaping its terms completely” (57). This description also aptly describes Sammy’s treatment of suburbia: resolutely avoiding the real, Sammy hopes to escape the terms of his personal history in a new space. The ultimate failure of Sammy’s identity construction proves the impossibility of escaping reality—the collection of events and expectations that make up one’s conception of the everyday. In suburbia, these conditions take on two forms: the reality of the present, which serves to facilitate Sammy’s double life, and the reality of the past, which constantly threatens to undermine it. Chabon’s narrator lends his support to Sammy’s double life through a set of narrative tactics and by doing so reveals the benefits and limits of trying to escape the troubles of everyday life in order to survive.

Section II: Escape through Transformation

THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF KAVALIER AND CLAY DESCRIBES SAMMY CLAY’S LIFE as one increasingly mediated by the superhero comic genre in which he works, to the point that Sammy fashions his existence in the style of a superhero. For much of the novel Sammy does not merely escape reality during brief moments; instead he actively works to deny his past by creating a present based on lies and deceptions he is willing to perform for a lifetime. Due to his inability to understand the limitations of escape through the superhero comic book genre, however, Sammy’s over-reliance on the genre to revise his identity begins to fail him.

Sammy’s dependence on comic books to structure his life begins early in the novel when he outlines the background of his character, the Escapist: Tom Mayflower depends on a crutch to walk, but when he is the Escapist, empowered by his golden key, he is capable of performing magnificent feats of heroism. Such a transformation mirrors Sammy’s own situation—stricken by polio at a young age, Sammy went on long walks as a child with his father to strengthen his legs. It takes another comic book man, Davy O’Dowd, to point out the similarity: “[Y]ou don’t want to have a gimp leg no more. So, boom, you give your guy a magic key and he can walk” (Chabon 145). O’Dowd’s observation startles Sammy, as he “had chosen not to look at the process of character creation in quite so stark a manner” (145). He unconsciously uses comic books to work through the narrative of his own life by inserting an idealized version of himself as the central character of his new line of comic books. This is a sign of his desire to be someone else—

“common enough among the inventors of heroes” (113)—that is complicated by a lack of self-awareness. Sammy embarks on a series of “regimens and scenarios and self-improvement campaigns that always [run] afoul of his perennial inability to locate an actual self to be improved” (113). That is to say, he takes an active role in creating comic book characters, but in the early sections of the novel, he does not take an active role in identifying himself.

As a writer engrossed in his own fantasies to the point that he loses sight of himself, Sammy does not have a vocabulary for his few moments of self-awareness, and as a result, they take him by surprise. When, for example, he is with his lover, Tracy Bacon, the word boyfriend “[flies] into Sammy’s mind and careen[s] blindly around it like a moth,” “Sammy chase[s] after it with a broom in one hand and a handbook of lepidoptery in the other” (372). The word appears without much fanfare—in fact, Chabon’s narrator slips it in at the end of a sentence and allows for a brief exchange between Sammy and Bacon before Sammy realizes what has happened. His mode of dealing with the word is to chase it out with a broom as though it is something that does not belong, an act that demonstrates his own discomfort with the topic of homosexuality and foreshadows the violence that will eventually befall him. Yet, the word simultaneously interests him, as it is something of which he has no previous knowledge and he must depend on the lepidoptery handbook, a reference tool, to find the word’s meaning.⁴ Sammy’s response is to cry out, “I don’t care!” (373), revealing a reluctance to plum the depths of his identity, a desire simply to let things be.

The first time Sammy takes an active step to change a part of his identity that dissatisfies him is also an important moment in his trajectory to superhero status. In a legal deposition to determine whether or not the *Escapist* comics infringe on the *Superman* comic’s copyright, Sammy perjures himself by saying that his boss never told him and Joe to “get me a Superman” (288). After the deposition, Sammy walks around the city, ashamed of himself, and wanders into a group of volunteers training to watch for enemy planes from the observation deck of the Empire State Building. Although Sammy discovers plane spotting in an accidental manner, his active choices are reflected in his decision to commit perjury and his commitment, after meeting the plane spotters, to scan the skies three nights a week to make up for his previous wrongdoing. In this way, Sammy has a superhero origin story of his own: racked by a guilty conscience, he must turn to acts of heroism to make his moral ledger balance. Monitoring for signs of disturbance is a way for Sammy to right a wrong, but it is also a means by which to escape the reality that his life’s narrative includes the crime of perjury.⁵ By taking on his responsibilities as a plane spotter, Sammy’s self-narrative includes two important characteristics of the comic book superhero: a desire for justice and a need to es-

cape reality.⁶

Sammy's life adopts yet another important aspect of the superhero identity when he meets the aforementioned Tracy Bacon. Bacon plays the titular role in the *Escapist* radio show. Physically, he looks like the Escapist: tall, blond, and muscular. His physicality even comes to inform that of his character: "Not always knowing his own strength was eventually to become, thanks to Tracy Bacon, one of the Escapist's characteristic traits" (303). Yet, Bacon has trouble vocalizing the Escapist, while Tom Mayflower's voice comes to him naturally. Bacon explains, "Well, I *am* Tom Mayflower, Mr. Clay, and that's the explanation for that" (305), meaning that he identifies most with the figure of the alter ego, his external appearance notwithstanding. Bacon needs Sammy's help to understand the Escapist's motivations, which of course, Sammy does, because he sublimates his own wishes in the Escapist's storylines. At first, Sammy is intimidated by Bacon's outward persona: "Big, radiant, confident fellows with string-bass voices always made him feel acutely how puny, dark, and Jewish he was" (303). Eventually, Sammy is able to stop focusing on how opposite they are and he sees part of himself reflected back at him: "there seemed to emerge ... an unmistakable portrait that Sammy was surprised to find he recognized: Tracy Bacon was lonely. And now, with an unerring instinct, he had sniffed out the loneliness in Sammy" (307). Their mutual loneliness makes them two sides of the same coin, both struggling to make it in a world where the only superheroes are the ones they create. Indeed, Sammy and Bacon both have a hand in creating the Escapist, but at the same time, they create for themselves an identity based around that of the superhero. Sammy and Bacon take turns playing alter ego or secret identity to each other's role as their friendship and subsequent romantic relationship take on a tone of complementary interrelationship: the self-assured actor has no trouble playing the alter ego who is a stand-in for the insecure writer with dreams of becoming a superhero, while the writer inhabits the ordinary space that the actor has left behind. Sammy and Bacon are able to share the construction of a superhero identity, each occupying both roles at separate times.

This construction is further deepened by a connection that the text draws between gay men and superheroes. Sammy and Bacon participate in New York's underground gay social network, and through these connections, they end up in a house on the Jersey Shore where they vacation with other gay men. Sammy observes the other couples present and remarks, "[T]hey could all play the secret identity of a guy in tights. Your bored playboy, your gridiron hero, your crusading young district attorneys. Bruce Wayne. Jay Garrick. Lamont Cranston" (407).⁷ This observation establishes a crucial link between the gay identity these men keep secret and the secret identity of a comic book superhero. Forced to protect

their secret identities from discovery, superheroes and gay men employ alter egos. The roles of these alter egos could be quite easily played by the two "gridiron heroes" Sammy watches play football on the beach. In a way, Sammy is normalizing the idea of homosexuality—something with which he remains uncomfortable—by placing it in a context he can understand: comic books. He is also setting the stage for the double life he will soon lead in suburbia, where he will operate with an alter ego and secret identity of his own.

While on the trip, a vice squad raids the house and Sammy is raped by an FBI agent. Sammy is unable to accept the reality of what has happened to him, and he breaks up with Bacon before the actor leaves for California. Sammy swears to himself that "regardless of what he felt for Bacon, it was not worth the danger, the shame, the risk of arrest and opprobrium" to continue the relationship (420). Feeling rejected by society, Sammy rejects his counterpart, his complement, and strikes out on his own, thereby forced to be all things to himself, both alter ego and secret identity. In his subsequent move to suburbia with Rosa and Tommy, Sammy shoulders the responsibility of being his own superhero, the role he previously shared with Bacon in a relationship where each supported and protected the other from loneliness. It is the superhero's job to protect innocent people from the villain, and the construction of hero/villain in Sammy's tale marks reality as the villain, especially the homophobic reality of the past. More generally, fantasy is also the novel's mode of choice through which to escape past trauma, as "fantasy may also act as an interruption to memory, a holding action against the incursions of the past" (Behlman 71).⁸ His alter ego—husband/father—masks the detection of his secret identity—gay man. He protects the people in his life from his secret, and at the same time, he attempts to shield himself from his own secrets.

Section III: Holding off the Urban Past with the Suburban Present

Sammy's first encounter with the promise of suburbia occurs at the 1939 World's Fair. Displaying new developments in technology that inspired many to believe in things that had been previously considered unthinkable, the Fair, as the novel reminds its readers, earned its title as "the World of Tomorrow." Fairgoers were distracted from the horrors of the present war and enthralled by the promises of the future. A monument to escapism, it is no wonder that the World's Fairgrounds are Sammy's favorite place in all of New York:

He had grown up in an era of great hopelessness, and to him and the millions of his fellow city boys, the Fair and world it foretold had possessed the force of a covenant, a promise of a better world to come, that he would later attempt to redeem in the potato fields of Long Island. (Chabon 375)

Having grown up in the hopelessness of the Depression and facing the turmoil of World War II, Sammy's generation wished for improvement in their lives, and the Fair promised a grand remodeling. As critics have remarked, the Fair "literally and figuratively replaced ashes with promise. It was a beacon of hope for a nation that had endured one storm of conflict and was about to enter another" (Cohen et al. 5). The Fair also "offered the illusion of better times, an escapism similar to, but more tangible than, Hollywood's palliatives" (Zim et al. 15). The exhibits of the Fair presented both historical feats of splendor and fantastic visions of the future. In a way that Hollywood movies could arguably never accomplish, the Fair enabled "the better life" to come alive. However, for all the extraordinariness on display, the Fair was tingling with a sense that its innovative fantasies were within reach. The Fair witnessed the first public use of fluorescent lighting, nylon, Lucite, Plexiglass, Kodachrome transparencies and color home-movie film, noiseless fireworks, and 3D film viewed through Polaroid glasses (Cohen et al. 3–4). These revolutionary uses of technology assured the public that such visions were not dreams, and that—as the buttons that visitors received upon exiting the Democracy exhibit stated—they had seen the future.

The Fair's literature demonstrated what was called the "American Way of Living": one brochure about the Fair stated that "We must tell the story of the relationships between objects in their everyday use—how they must be used ... how they may help us" (Cohen et al. 3). Sammy learns this lesson from the Fair, and he uses the suburbs, the idealized neighborhoods of the Fair, to build a life for himself based on the compelling notion of a fantasy world that promises to solve his problems. Going beyond building relationships with objects—the televisions, washing machines, and lawn mowers ubiquitous in suburbia—Sammy exploits relationships with spaces to suit his needs. In particular, he uses the two spaces that make up his "everyday," the city and the suburb, to help him keep his secret identity and alter ego separate. By living in the suburbs and working in the city, Sammy is able to put even more distance between his alter ego and his secret identity. This physical distance reflects the cognitive distance Sammy puts between his dual identities. His commute between the two spaces allows him to transition mentally from one to the other (Brekhus 49).

The delineation between suburban and urban spaces also helps maintain Sammy's mask. Superheroes often wear masks or costumes to signify the shedding of the alter ego and the revelation of the secret identity. As is the case with Clark Kent and Superman, however, "the most cunning mask is no mask at all—as when a hero has a secret identity so unexpected or so well-contrived ... that context is a sufficient alibi for the familiar face" (Reynolds 26). By creating two different contexts for himself, Sammy does not need to alter his physical appearance as do

other superheroes morphing into their secret identities. He is protected by the fact that his lunches with men stay in the city and his home life stays in the suburbs.

Sammy employs a routine to legitimize these spaces and ensure their separation from one another. Unfortunately, such a scheme does not provide much room for excitement:

He adopted the same policy with regard to [the house] that he followed with his wife, his employment, and his love life. It was all habit. The rhythms of the commuter train, the school year, publishing schedules, summer vacations, and of his wife's steady calendar of moods had inured him to the charms and torments of his life. (Chabon 474)

Though Sammy's double life is not wholly without pleasure, the torments of continued deception and the inability to express himself fully dampen his experience of the richness life has to offer. By relying on external structures to shape his life, structures that have power over specific areas, Sammy functions almost on autopilot, allowing his personae to act for themselves only insofar as they can safely respond to the environment in which they exist.

It is important to note, however, that Sammy puts distance between his two selves not because one is more fulfilling than the other, but so that they do not overlap and become confused. For the alter ego to be truly successful, it must be an authentic self that experiences real emotion, which Sammy's suburban self seems to be able to do, for he genuinely enjoys the comfort of his relationship with Rosa and the unpredictable nature of his relationship with his stepson, Tommy (Chabon 474). The urban secret identity is also a genuine self, because he is able to express the elements of his personality that he represses as the alter ego. Sammy's commute, then, like that of other gay commuters,⁹ is between "two different but equally 'real' selves" (Brekhus 52). Although Sammy's secret gay identity may be closer to an "authentic" self, that identity can only be fully protected if his alter ego is as realistic as possible. Sammy succeeds in giving substance to his suburban alter ego through his relationship with Rosa. Their marriage, a relationship built on a model of what marriage "should" be, is a simulation in which they pretend to have what they do not.¹⁰ Originally a marriage of convenience, Sammy and Rosa's relationship does not have the basis in romantic feelings that most marriages have. It cannot be deemed "unsuccessful," however, because they feel genuine, friendly affection for each other. Additionally, after Rosa begins creating her own comic books for Sammy's new line designed for women, their professional relationship informs their domestic relationship, and gives them a blueprint from which to work:

And the truth was that their marriage had improved after she went to work for Sammy. It no longer seemed (to mistranslate) quite as blank. They became colleagues, coworkers, partners in an unequal but well-defined way that made it easier to avoid looking too closely at the locked cabinet at the heart of things. (Chabon 547)

By supplementing the simulated roles of husband and wife with the real roles of coworkers, Sammy and Rosa's relationship feels less artificial and more meaningful. Creating lives for themselves in suburbia makes it easier to mitigate the pain of remembering life in the city. Central to this set-up, however, is the locked cabinet into which Sammy and Rosa steadfastly refuse to look. While they may not acknowledge the content of their secrets, the very existence of such a set of blocked-off memories is a reminder that all is not as it seems. By creating a locked cabinet, Sammy and Rosa make a specific place for their memories of the past, potentially granting the memories more power to haunt them than if they had simply forgotten them.

Sammy's suburban life, then, reveals two distinct forms of everyday life: the past that he hopes to escape, and the present that he embraces. While Sammy's working relationship with Rosa is authentic, the present is also marked by a series of deceptions and avoidances. Their system of evasion is so fragile that it almost falls apart when Tommy asks simple questions about his family's history. Tommy innocently inquires into the current whereabouts of "Uncle Joe," but Sammy responds by refusing to answer his questions: "Such talk ... made Tommy's father nervous. He would reach for his cigarettes, a newspaper, the switch of the radio: anything to cut the conversation short" (Chabon 505). Sammy worries that answering one question about Uncle Joe ("We don't know where he is") will lead to others ("Why not?" "Why did he leave?") that could potentially lead to even more difficult questions ("Who is my real father?" "Why did you marry your cousin's girlfriend?"). Sammy's perpetual evasion of Tommy's questions is a form of deception; his silence is a lie of omission. Living his suburban life based on lies (that he is straight, that Tommy is his biological child) affords Sammy protection from his past life. For Sammy's suburban alter ego, the consequences of both the city and the past are damaging and must be avoided at all costs. Indeed, for the alter ego, there must be no acknowledgement of life in the city. It must be categorized as something belonging to the past, since the present suburban life cannot function otherwise. This false distinction between lives, however, also constrains his secret identity. Although the urban gay self can express a side of Sammy's identity that is often repressed, the urban self is also weighted with the responsibility of protecting the suburban life with Rosa and Tommy from reality by ensuring that the two worlds never collide.

The narrator, moreover, cooperates in protecting Sammy from the prying eyes of a society that does not accept homosexuality. Such narrative protection comes in the form of language, the central tool that the narrator has at his disposal. The narrator's language "is at the same time a use of language and an operation performed on it" (de Certeau 33). By using language, or in some cases, by choosing to avoid description, the narrator can manipulate the presentation of Sammy's character so as not to reveal that which Sammy hopes to keep secret. For example, when describing Sammy's relationships with men in the city, the narrator speaks from Rosa's point of view, a necessarily ignorant perspective: "Rosa always assumed these friendships of Sammy's ... went no further than a lunch table at Le Marmiton or Laurent. It was one of her fundamental assumptions" (Chabon 565). By not referring to what happens in these relationships from the perspective of anyone in them, the narrator avoids disclosing too much. Earlier in the novel, when Sammy was ambivalent about his sexual identity—not confronting it, but not going to any particular lengths to hide it—the narrator offers a slightly clearer picture, describing kisses and alluding to lovemaking. After Sammy decides, however, "that he would rather not love at all than be punished for loving" (420), the narrator retreats and leaves more unsaid, thereby respecting Sammy's wishes to escape the past.

While the narrator makes sure not to reveal Sammy's specific secret, the narrator does not hide the deceitful nature of the life Sammy and Rosa share; almost every reference to their domestic life includes a mention that it is held together by lies—"As a rule, they tended to avoid questions like 'How sane are we?' and 'Do our lives have meaning?'" The need for avoidance was acute and apparent to both of them" (563). The narrator is less careful about disclosing the false nature of Sammy's suburban marriage to the reader because the reader is expected to allow and enable the deception, along with Sammy and Rosa.

Baudrillard writes, "reality asks for nothing more than to submit to hypotheses. It validates all of them: that is its ruse and its vengeance" ("Radical Thought" 168). In Sammy and Rosa's marriage, the hypothesis is based on the assumption that their marriage is based on romantic love for each other. Reality validates this hypothesis by conflating professional roles with domestic ones and fostering actual feelings of affection between the two. It fools Sammy and Rosa into thinking that their life is just like everyone else's, but it also punishes them by making their fantasy come true. The responsibility of living in suburbia takes its toll on Sammy. To live in the suburbs, one must meet certain requirements: employment, marriage, parenthood, stability. "If there were not a wife and child for him to support, *a child not even his own...*" (Chabon 547, emphasis in the original) is the unfinished threat Sammy leaves hanging in the air between himself and

Rosa. In the unspoken ellipsis, he gestures towards the novel he could write, the love he could find. Suburbia can also make this threat to him: if there were not a wife and child for him to support, he would not have been granted access to this paradise; if the wife and child were to disappear, so would the promise of happiness achieved by hiding in the suburbs. Thus, his configuration of suburbia as a space “conforming beyond expectations” is ultimately a dead end (Baudrillard, “Radical Thought” 172).¹¹ With his escape from his past reality realized through the form of Sammy’s alter ego, there is nothing left to imagine and the crushing forces of his present reality take over.

These forces, while oppressing Sammy, paradoxically make the mask even more convincing. It is so convincing, so real, that even when hints of that other reality, that of the past/the city, peek through, they go unchallenged: “Everyone knew. That was what made their particular secret, their lie, so ironic; it went unspoken, unchallenged, and yet it did not manage to deceive” (Chabon 566). Sammy and Rosa’s lie does not go unnoticed by their friends and neighbors, the narrator takes careful pains to point out, but it goes unchallenged because of a basic wish on the part of the world to embrace the façade. If the other residents of Bloomtown do more than idly speculate as to the true nature of Rosa’s feelings for “Cousin Joe” or what Sammy does in the city, they would be opening the doors for their own past realities to return.¹² Therefore, illusion is necessary, as it provides the impression that there is something beyond the banality of the everyday (Baudrillard, “Radical Thought” 162), and the residents of Bloomtown accept Sammy and Rosa’s illusion because it makes it easier to accept their own.

This tacit agreement establishes the suburbs as the locus of characters’ hopes to escape the past and create new lives for themselves. The power of the past, however, lies in the fact that Sammy was forced to move away from it. By escaping from New York City to Bloomtown, Sammy acknowledges the dreadful power of remembering his rape. The force of the past is so strong it would have had the power to cripple him if he had remained in that urban space. The passing of time, however, serves to alleviate his pain. The longer Sammy goes without being confronted directly by the specters of the past, the stronger the illusion of successful escape in the present is. Time is on his side, as he and Rosa spend more than six years in suburbia. Thus, a tentative balance is struck between the strategic forces of reality and the tactics of escape, a balance unique to the suburban space in which it occurs.

This balance topples for Sammy, however, with his outing by a Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency of the Senate Judiciary Committee. During the Subcommittee hearings, Senator Hendrickson asks Sammy about the

frequent use of boy wards in comic books, such as Dick Grayson, Robin’s alter ego in the *Batman* comic books. The Senator asks whether Sammy was aware that he was “in any way expressing or attempting to disseminate [his] own ... psychological proclivities” (Chabon 616). Sammy’s response is that of the flustered victim: “I’m afraid I don’t ... these are not any proclivities which I’m familiar with, Senator” (616). This lie is an attempt at protecting himself thrown up by the alter ego, but because Sammy’s secret identity is a gay man, he cannot offer any effective protection from this attack.

Because Sammy’s protective system operates on the continued belief of a lie, the failure of the system marks the failure of the lie. The lie teaches Sammy the degradation of the world in which he lives, a world that requires him to degrade himself through lies in order to participate, while simultaneously paying lip service to the idea of honesty (Adorno 30). Perjuring himself twice (in the *Superman* copyright deposition and the Subcommittee hearing) is a necessary survival technique, as is his continued denial of his homosexuality. Each time he perpetuates those lies and denials, however, Sammy separates himself from a society that, in Adorno’s words, “sings the praises of loyalty and truthfulness” (30). By lying, Sammy places himself on the fringes of society, although such lies were originally motivated by a desire to remain a part of it. In the Subcommittee hearing, his lie is dismissed, the truth revealed, and suburbia lost. He is not only outed as a gay man, but also as a liar, and the lie’s ability to offer a “glacial atmosphere in whose shelter he can thrive” (Adorno 30) no longer exists.

This turn of events destroys Sammy’s identity construction, but it simultaneously allows a new one to emerge. With his secret identity no longer a secret, there is no need for the alter ego, as there is no one left to protect. Therefore, Sammy is free to unmask his secret identity and make it part of his entire identity. If the reality of the lie is hyperreal, artificial, an illusion, it is able to survive for only a brief time in suburbia, a space shaped by a collective fantasy. Suburbia liberates Sammy one final time by allowing him to leave his life of lies for an unknown future that is unshaped by any corporate marketers, developers, or Fair promoters. Incapable of imagining “what it would feel like to live through a day that was not fueled or deformed by a lie” (Chabon 623), Sammy accepts this intervention and sets off to discover exactly what is real in his life. What was originally a final reassertion of strategic power becomes invigorating as Sammy leaves tactical maneuvers behind, able to survive on his own without the need to mediate his reality through escape.

Section IV: Conclusions — “An easy escape from reality”

If Sammy’s suburban escape from reality is unsuccessful in that it routinely fails and prevents Sammy from living a full life on his own terms, some forms of imaginary fantasy are nonetheless essential to the human condition. Behlman suggests that Chabon presents “fantasy as a means of therapeutic escape from history ... he sets up a defense of popular escapism as a quintessentially American artistic response to the Holocaust” (56). Americans need their comic books, their films, their Worlds Fairs, their love lives—all modes of escape presented in the novel—to escape the horrors of history. Why, then, does Chabon routinely establish the failure of that escape when it concerns Sammy Clay?

Through the novel, Chabon expresses the need to forget a historical happening so that individuals can function in their day-to-day lives. For example, Joe must forget the pain of leaving his family behind in Prague in order to assimilate fully into the United States. If individuals try to escape their day-to-day reality, however, then they have no place left in which to function. The wider theme of the novel—escapism as a legitimate response to historical trauma, specifically that of the Holocaust—is tempered by the object lesson of Sammy Clay. Escaping the everyday leaves one empty, and such an escape cannot sustain itself because it is not truly an escape, but denial. Where escape is a matter of momentary disregard, according to Bettelheim:

Denial is the earliest, most primitive, and most inappropriate and ineffective of all psychological defenses used by man ... it does not permit taking appropriate action which might safeguard against the real dangers. Denial therefore leaves the individual most vulnerable to the very perils against which he has tried to defend himself. (Bettelheim 84)

Sammy’s escapism fails because it leaves him vulnerable to the perils against which he tries to defend himself—the political and homophobic realities that permeate all of these spaces. For Sammy, escapism is transformed into denial of such realities, which always return in new forms of social and political antagonism.

In contrast, Chabon uses comic books as a means to channel the desire to change history by individuals who are powerless to do so: hence the cathartic power of the first *Escapist* comic book cover, which portrays the Escapist vividly punching Adolf Hitler in the mouth. By recasting themselves as heroes during the Golden Age, Sammy and Joe can feel like they are doing something to bring an end to the war. This sort of imaginative escape is productive because it turns feelings of helplessness into feelings of power, which enables individuals to continue their lives without getting bogged down in the realization of weakness to prevent atroc-

ity. Escape is not productive when it replaces one’s life with an entirely imagined illusion that cannot sustain itself, but imaginary escape as a supplement to the real can offer a momentary respite from the present.

The moments of liberation are what Chabon’s narrative offers the reader. By veiling Sammy’s reality, he makes the extent of Sammy’s denial clear and the danger of such denial all too real. Readers follow the course of this novelistic meditation, discovering where fantasy succeeds and also where it fails. By establishing reality as both necessary and avoidable, *Kavalier and Clay* makes apparent the dual importance of escape and acceptance. We must face reality, but we do not have to do so all of the time. We can escape reality, but we cannot do so all of the time. We must strike a balance between the impulse to remember and the impulse to forget; only then can we attempt a full and functional life.

Endnotes

¹ The Golden Age of comics lasted for most of the 1940s: “America’s entry into World War Two gave the superheroes a whole new set of enemies, and supplied a complete working rationale and world view for a super-patriotic superhero such as Captain America” (Reynolds 8). Golden Age comics allowed readers to escape the realities of war, and to believe in the power of patriotic men in tights to put an end to unthinkable violence overseas.

² Additionally, Theodor Adorno writes in *Minima Moralia* that while the world was once interested in irony, defined as the difference between claims to reality and reality, now the world is content to accept the appearance as the reality. Not only does Sammy choose self-repression, but he also is supported in that choice by a society that refuses to confront the consequences of such repression.

³ In *Superheroes: A Modern Mythology*, Richard Reynolds elaborates on the alter ego/secret identity dynamic: “[Superman] pays for his great powers by the observance of this taboo of secrecy” (15).

⁴ Interestingly enough, the motif of lepidoptery, the study of butterflies and moths, recurs frequently throughout Joe and Rosa’s initial courtship. Joe creates the Luna Moth character as a tribute to Rosa, as a reflection of how he perceives her mysterious nature, and as a symbol for the change she affects on his life. Chabon’s use of the word “lepidoptery” here, when read alongside the other references in the novel, suggests the transformative power of romantic relationships to bring a person from larval ignorance to maturity through increased self-awareness.

⁵ “Engaging in denial and repression in order to save oneself the difficult task of integrating an experience into one’s personality” (Bettelheim 33) is a frequent tool of trauma survivors, and one that resurfaces later in Sammy’s refusal to accept his sexual assault as reality.

⁶ Other important motifs of the superhero comic are outlined in Richard Reynolds’s books *Super Heroes: A Modern Mythology*. He identifies the seven major motifs, some of which also apply to Sammy: lost parents (Sammy’s father leaves home and later dies); identifying the superhero as an earth-bound deity; a devotion to justice that overrides devotion to the law; an extraordinary nature contrasted with the ordinariness of the hero’s surroundings; the dual nature of the secret identity and alter ego (which Sammy develops); loyalty and patriotism, which again, supersede the letter of the law; and science as magic (12–16). It is Behlman who identifies escapism as one of the other major elements of the superhero comic genre.

⁷ Sammy uses the term “secret identity” to refer to what I call the “alter ego.” This difference in vocabulary can be explained by the nature of the word “alter ego.” As a literal “alternate self,” the alter ego is not the superhero’s actual self, but a role assumed to cover a secret. In this case, Sammy’s use of the term “alter ego” would suggest that the “guys in tights” are not actually gay if their alter egos are. Here, Sammy seems to fixate on the secret nature of a gay identity as something, like a superhero’s secret identity, that is only revealed under certain circumstances.

⁸ Bacon also uses fantasy to escape an undesired past. Throughout the novel, the narrator drops hints at a past life that Bacon has left behind. Even the name “Tracy Bacon” is presumably an alias, an alter ego to an unknown secret identity. He enacts the alter ego all the time—an identity laden with other secrets; for example, in his earlier relationship with actress Helen Portola, he played a straight man to cover up his homosexuality—but that does not diminish the fact that below the surface, he is still protecting his secret identity from detection.

⁹ In his book *Peacocks, Chameleons, Centaurs: Gay Suburbia and the Grammar of Social Identity*, Brekhus explores the idea of gay identity as a grammar. To some men, “gay” is a noun or adjective, and to a subset of gay men whom Brekhus refers to as “commuters” or “chameleons,” “gay” is a verb, meaning that they enact their gay identities only in specific settings, often removed by physical distance from the everyday functioning of their lives.

¹⁰In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard warns, “simulation threatens the difference between the ‘true’ and the ‘false,’ the ‘real’ and the ‘imaginary’” (3). Every simulation ultimately becomes infused with elements of the real—in a fake holdup, the victims will be experiencing real fear—and it is one of the functions of the real to “devour any attempt at simulation” (20).

¹¹The quote continues, “for somewhere you don’t even believe it that much, otherwise you would never have been able to invent it.”

¹²Because suburbia promises through the World’s Fair and suburban marketers to offer an escape from reality, suburbanites transplanted from the city have a past reality they would like to forget or reconstitute also. The quote from page 474 of Kavalier and Clay (found at the beginning of Section I of this thesis) reinforces this notion. Not every suburbanite is necessarily hiding a secret sexual identity, but every move to somewhere is also a move away from somewhere else.

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