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PENTANGLE

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Editors

Aaliyah Bennett
Kaylynn Berg
Anna Bohn
Tabitha Cain
Kaylin Conley
Kathy DuBois (“Kat Wren”)
Cecilia Field
Harrison Hall
Cody Hammond
Hannah Henriques
Mitch Horner
Autumn Howard
Abby Isbill
Taryn Markle
Hunter Meister
Liam Minniti
Chloe Mullins
Jessie Peare
Angelica Poe
Theo Sells
Katie Tillman
Jackson Witt

Faculty Advisor

Dr. Donelle Dreese

Cover Art

Hannah Henriques

Department of English
Northern Kentucky University
Highland Heights, KY 41099

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Pentangle is NKU's student-run journal featuring essays pertaining to public writing and all areas of literary studies, including film and other media.

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Contents

“I’m Just Ken”: Ken’s Search for Identity in a Female-led World

Anna Bohn 2

Prufrock: A Man Out of Time

Cecilia Field 9

Leaving Glasgow

Harrison Hall 13

Midwest Emo: A Cultural Landscape

Hannah Henriques 16

How Does Word Choice Shape Who a Character Is? Let’s Take a Glance at Myrlie Evers in Frank X Walker’s *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting of Medgar Evers*

Autumn Howard 23

The Playlist To Your Next Breakdown

Taryn Markle 29

The Nature of Humanity

Hunter Meister 37

White Power, Native Pain

Chloe Mullins 48

Matters of the Heart

Angelica Poe 52

In Favor of Elliot Page’s *Pageboy*

Theo Sells 56

Sexual Attraction in Relation to Nella Larson’s *Passing*

Katie Tillman 59

***Steal the Street*: A Persuasive Teacher of Pathos**

Kat Wren 65

Contributors 73

“I’m just Ken”: Ken’s Search for Identity in a Female-led World

Anna Bohn

Barbieland’s only fault was that it was not prepared for the hostile takeover of the Kendom. In the movie *Barbie*, which premiered in July of 2023, the camera follows Stereotypical Barbie around as she explores the real world and discovers herself. The movie highlights the accomplishments of the various Barbies (president, supreme court, Nobel prize-winning) while diminishing the presence and identity of the Kens in Barbieland. In this matriarchal society, Ken is a secondary character. However, in his adventure to the real world, one Ken discovers a way to make his life more than just the smiles and attention that Barbie gives him. In the movie, Ken’s song, “I’m Just Ken” becomes a powerful statement that demonstrates his growth as a character and his changing perspective that by being himself, he is enough.

What/Who is Barbieland?

In the magical world of Barbieland, all the girls can aspire to be whatever they want to be without any obstacles to stand in their way. All the Barbies can succeed in whatever career they please and they will experience the perfect day every day. However, while there are a variety of

Barbies inhabiting their Dreamhouses and living their perfect life, all the Kens are left to follow behind in Barbie’s shadows.

Ken was created by the toy company Mattel in 1961 to be Barbie’s male counterpart. The creation of the Ken doll was in reaction to complaints sent to Mattel about the Barbie doll being single and not having a male figure in her life (Carlin 2023). Every iteration of Ken, however, was not created to be an individual doll, but rather he was created to complement the look of the Barbie doll that had come out. One may even relate Barbie and Ken to Adam and Eve in the Bible. In the same way that Eve was created to be a companion to Adam, Ken was made to be Barbie’s companion. The movie’s director, Greta Gerwig claims the while Barbie was created first, “Ken was invented after Barbie, to burnish Barbie’s position in our eyes and in the world” (Wilkinson 2023).

The movie demonstrates Ken’s individual purpose, or lack thereof, as Ken needing to please his compatible Barbie. However, the movie is about Barbie and not Ken. For example, in the movie, the question of where Ken lives is raised as Barbieland is full of Barbie Dream Houses, but no places for Ken to sleep. In both the movie Barbie and the doll’s real-life manufacturing, it is clear that there was never an intended place for Ken to live. In this world of successful Barbie dolls who are breaking the gender barriers that women face in the real world, Ken is left to base his self-worth off of the attention he receives from Barbie

The Establishment of the Kendom

Ken’s big breakthrough comes in the form of a takeover of Barbieland after being exposed to the practices and literature of the real world. Having spent the first half of the movie working at his job, “beach,” and desperately trying to vie for Barbie’s attention, Ken’s character becomes established as a supporting role to Barbie’s lead. This is evident in both the movie and in Ken’s life. His purpose in life is connected to Barbie and without her, he is nothing.

By following Barbie to the real world, Ken is exposed to new concepts that do not exist in Barbieland. The most exciting one: horses. Less exciting but more impactful: patriarchy. Instead of the female construction workers that Ken has always known, there are male construction workers. He immediately feels empowered when a stranger notices him and says, “excuse me, sir.” There are men working out, men driving cars, men on horses, even men discussing business and making a woman wait for them to finish. These are all concepts that Ken had never experienced

in Barbieland. It is a culture shock that Ken wants to embrace. Ken is witnessing patriarchy in action, and he is falling in love with it (Bush 2023). The first thing Ken needs to do with this new knowledge is bring it to the other Kens of Barbieland.

While Barbie is still in the real world, the Kens begin to take over Barbieland with their current ideas of patriarchy. The roles of the Barbies and Kens quickly reverse, and the Kens have established dominance over the women in Barbieland. Ken has unknowingly turned Barbieland into the exact opposite of what it was created to be. In his search to fulfill his purpose, he has upended Barbie's way of life. However, Ken does not realize the true impact of his actions. For all Ken knows, he is bringing knowledge to Barbieland, and he is showing the Kens that they are more than just side characters in their Barbie's lives.

When Barbie gets back to Barbieland and sees what Ken has done, she is crushed to see everything taken from her. When she tries to fight with Ken about it, his feelings come out that Barbie failed him in a way she does not even realize. By ignoring Ken and refusing to reject his affection, Barbie has led Ken on. Barbie has thrived in Barbieland, but she never considered asking Ken how things were for him or how he felt.

Until Ken made the trip to the real world, he had no idea that he should even be upset about his situation in Barbieland. Barbieland was all about the Barbies and what they felt. There was never any room for the Kens to be anything other than Barbie's supporting character. The feelings of the Kens parallel how women in the real world have felt throughout history. Ken's feelings were discarded and didn't register as even a thought in Barbie's mind. However, after making the trip to the real world and seeing a male-dominated society, Ken realizes what he has been missing and aims to rectify that by bringing the patriarchy to Barbieland.

Because the Barbies never considered that the Kens may be unhappy, they were not prepared for any potential disagreement. By not taking the feelings of the Kens into consideration, Barbieland shows its ignorance of the inequality that the Kens may be going through. Barbieland was unprepared for the Kendom's takeover because the Barbies were more focused on themselves and their happiness. By taking Barbieland over, Ken wanted to make Barbie realize that it hurt to be overlooked and have his feelings ignored by her.

To Ken, equality was never an option. All Ken knew was total domination of one sex over the other. Even in the real world, there was the illusion of equality, but it was clear that the society Ken had entered was male dominated. It is Ken's perception that if he wants Barbie's attention, he will have to earn it by being more powerful in society. Ken takes over Barbieland with no remorse for her whatsoever.

In his Mojo Dojo Casa House, Ken can enjoy a Brewski Beer courtesy of his Barbie sidekick. He even offers Barbie a part in his life as his bride wife or long-term-long-distance-low-commitment casual girlfriend. How generous of him! Unlike how Barbie kept Ken in suspense, Ken is offering her a place at his side. Even though she rejects him, Ken is still content with what he has. At this point in the film, Ken has everything one would think he wants, but when Barbie’s affection is threatened by another Ken, it becomes clear that Ken is still nothing without Barbie.

“I’m Just Ken”

Ken’s debut song “I’m Just Ken” is a statement piece that illustrates Ken’s true struggles with his identity. Material objects and social status are not enough for Ken to realize his identity. He has fulfilled the prophecy of the patriarchy and yet he still does not have the affection and attention he seeks from Barbie. After Ken’s relationship with Barbie is threatened by another Ken, Ken plans to go to war for his love.

In this song, the audience gets a glimpse into Ken’s inner thoughts about himself, Barbie, and his place in Barbieland. The song begins with Ken bemoaning how he is always “number two” and how no one (especially Barbie) has recognized his efforts. The line “I’m just Ken, anywhere else I’d be a ten,” represents how in Barbieland, Ken is simply Barbie’s side character (Ronson, M. & Wyatt, A.). Yet, in the real world he was his own person that women respected. If he were anywhere but Barbieland, he would be valued and respected by his companions. Ken then laments the lack of attraction Barbie has for him and he voices his wish for Barbie to fight for him the way he has been fighting for her.

While he sings, the Kens all fight each other on the beach over their respective Barbies. Ken continues to sing, claiming he wants to know love and he expresses his confusion towards Barbie’s reaction towards the Kendom. Ken questions if his feelings for Barbie and his wish for a relationship is a crime. All the actions he took in establishing the Kendom were done because Ken wanted to be respected and loved by Barbie. Ken wanted to bring some joy to the other ignored Kens of Barbieland.

By the last part of the song, the Kens have come together and have realized their identities. Ken declares that he is doing enough by just being himself. He has come to terms with his identity as Ken the person and not Ken, Barbie’s counterpart. Ken, who knew nothing about existing outside of making Barbie happy, has found a new purpose. After experiencing the patriarchy and what life could be like for him, Ken realizes that he can be somebody on his own and find happiness that way. However, although the song ends with the Kens standing hand in hand, it also ends on the news

that the Kendom they established will fall to the Barbieland constitution.

He is Kenough

By the end of the song, Ken has realized that being himself is enough. This is the first big step he takes in his personal journey of discovering his identity without Barbie. However, the first step is not always the biggest and Ken still needs affirmation from Barbie herself before he can truly begin his journey. Upon realizing his Kendom has fallen, Ken retreats to his Mojo Dojo Casa House to mourn his loss. Despite the breakthrough he had made during the song, Ken still has insecurities about being his own person.

In the solitude of his former Mojo Dojo Casa House, Ken cries about the loss of his identity. In the patriarchy, he fulfilled an assumed role and without it, he is brought back down to being no one. Barbie comes to talk to Ken and he cries to her, telling her that he doesn't know who he is without her. This reinstates why he was truly created, as a counterpart to Barbie. Ken reaffirms this saying that "it's 'Barbie and Ken.' There is no 'just Ken'" (Gerwig 2023). The idea of being Barbie's supporting character has been instilled into Ken and even after his song, he still has the feeling of not being enough by himself. There is still the lingering self-doubt of an individual who is finally discovering their identity.

Barbie, the person that Ken has been chasing after his entire creation, was the best individual to give the push he needed in his journey of self-discovery. Their conversation helps Ken to realize that he has his identity, whether he knows what it is or not. In this moment, Barbie gives Ken his identity. The other Kens also come to realize that they are not stuck to their Barbies and that they have their own lives chanting "Ken is me." As the scene transitions, Ken is visible wearing a sweatshirt that says "I am Kenough" signifying Ken's acceptance of his identity as a person on his own, separated from Barbie.

For Ken, the journey to discovering his identity was filled with strong emotions and change. His character was desperate to be more than Barbie's shadow and that led him to making discoveries about himself and his role in Barbie's life. Ken knew in his heart that Barbie did not have feelings for him the way he did her, but when she finally said it aloud, he truly accepted it. Although Ken may not have gotten the ending he originally wanted for himself, he might have found something better.

The song "I'm Just Ken" when analyzed after Ken's final discussion with Barbie, can be seen as the story of Ken's transformation throughout the movie. First, in the movie and in the song, he is focused on Barbie and her

perception of him. Ken blames himself for not being enough for Barbie’s love and seems to think something is wrong with him. It does not occur to him that it was not meant to be. Ken thinks that he is not good enough just the way he is and wonders if there is anything he should change for Barbie. In his unhealthy mindset he is putting too much pressure on himself to please another doll, reflecting on his initial purpose in being created.

It is important that Ken discovers himself because Barbieland is changing, and Barbie is leaving. If his life is truly based on that of another doll, then Ken will find that without the other doll, he is nothing. Ken needs to learn how to live on his own the same way any individual needs to find their sense of self. The way Ken relies on Barbie for happiness is unhealthy and by separating himself from his identity as Barbie’s companion, Ken will learn that he can live independently in Barbieland.

Ken eventually comes to the realization that he is enough with Barbie’s guidance. Despite what he believed about himself not being good enough and not being able to do what he wanted, Ken learned that he should not evaluate himself on how Barbie reacts to him. In the last verse of the song, all the Kens realize that they are enough by themselves. Ken’s entire character arc can be summed up in the song “I’m Just Ken” as it depicts his character’s changing views on his self-worth.

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Prufrock: A Man Out of Time

Cecilia Field

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” by T. S. Eliot is a deeply introspective look into a troubled man’s mind. In the poem, the poet adopts the persona of a man named J. Alfred Prufrock and maintains it throughout. The poem begins with the line “Let us go then, you and I” (1), but Prufrock seems to be talking to himself, rather than an outsider. The poem is one of Eliot’s earlier works, published in 1915 and written a few years earlier. It purports to be a love song, but if so, it is a song of failed love. J. Alfred is a man caught in the headlights of vast societal changes that he does not know how to cope with. He has been equipped for a life led by the previous generation, not the new. This is clearly illustrated by his apparent education and romantic attitude, the unromantic and changing world he describes, and his clear inability to cope with the disparity between these two things.

Prufrock’s education and class can be seen in multiple ways throughout the poem. One of the first signs of Prufrock’s class can be seen in his name. Rather than going by a simple name, the title states his full, somewhat pretentious, name of J. Alfred Prufrock. Not only this, but the way it is phrased is as if he were writing it for himself. It is not Prufrock’s song, but the song *of* Prufrock. A song written in honor of another is typically called by the person’s name, not the name of the author of the poem. This loops back to the fact that the poem is introspective. It is about no one so much as it is about J. Alfred himself. Prufrock shows his class in other ways as well. He mentions his clothing choices on several occasions, stating that he will soon be wearing “white flannel trousers” (123), as he is getting older. Even

earlier in the poem, he goes more in depth about his wardrobe, describing his “morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin, / My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin” (42-43). He is describing the clothes of a gentleman, a man of taste. He will be fashionable and not over-done with his “simple pin.” His leisure activities also speak of his class. When trying to decide whether to ask a delicate question, he wonders if it would be worth it, “After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor” (102). Beautifully dressed women, superfluous reading, and afternoon tea parties are all things an educated man of leisure would understand and interact with.

The wealth of allusions contained in the poem work to further the idea of Prufrock’s education. They come from various places, but most are sources that would only be familiar to a well-read man. The very beginning of the poem is a lengthy quotation from Dante’s *Inferno*, the first book of *The Divine Comedy*. Not only that, but it is quoted in the original Italian. That is not something that an uneducated person would likely know well enough to quote in such a manner. He also refers to the Italian Renaissance artist, Michelangelo, multiple times. This is a slightly less obscure reference, but still contains the idea of a society that has the time and ease to casually discuss art history. “In the room the women come and go/ Talking of Michelangelo” (13-14). This line drips with the idea of monied leisure. He makes two later allusions to Bible stories, but not in a very direct manner. He references them as one who knows them well. “Though I have seen my head (...) brought in upon a platter, / I am no prophet” (82-83). This is a reference to the prophet St. John the Baptist whose head was brought to King Herod upon a platter. The second biblical reference is more overt, actually stating the name of the Biblical character, Lazarus. His last two allusions are to British poets, although one is significantly better known than the other. On line 111, Prufrock states that he is “not Prince Hamlet,” clearly referring to Shakespeare’s great tragedy. The final allusion comes at the end of the poem, and refers to the sixteenth century poet, John Donne, and his poem “Go and Catch a Falling Star.” The line “I have heard the mermaids singing each to each (124)” refers to the earlier poem’s expression of a desire to hear the mermaids singing. Taken all together, these allusions paint a picture of a well-read man who is capable of quoting in a familiar manner many texts, both old and obscure.

In addition to being well educated and likely a gentleman, Prufrock seems to be a romantic. This is immediately apparent in the title as well, as it states it is a love poem. While much of the poem does not read in a romantic manner at all, there are pieces that show this side of Prufrock strongly. For instance, in the final stanza, when he discusses the mermaids, he says he has seen them “Combing the white hair of the waves blown” (127) and describes

the “sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown” (130). This paints a lovely, romantic image that is starkly at odds with other imagery in the poem dealing strictly with Prufrock’s surroundings. Earlier in the poem, he also devotes an entire stanza to the discussion of women’s arms, “braceleted and white and bare” (63), shining in the lamplight. He then almost admonishes himself for the stanza, asking “Is it perfume from a dress/ That makes me so digress?” Prufrock clearly aspires to be a great, romantic man, but falls short for some reason.

This may be accounted for by the world in which Prufrock lives. When describing the society surrounding him, Prufrock uses imagery that is far from romantic. He paints a world of “half-deserted streets” (4), “one-night cheap hotels” (6), “sawdust restaurants” (7), and “streets that follow like a tedious argument” (8). It is not a beautiful, inspiring place that he inhabits. It is one with grimy windows, on which the fog “rubs its back” (15) and has been for many years. There are questionable “pools that stand in drains” (18) and “soot that falls from chimneys” (19). He speaks of wandering the streets, watching “the smoke that rises from the pipes/ Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows” (71-70). The only descriptions that do not contain this dreary atmosphere are those surrounding his descriptions of women, specifically ones he has failed to attach. He is left in a dirty world, drifting through streets where other lonely men smoke away their troubles.

Prufrock is seen to be an educated man with a romantic soul. He is also seen to be a man stuck in a dirty, unromantic world, and he does not cope well with the disparity between these two things. He is extraordinarily self-conscious. He mentions his physical appearance many times throughout the poem, and always in a negative manner. He tells how he has “a bald spot in the middle of [his] hair” (40) and hypothesizes about what others think of him: “How his hair is growing thin!” (41) and “But how his arms and legs are thin!” (44). Still later in the poem, he mentions the balding issue once again when mentioning his head, parenthetically stating that it had “grown slightly bald” (82). His negative self-image goes even deeper than his personal appearance, however. He is discontented with himself as a person. He says that he has “seen the moment of my greatness flicker” (84) and that he has seen death look upon him, “and snicker” (85). He thinks that he has failed at life and even death mocks him. His self-image is so low that he even goes as far as to say, “I should have been a pair of ragged claws/ Scuttling across the floors of silent seas” (73-74). He does not even think he is worthy of being a human. In his Donne allusion near the end of the poem, he says that he had heard the mermaids singing, but he does “not think that they will sing to me” (125). He may observe wonders, but he does not feel he will be able to share in them.

This disconnection from the surrounding world is manifested in other ways, aside from Prufrock's self-hatred. He overtly states at one point how uncomfortable he feels in the society of others, saying that "there will be time/ To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet" (26-27). He is unhappy with himself as a person and assumes that everyone else is equally displeased with him. Another way his disconnection is manifested is his persistent procrastination and indecision. He repeats the phrase "there will be time" throughout the middle of the poem, as he wrestles with his indecision. He uses it as a mantra to numb himself to the reality of the fact that he is letting opportunities slip through his fingers. He questions "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?" (38), and whether he will "Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis" (80). Toward the end of the poem, it becomes clear that his indecisiveness has made the decision for him. He switches from asking if he dares, to asking "would it have been worth it" (87). The opportunity has already slipped away from him.

These things lead to the conclusion that "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is a ballad for a man out of his natural time and element. He is an old soul and a Romantic, stuck in a world in transition. The beginning of the twentieth century was a time of great change, and all great changes are accompanied by casualties. Societal change is frequently accompanied by social anxiety, and this was certainly the case for J. Alfred. The social mores of the day were shifting, and he did not know how to cope. An indecisive person in a world tipped upside down, he became paralyzed by doubt and indecision and agonizingly watched his own life slip away from him.

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Leaving Glasgow

Harrison Hall

From the harrowing opening of Douglas Stuart's novel *Shuggie Bain* there is little doubt about the nature of the titular-tied matriarch Agnes's relationship with alcohol, and with her all-consuming need to escape her own reality. Leaning her body out of the tenement window she wants to be seen in her velvet dress, to be embraced in the arms of dancing strangers, and more than anything she wants a stiff drink. Her prerequisite for a good time has already been muddied by that final thought, that there must be a drink if there is to be any joy, any experience worth having. For Agnes, there are no moments of pleasure in a sober reality. To Agnes every disappointment leading to her life in that Sighthill apartment was only further evidence of an expansive injustice that the universe had played on her. She was not meant to be thirty-nine and living in her parents' flat. She was not meant to live with a man out of love, all romance gone, only the metrical repetition of trysts and a faltering family left to hold them together.

Agnes expected a great deal more from her life. Others that had fallen short in lives might have reevaluated their expectations, examined their own shortcomings in the face of adversity, and developed some kind of stratagem to save themselves; Agnes however lacked the cognizance or ability to implement any such plan. Her continual series of perceived failures only fed her belief in her own self-imposed depressive prophecy and pushed her inward into the isolated existence of darkness and abuse. Agnes, from her personal interpretation of reality, was alone in her life, and only through

intensive psychiatric help and a communal acceptance of the nature of her disease could she be expected to rebuild her existence into something substantive and worthwhile. If there was no social stigma toward seeking professional psychiatric help in Agnes's upbringing she would have been diagnosed with depression, bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, or some hodge-podge of the three. If Glasgow and the world at large had not taken such an uncaring view of mental health issues and addiction in the 1980s, Agnes would have been able to break her cycles of escapist binges and could have developed methods to cope with her loneliness and self-destruction - to build a life for herself surrounded by support and understanding.

Brutalist and grey, Agnes's structural surroundings throughout her life are as void of joy and aesthetic intrigue as the neighbors that she lives shoulder to shoulder with. From the Sighthill tenements to the Pithead council houses her world is concrete accented by soot, and those that inhabit those grey houses seem wholly unphased by the shabby, monochromatic lifestyle. Their aspirations are not Agnes's, and their comfort with their position confounds Agnes in her sober moments. The families that surround her are interested in survival and what little comfort can be found in their working-class lives. Agnes is interested in life's glamour. She always expects the next chapter of her life to be somehow profoundly grander and more glamorous than the sad, unpleasant mess that she was leaving behind. Agnes packs her suitcases and her family into the taxi to leave for Pithead and as they pull away from Sighthill she wistfully looks back toward her family and friends, "... waving mournfully through the rear window with a long, heavy blink. She thought it was a cinematic touch, like she was the star of her own matinee" (Stuart 90). Agnes's supreme isolation and delusion are highlighted in her reflexive need maintain her own solipsist narrative, that she is the character that is exiting the scene, and that as her backward glance and wave fades into the distance of Sighthill's vision so the scene fades to black on all behind her.

To escape from those that don't care to understand her, those that see Agnes as an eccentric loser with weak morality and weaker self-control, to escape from the nosey neighbors that she has no choice but to cohabit with on a day in and day out basis, Agnes drinks. Alcohol amplifies and transforms the loneliness that she feels into an external phenomenon, the world now the cause of her pain and frustration, the warm buzz of vodka and Extra Stout pumping through her brain convincing Agnes with each drink that she had always been in the right and that everyone else in her life deserved to suffer as she did. The more Agnes drinks the more she hides from herself, the more Agnes drinks the more her children hide from her. Leek warns his sister about what variety of bender is impending, a loud

and angry drunk or a tearful and whaling one, in either case, “She was drinking like she wanted to get somewhere else,” he says (Stuart 69). Agnes’s drinking relinquishes her personal responsibility for her mood and abstract responsibility for the damage that she causes while lost in the brown haze of liquor. She sits in a stupor at the kitchen table, drunkenly demanding that her youngest son to dial the numbers of men that Agnes has perceived to have slighted her in the past, looking at the phone book, “... like it was a menu, looking for something to fill her hunger” (Stuart 221), because Agnes is reaching out desperately for human contact, but in the only way that her abused, alcohol ridden mind can fathom. She wants a connection from one of these men that she calls, one of these neighbors that she harasses, one of her parents she maligns. Agnes is not accosting or berating because of a sheerly antagonistic personality, but because her loneliness has so warped her perception of human interaction that she can only think to reach out to other human beings by lashing out with her torment, to hope that they can understand Agnes through her own impulsive need to self-destruct to escape.

“Why can’t I be enough?” Shuggie asks his mother before their final move into Glasgow, and because of proximity, and because of love, Shuggie can’t understand the fundamental cornerstone of his mother’s illness: no one is enough. Agnes needed the compassion and understanding of a great many people to overcome herself, and even then, her margins were exceedingly slim. Agnes needed a sympathetic community that simply didn’t exist in that place at that time. Unless she had found the support to move far away, to some place where there were no remnants or reminders of her trauma, no neighbors Hellbent on drawing her back into the bottle, then she would stand no chance. And before it was too late, Leek understood, better than his mother or brother did, that “The only thing you can save is yourself” (Stuart 356).

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Midwest Emo: A Cultural Landscape

Hannah Henriques

Midwest Emo, a distinctive subgenre within the broader realm of emo music and birthed from the “second wave” of the emo movement, encapsulates a sonic journey that emerged from the heartland of the United States. Geographically, the second wave of emo had a broader reach than the preceding wave, and was localized in the Midwest, which explains the name (Sims). Characterized by its highly personal lyricism, loud-soft dynamics, intricate guitar work, and a DIY ethos, Midwest Emo carved a unique space within the alternative music scene. While the term “emo” itself often carries varied connotations, Midwest Emo is part of a distinct musical history and lineage and stands as a complex and introspective form of expression, rooted in the cultural landscape of the American Midwest.

Delving into the history and significance of Midwest Emo is more than a nostalgic exploration of a musical era. It serves as a crucial examination of the cultural and social forces that shaped this genre, offering insights into the DIY spirit that empowered musicians and resonated with audiences. Studying Midwest Emo unveils not only the evolution of a specific musical style but also its profound impact on subsequent generations of artists and its enduring influence within the broader landscape of alternative music. By understanding the origins and unique characteristics of Midwest Emo, we gain a deeper appreciation for the cultural nuances that underpin this evocative and influential genre.

The genesis of Midwest Emo can be traced back to the late 1980s and early 1990s, where bands from cities like Chicago and Milwaukee laid the

groundwork for a distinctive sound. Drawing inspiration from punk, indie rock, and post-hardcore, Midwest Emo evolved into a genre around 1992, marked by a penchant for exploring the depths of personal emotions. The Midwest landscape, often characterized by a unique blend of industrial grit and suburban introspection, provided a fertile ground for the emergence of a musical style that would come to be known as Midwest Emo. The heartbeat of Midwest Emo was fueled by a cadre of influential bands and musicians who laid the groundwork for the genre. Bands such as The Promise Ring, Rainer Maria, and American Football played pivotal roles in shaping and refining the genre's sonic identity with their experimental approach to music.

Midwest Emo's sonic tapestry is woven with threads borrowed from various musical influences. The genre's early pioneers drew inspiration from the rebellious energy of punk rock and the DIY ethos that characterized the independent music scene. Indie rock, with its emphasis on introspective lyricism and unconventional song structures, also played a pivotal role in shaping the distinctive sound of Midwest Emo.

The evolution of Midwest Emo cannot be divorced from the broader socio-cultural context in which it emerged. As a reflection of the times, the genre bore the imprints of a generation navigating the complexities of suburban life, relationships, and self-discovery within a time that is coined as "the last great decade" (National Geographic) and defined by a shrinking middleclass. While the government was bemoaning teenagers for their lack of morals, bands like Dashboard Confessional, Jimmy Eat World, and Thursday were creating relationships with America's youth through their music and spurring self-discovery and self-definition in a world that did not have a place for the distraught and emotional teen (Greenwald). The DIY ethos that prevailed in the Midwest, coupled with an interconnected network of underground venues and independent labels, provided a platform for musicians to experiment and develop a sound that resonated with the experiences of their audience. Beyond a musical genre, it became a cultural movement that resonated with a generation, leaving a lasting impact on the way individuals expressed themselves and engaged with the world around them. The historical background of Midwest Emo is a tale of geographical influence, musical experimentation, and cultural resonance, all converging to give birth to a genre that would leave an indelible mark on the landscape of alternative music.

The musical landscape of Midwest Emo is defined by a distinctive blend of instrumentation and sound that sets it apart within the broader spectrum of alternative music. Characterized by intricate guitar work, melodic basslines, and emotive drumming, Midwest Emo's instrumental palette creates a sonic atmosphere that is both contemplative and dynamic. The use

of clean, twinkling guitar arpeggios often intertwines with expressive and unconventional chord progressions, contributing to the genre's signature sound. While maintaining a raw and unpolished quality emulating music you might hear coming from your friend's basement, Midwest Emo's instrumentation fosters an emotional depth that resonates with listeners on a visceral level (Edge).

The song structures of Midwest Emo defy conventional norms, embracing a sense of unpredictability that mirrors the complexity of human emotion. Tracks often feature dynamic shifts in tempo and intensity—a style indicative of Math Rock which was originally popularized in the 1980s—creating a musical journey that mirrors the ebb and flow of the genre's lyrical themes. Lyrical content in Midwest Emo is deeply personal and introspective, delving into themes of love, heartbreak, self-discovery, and existential reflection. The genre's lyricists, influenced by confessional poetry, paint vivid narratives that resonate with the listener's own experiences, forging a powerful emotional connection.

At the core of Midwest Emo lies a commitment to the DIY ethos—a philosophy that emphasizes independence, self-expression, and grassroots community building. Musicians within the genre often took charge of their own production, distribution, and promotion, bypassing traditional music industry channels. This DIY approach not only contributed to the genre's distinctive sound, characterized by a lo-fi aesthetic and authenticity but also fostered a sense of intimacy between artists and their audience. The democratization of music production and distribution allowed Midwest Emo to flourish in independent spaces, cultivating a passionate and engaged fanbase that actively participated in the growth of the genre.

An example of this can be seen in the emergence of LimeWire (a now defunct music torrent site) and the pirating and distribution of Dashboard Confessional's music. Chris Carrabba, frontman of Dashboard Confessional, in an interview with Stryker of *Tuna on Toast*, says the pirated distribution of his music on websites like LimeWire and Napster are the reason he was able to be successful as an artist at all (Stryker).

Influential bands within the Midwest Emo movement include The Promise Ring, originating from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This band stands as one of the foundational pillars of Midwest Emo. Formed in the early 1990s and known as part of the "second wave" of emo, The Promise Ring further contributed to the genre's development with their balance of catchy melodies, introspective lyrics, and a sound that evolves across their discography. Albums like "Nothing Feels Good" and "Very Emergency" showcase their ability to blend emotive storytelling with infectious hooks, solidifying their place as key influencers in the Midwest Emo movement.

Rainer Maria, a seminal band from Madison, Wisconsin, played a pioneering role in shaping the chaotic and experimental side of Midwest Emo. Emerging in the mid 1990s, the band's first decade of existence left an indelible mark. Rainer Maria's influence can be traced through their unconventional song structures, erratic time signatures, and gender ambiguity of both their band name, and male/female dual vocals, courtesy of Caithlin De Marrais and Kyle Fischer. Their album "Look Not Look Again" (1999) is often cited as a pivotal work within the Midwest Emo canon, featuring a sense of intimacy and urgency. Rainer Maria's sonic experimentation, blending elements of indie rock and post-hardcore, expanded the boundaries of Midwest Emo, influencing subsequent generations of musicians. The band's contribution lies not only in their musical innovation but also in their role as trailblazers, helping to shape the evolving landscape of a genre known for its depth of feeling and sincerity (Sanneh).

American Football, hailing from Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, is synonymous with the genre's expansion into more intricate and post-rock-infused territories. Their self-titled debut album, released in 1999, is an iconic representation of Midwest Emo's evolution. Characterized by complex time signatures, layered instrumentation, and introspective lyricism, American Football's influence extends beyond their initial tenure, with their work continuing to inspire subsequent generations of musicians.

Midwest Emo's journey from underground scenes to commercial success is a testament to its lasting influence. While the genre originated in independent and DIY spaces, certain bands, particularly those like The Get Up Kids and Dashboard Confessional, achieved a level of commercial success that brought Midwest Emo to a broader audience (Raymer).

The impact of Midwest Emo reverberates through subsequent generations of musicians, leaving an indelible mark on the alternative music landscape. Many contemporary bands cite Midwest Emo as a crucial influence, adopting its emotive lyricism, intricate instrumentation, and DIY ethos. This influence is evident not only in the indie and emo revival scenes but also in genres that extend beyond traditional boundaries. Furthermore, the DIY ethos inherent in Midwest Emo has influenced not only musicians but also the way music is produced, distributed, and consumed. Independent labels and underground venues, integral to the genre's growth, have become models for artists seeking autonomy and authenticity in an industry that often prioritizes commercial interests (Best Emo).

While Midwest Emo has garnered a dedicated fanbase and critical acclaim, it has not been without its controversies and internal debates. Some purists within the genre have debated the boundaries and authenticity of what constitutes "true" Midwest Emo. Disagreements over the evolution of

the sound, the inclusion of newer bands, and the genre's commercialization have sparked debates among enthusiasts. These discussions often revolve around the balance between staying true to the genre's roots and allowing for artistic progression and experimentation.

Beyond internal debates, Midwest Emo has faced criticism and misconceptions from outside observers. Some critics have dismissed the genre as overly sentimental or lacking in musical complexity, attributing its emotional resonance to a perceived lack of maturity in songwriting. Others have pigeonholed the genre, associating it solely with a particular demographic or era, overlooking its continued evolution and influence on contemporary music.

In essence, the criticisms and debates surrounding Midwest Emo reflect both internal discussions within the genre's community and external perceptions from those outside its sphere. These debates encompass questions about authenticity, evolution, and the genre's reception within the broader musical landscape, underscoring the complexities and nuances inherent in assessing its cultural and artistic significance.

The contemporary landscape of Midwest Emo reflects a dynamic and evolving scene that continues to captivate audiences. While the genre had its heyday in the late 1990s and early 2000s, it has not faded into obscurity. Instead, Midwest Emo persists as a vibrant and influential force within the alternative music scene. Bands and artists associated with the genre have demonstrated resilience, with many embarking on reunions, releasing new material, or evolving their sound while maintaining the core elements that define Midwest Emo.

The current state of Midwest Emo is characterized by a diverse range of artists who draw inspiration from its legacy while infusing their own unique perspectives. This adaptability has allowed the genre to remain relevant, appealing to both longtime fans and a new generation of listeners seeking the emotional depth and authenticity that Midwest Emo offers.

A wave of new and emerging bands has emerged, contributing to the ongoing narrative of Midwest Emo. Bands like Bottom Bracket, Affogato, and Yawning explore the genre's sonic boundaries while staying true to its emotional core. Some bands seamlessly blend Midwest Emo with elements of math rock, post-rock, or shoegaze, pushing the genre into uncharted territory, bringing a fresh perspective and contributing to the genre's evolution. These emerging artists play a vital role in ensuring the continued relevance and vitality of Midwest Emo, showcasing its enduring appeal and adaptability.

Midwest Emo's influence extends well beyond the confines of its own sound, permeating various genres and resonating with a diverse array of musicians. Elements of Midwest Emo can be heard in the music

of contemporary indie, alternative, and even mainstream artists who incorporate its emotional depth, intricate instrumentation, and confessional lyricism.

The contemporary presence of Midwest Emo is marked by its resilience, adaptability, and ongoing influence. The genre's ability to inspire new generations of musicians and evolve while staying true to its roots positions Midwest Emo as a timeless and enduring force within the rich tapestry of alternative music.

In tracing the history and significance of Midwest Emo, we have explored a musical movement that emerged from the heartland of the United States, carving its own niche within the broader spectrum of alternative music. Key locations such as Chicago and Milwaukee became breeding grounds for a distinctive sound characterized by emotive lyricism, intricate instrumentation, and a DIY ethos. Prominent bands like The Promise Ring, Rainer Maria, and American Football played pivotal roles in shaping the genre, contributing to its cultural and musical significance.

The exploration of Midwest Emo's musical characteristics revealed a unique blend of instrumentation, unconventional song structures, and a profound connection to emotions and experiences. The impact on the music industry saw a transition from underground scenes to mainstream recognition, influencing subsequent generations of musicians and fostering connections with diverse genres and subcultures.

As we reflect on the genre's impact, it becomes evident that Midwest Emo is not merely a musical category but a cultural phenomenon that resonates with authenticity, vulnerability, and the nuances of the human condition. Its connection to youth culture, representation of emotions, and influence on contemporary music showcase the genre's profound impact on a generation seeking a genuine expression of their experiences. Midwest Emo serves as a reminder that music is a powerful form of storytelling, and its influence extends far beyond the notes played—it shapes the narratives of lives and communities.

As Midwest Emo continues to evolve, the research possibilities are vast, offering opportunities to unravel new layers of its significance and influence. By continuing to explore the genre's roots, contemporary expressions, and cultural implications, we can further appreciate the enduring legacy of Midwest Emo in the ever-changing landscape of music and youth culture.

In closing, the journey through the history and significance of Midwest Emo is a testament to the genre's lasting impact—a resonance that transcends time and continues to shape the emotional and cultural landscapes of those who embrace its melodies and messages.

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How Does Word Choice Shape Who a Character Is? Let's Take a Glance at Myrlie Evers in Frank X Walker's *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting of Medgar Evers*

Autumn Howard

How do word choices show how a person is represented? Well, the word choices we make show the readers who a persona is and gives them a distinct voice. Frank X Walker shows readers this in his interpretation of Myrlie Evers (the wife of Medgar Evers) in his book *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting of Medgar Evers*. Walker uses word choice to represent Myrlie as a strong/impactful woman capable of anything. Walker's poems of Myrlie Evers show that she is a compelling woman because she calls out people who act like the problems of the Civil Rights movement were only happening then, she shows strength in resisting her anger, and she finds ways in which her husband still lives through her son.

First, Walker uses word choice in the poem "What Kills Me" on page three to show that Myrlie Evers is passionate about fighting for justice. In the poem, the persona of Myrlie Evers calls out the people who act like the problems of the Civil Rights Movement only happened then.

When people talk about the movement
as if it started in '64, it erases every
body who vanished on the way home
from work or school and is still listed
as missing. (3)

This beginning section of the poem shows that Walker wanted Myrlie Evers' persona to be somebody who tries to change the minds of people who thought Black people were only being treated badly during the Civil Rights movement and not before. Notice how Walker writes the word everybody. Instead of using the two words together, saying "everybody," he writes the words separately "every body" signifying that those particular people are dead. This shows that Myrlie Evers' persona does not want the lives lost in the Civil Rights movement to be erased. She wants the lives to be remembered and bring some sort of change in the world that shows the families that they did not die in vain.

Another section of the poem "What Kills Me" on page 3 to look at is the final two lines.

It means he lived and died for nothing.
And that's worse than killing him again. (3)

Toward the end of the poem, we can see that Walker shifts from having Myrlie Evers talk about the lives lost in general to the specific life lost of her husband, Medgar Evers. By having Myrlie Evers talk about Medgar Evers specifically, Walker shows that she's now focusing on him and why people should stand up for what's right and not let her husband's life be forgotten. Doing makes the voice of Myrlie Evers more emotional. When Walker adds a space between the words 'him' and 'again,' it signifies that Myrlie Evers is calling out the injustice that happened to her husband that ended up with Medgar Evers losing his life. Adding this again at the end shows that she does not want the injustices to keep happening, and she does not want Black lives to continue to be lost and forgotten.

According to the book review article titled "August Read Of The Month: *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting of Medgar Evers*" By Frank X Walker, "the poems in Myrlie's voice focus on living with and surviving Medgar" (Aarnes). This explains to the readers what Walker wants Myrlie's voice to sound like, and what the poems in her perspective talk about. The readers see in the poems from Myrlie's perspective that Walker has her voice talk about living and surviving Medgar. We will see this in other examples in this

analysis. Myrlie does have a distinct voice in the book.

Additionally, Walker shows that Myrlie Evers is powerful and inspirational when she speaks to the wives of her husband's assassin in the poem "Sorority Meeting." In this poem, Myrlie talks to Thelma and Willie De La Beckwith as if they are sorority sisters. Walker chooses to have Myrlie call Thelma and Willie De La Beckwith sisters in two parts of this poem.

All I know is that day
made us sisters, somehow.

We are sorority sisters now
with a gut-wrenching country ballad
for a sweetheart song, tired funeral
and courtroom clothes for colors
and secrets we will take to our graves. (45)

This shows that Walker wanted Myrlie to be the kind of character who had a forgiving nature and could talk to the wives of her husband's killer and call them sisters. Not everybody has the strength to do that. In these two sections of the poem, Myrlie tells Thelma and Willie De La Beckwith that when their husband (Byron De La Beckwith) killed her husband (Medgar Evers), it made them sisters somehow. There was a connection between them now because of the murder. The poem shows that Walker chooses to add the words 'courtroom clothes for colors' because Myrlie is showing Thelma and Willie that all three of them spend time in the courtroom. For Myrlie, to see Byron De La Beckwith get justice. For Thelma and Willie De La Beckwith to see if their husband will get convicted.

Walker also chooses to include Myrlie Evers' faith in the poem.
My faith urges me to love you.
My stomach begs me to not. (45)

These two lines show how much of Myrlie's faith's role has on her. Her faith is urging her to forgive and love the wives of her husband's murderer. We can tell as readers that Walker is giving Myrlie's voice a sense of peace when she talks about her faith, and we can tell how much of an influence her faith has on her. We can also know that she had those moments where she does not want to forgive and she just wants to stay angry, especially in the line where she says "my stomach begs me to not."

Walker talks about how important it was to add Myrlie Evers' faith to the poem in an interview where we talked about the poems and Walker's intentions. "It was important to me because it was the truth. It was important to me that it be as authentic as possible. It is historical in nature"

(Walker). This shows us that Walker wanted the persona of Myrlie Evers to be as close to the real person as possible. He wanted to add the part about Myrlie's faith because it is a part of her.

"I hope that audiences or readers, artists respond to 'Sorority Meeting' in a way that makes them also wish that the women in the story had a chance to have a conversation and that it somehow moved their participation in a positive direction toward something like reconciliation" (Walker). This shows us that the women in the story probably did not have a conversation like the one in the Sorority Meeting in real life. This also tells us that it was important for Walker to have a poem where Myrlie was talking to Thelma and Willie De La Beckwith and trying to move in a positive direction where Myrlie can find some peace and find a way to let go of her anger toward Thelma and Willie for being married to a killer.

Walker shows us that Myrlie Evers has strength in the way that she uses time to help her heal and see how her husband, Medgar Evers, is still alive in her son. In the poem "Gift Of Time," Walker starts writing Myrlie's persona with a harmonious tone.

When I saw a son grow into his father's face,
his laugh, his walk

I saw how faith could be restored. (65)

This part of the poem "Gift Of Time" shows us that Myrlie is looking at her son and seeing all how her husband is still alive in her son. When she watches her son and sees little parts of her husband in him, she believes in faith again and sees the positivity in the world again. Talking about how faith is restored to Myrlie tells us that at one point, she lost her faith, and seeing her husband alive in her son made her regain her sense of belief. This shows how important it was for Myrlie to have faith and hope to move on and find that place within herself where she was not angry and could stand up and continue to fight and live for justice in a way that would protect her and her son.

In the poem "Gift Of Time," Walker also uses word choice to give Myrlie the voice of looking at things from the perspective of Byron.

I imagine before all that, little Byron was good.
He was clean. He was innocent. (65)

These two lines show us that Myrlie is starting to imagine Byron as a little boy. She is trying to imagine him before he killed her husband, Medgar Evers. She is starting to see that maybe Byron was not a bad person his

whole life, maybe he was shaped that way through the tragedies in his life. She is starting to realize that at one point in everybody's life, they are innocent until things around them shape them into the people they are today. We can tell that Walker chooses this poem to be the last poem from Myrlie in the book because he wants to give Myrlie a sense of peace and show us that she is at a place in her life where she has justice and where she looks at people and tries to see the positive and not the negative.

According to Jim Minick's interview with Frank X Walker, Walker says, "[Myrlie] talks about [forgiveness] in her autobiography. There's no one road out. It was a combination of things, the most important of which was time. She needed time to heal. The crucial thing was to get to a point where she was no longer talking about Medgar's absence because she'd found a way to recognize his continuing presence, and what made it easier for her was that she still had their son." (Walker) We can see here that Walker got some of his information about Myrlie Evers from her autobiography. We can see the similarities between the persona of the poem and the actual Myrlie Evers from her autobiography. From this, we can tell that Walker wanted to be as true to Myrlie as possible and that he was well-researched.

On the other hand, Myrlie Evers' persona could be seen by others as weak because her anger took over her to the point she had to move to another state. In Jim Minick's interview with Frank X Walker, Walker talks about Myrlie's move to California. "There's not a huge leap from anger to hate if you don't deal with the anger. Eventually, she decided that she could no longer live in Mississippi because her anger was too powerful, so she moved to California, the state where Byron De La Beckwith was born." This tells the readers that Walker acknowledges that Myrlie's anger did overwhelm her, but he also recognizes that it took strength to move and that moving helped her deal with her anger and not let it turn to hate.

In the poem "On Moving To California," Walker shows the readers what Myrlie feels when she moves to California.

Dying can't compare with living
with death and loss grief and anger.

Climbing out from under the heaviness
Of hate is the hardest thing I've ever done

We can tell when we read these lines that Myrlie's voice has a sad tone. Walker uses these lines to show the readers that Myrlie is having trouble coping with the loss of Medgar Evers and that loss fills her with grief and anger. Walker makes the readers see that overcoming her hate was a very difficult thing for Myrlie to do. It was a challenge. She did not just turn off

her anger one night. She had to climb out of her hate like Walker says. She did not, however, fall into her hate and let it consume her.

Thus, while Myrlie Evers' anger over the death of her husband overwhelmed her to the point that she had to move out of Mississippi to California, Walker shows us that she is a strong and capable woman. Her voice in the book *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting of Medgar Evers* reveals to us that she fights for justice, takes the time to heal, and accepts forgiveness into her heart. These three things show us what strength and courage are. What do you think about how Walker portrays Myrlie Evers? How do you feel about the poems from her perspective? How do you feel word choices affect how a character is portrayed?

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The Playlist To Your Next Breakdown

Taryn Markle

“The Song Formerly Known As Intro” - Hot Mulligan

Music has always held an important role in our society, especially sad music. Music has been used in tragedy since the start of theater with the Greeks and Romans, and these melancholic-sounding pieces have survived to this day, used specifically to create catharsis in an audience. Sad songs have become a staple in today’s day and age, becoming even more popular through social media such as TikTok where it is easy for a song to spread like wildfire, and when people hear this music and relate to it, it sticks with them. Specifically, Midwest Emo music finds its footing in the young adult crowd and is gaining popularity quickly, allowing you to “Hedge your bets, get some rest, get these feelings off your chest” (“The Song Formerly Known As Intro” - Hot Mulligan). The rhetoric of sad songs in Midwest Emo music creates a sense of community, shared empathy, and emotional likeness through the use of interpretive music and lyrics that relate to current events and mental health in an effort to encourage people to experience the catharsis that can be found through sad music.

“Honestly?” - American Football

Midwest Emo’s roots can be drawn back to the origins of Emo in the 80s with bands like Rites of Spring and Embrace. Midwest Emo itself became a popular subgenre in the 90s with bands such as Cap’n Jazz and American Football, the latter of which became an instant staple and

one of the most popular Midwest Emo bands of all time after releasing their self-titled album in 1999. Their melancholic riffs and nostalgia-seeped lyrics such as “Honestly I can’t remember all my teenage dreams and the meanings,” (“Honestly?” - American Football) created a base for the way that Midwest Emo music would progress from then on. The “golden age” of Midwest emo emerged in the mid-2010s with the growing popularity of bands like Modern Baseball, Hot Mulligan, Free Throw, The Cardboard Swords, and McCafferty. Each of these bands follow the pattern laid out by the early bands, some leaning into a heavier sound and some leaning less so, but always with relevant lyrics relating to the changing times, nostalgia, mental health, and sadness.

“Under The Weather” - Satisfied

In today’s world, we see a constant emphasis on opening up about mental health and sadness. Things such as seasonal depression, loneliness, societal issues, and the pressure of a world that can be so dark it can be entirely disheartening are examples of why these songs can be so sad and what draws people to this kind of music. The raw and emotive nature of Midwest emo resonates with a generation grappling with a myriad of challenges, from existential concerns to the ever-present weight of societal expectations. Loneliness specifically has become an epidemic in our world with the WHO declaring it a “pressing global health threat” (Johnson 2023). This sense of loneliness has become so dominant in society, especially with the previous pandemic, that it has seeped into the music we write as well, leading to further conversations on depression and loneliness. Depression is so common that suicide has become a regular topic in the writing in Midwest Emo music, reflecting the rising suicide rates in America, with suicide being the 11th most common cause of death in our country (AFSP 2021).

As a mirror to this, we get lyrics like, “Why am I so gloomy? No thinking or stopping as I drive off of the road” (“Under The Weather” - Satisfied). These darker topics are what draw people to Midwest Emo music. It allows people to feel these feelings and feel understood by someone else. “For a moment, I believe them... In a way, I know I am not as alone as I think I am. Music was my refuge during a difficult period of my life. I have always battled with my mental health, but as a teenager, the walls of my bedroom shrank, and hopelessness knocked on my door” (Vasques 2019). This understanding between self and the lyrics of emo music is what encourages us to feel together. It allows those with mental health struggles to feel less alone in the midst of an

epidemic of loneliness, and this is so important to our survival as social beings.

“Drown” - Front Porch Step

With the topics of Midwest Emo music always targeting the current social climate and mental health climate, it is easy for them to connect to an audience through their authenticity and pathos. Songs like “Drown” by Front Porch Step invoke an angry sadness that many can relate to and empathize with. Lyrics such as “I’ve been laying in my bed wishing I had never woken, begging God to rid my head of every word you’ve ever spoken,” push the audience to experience the same emotions that the writer does through the universal experience of heartbreak and wanting to forget the pain. This rawness is what makes Midwest Emo so appealing, the willingness to be vulnerable and connect to an audience by laying out their heart in the music. Being so authentic with an audience creates a shared sense of empathy and connection to the music, but also shares that same connection with other listeners. Though this same raw appeal can be found in other genres of music, Midwest Emo specifically holds this appeal due to the nature of the music itself and its production, recording in basements or backyards, writing about the darkest times in our lives, and creating songs that we can relate to in the deepest part of our core. In my personal experience, listening to my Midwest Emo playlist is best enjoyed in the company of another, where we can both share in the sadness and feel the emotions together. In the experience of my friend, Ryan Spragen, it is best enjoyed by yourself-- “it’s almost like a guilty pleasure” he said, “but it makes you feel... a certain type of way based on how you perceive the lyrics.” With interpretive lyrics and music that encourages you to feel all of the emotions you can, it is up to the listener to decide what they get out of it, but it is generally agreed upon that it creates a sense of catharsis.

*“*Equips Sunglasses*” - Hot Mulligan*

Outside of mental health, current-day events are a big topic in Midwest Emo music as well, relating to the current political climate, economic status, the general angst of the Midwest, the status of activism, and even cancel culture, as is mentioned in the song “*Equips Sunglasses*” by Hot Mulligan. “Head on a pike, plain and vacant tonight as you cry through your phone, let the masses support all the hate that you spit.” These lyrics specifically commentate on the rise of cancel culture online, people spearheading hatred on the internet and throwing it around like it’s nothing because they can hide behind a screen. More than that, this song comments on the hate that is spread

not just in cancel culture, but in the mainstream media such as news outlets and political debates. Cancel culture has become a common problem in today's world. Nicole Dudenhoefer from *The Magazine* of the University of Central Florida references it as "mob mentality" and "punishment without a chance for redemption" (2020). Apart from cancel culture, politics seep their way into the Midwest Emo music of today as many of the artists consider themselves liberal but grew up in conservative and Red States.

"BCKYRD" - Hot Mulligan

This Midwest angst is what makes the music so powerful. It explores the problems of the everyday Midwest resident and amplifies the struggles that many of us go through. The relatability of these songs creates a shared sense of community. Communities often go through the same struggles, the same hardships, the same emotions, and Midwest Emo aims to take those struggles and create a space where people can feel safe expressing their frustrations. This, in turn, makes it so that people can feel connected to each other. In my own experience, going to concerts to see bands such as Hot Mulligan creates an even stronger sense of community and shared feelings. The heightened energy of a concert mixed with the emotional lyrics created an experience like no other. During their song "BCKYRD," people swayed together, cried together, laughed together, and sang together. The song has had such an impact on our lives and has gotten us through so many things. When Nathan Sanville, the lead singer of Hot Mulligan, sang the opening lines, "Hang in the backyard where the grass and spiderwebs grow up next to us. Say what's your interests, tell me how you plan to give up on all of them," the crowd couldn't help but feel the same emotions that the band did writing the song. With tears streaming down my cheeks, I turned to the crowd around me and felt understood, felt at home, felt safe, like I had always known these people, like we had spent cold fall nights discussing the tragedies we'd experienced and trusted each other like no one else.

This song is a great example of the contemporary trend of giving up on your dreams. With the current social and economic climate, many people, including myself and several of my friends, worry that we will never own a home, have a retirement plan, have a stable career that pays enough to not live in poverty, or even collect social security when the time comes. "Younger generations are skeptical about their chances of receiving Social Security: About 40% of millennials and 45% of Gen Z members said they don't think they'll collect any Social Security benefits, according to a recent Nationwide survey, and more than three-

quarters of both groups said they expect to work into retirement because Social Security “will not pay enough,” the survey found” (Malito 2023). These concerns have beaten the generation of young adults down to the point that many of them want to give up on their dreams of being a homeowner or having a stable career completely.

“Fine, Great” - Modern Baseball

In a society that so often works against us, we need this trust in each other. A shared sense of empathy for those around you is necessary, especially with mental health concerns on the rise and politics bogging everyone down. Having a shared emotional experience and a commonality in how we suffer with the music creates empathy between people. If more people listened closely to the lyrics in Midwest Emo sad songs, they would realize how common these struggles are and come to an understanding of the hardships of the people around them. Though many of these songs target the American Midwest, they are universal in nature; The topics in them are able to be applied to people all across the world, hence why these bands go on world tours. Even the lyrics of the songs themselves encourage empathy for those around you, with the chorus of “Fine, Great” by Modern Baseball saying, “I hate having to think about my future when all I wanna do is worry about everyone but me.” The transparency in these lyrics helps readers with similar experiences to relate but also draws in those without the common experience, almost forcing them to be empathetic.

In an article published in Psychology Today about how music creates empathy, writer Shahram Heshmat says, “Empathy is built through processes like those involved in music playing, including sharing feelings, imitation, and collaborating (Haung 2020). When people engage in musical activities, such as listening and dancing, they often connect to their emotions, as well as to the feelings of others” (2023). We need this empathy because, without it, we turn on each other, deceive each other, and completely disregard how the people around us may feel. It is important to be empathetic and remember that everyone has their own struggles, a reminder that Midwest Emo music never fails to give.

In addition to this empathy sharing, another commonality that this music gives us is a common sense of fear of the uncertain future and what it may hold for us. In an article from The Independent, Rebecca Speare-Cole states, “Research from The Prince’s Trust charity has revealed that 49% of people aged 16 to 25 feel anxious about their future daily while 59% agree it is “frightening” for their generation” (2022). The charity calls on the Government and other organizations to help give young people a better outlook on their future, but it is hard to

have a happy outlook on our future when we are staring down the barrel of a metaphorical shotgun loaded with political tensions and global anxiety. This is why this generation needs empathy more than ever because we are all uncertain of the messy future.

“If It Makes You Happy” - Michael Cera Palin

“If it makes you happy, then why the hell are you so sad?” (“If It Makes You Happy” - Michael Cera Palin). Sad songs create catharsis, even though they can amplify the sad feelings. They typically leave us feeling better after listening to them. Apart from Midwest Emo, this same catharsis can be found in other sad songs, ones carrying similar messages to those found in Midwest Emo’s sad songs. “I don’t want to face you with a heavy head, I’ve taken my body to the river bed” (“Thirteen Times the Strength” - A Silent Film). These lyrics from Indie band A Silent Film reference mental health struggles, and the lyrics “Have you ever felt the last spark of innocence die before your very eyes and fade out of your life?” from the song “Eastwick” by Real Friends, a Pop Punk band. This song references the nostalgia we see so much in Midwest Emo music, the longing for that innocence that we had at the start and the loss of it. Then there are songs like “Hurt For Me” by SYML, “I lie awake and I count the days and I wait beside the door,” covering heartbreak that is also commonly found in Midwest Emo songs. Even Metal bands like As Animals Eat My Insides have sad songs, such as “Avalanche.” The lyrics, “I’m not perfect, I don’t think I can... I’m not worth it don’t take this chance,” provide another good example of the way that mental health impacts our music. Finally, Nicole Dollanganger uses the somber sound of Bedroom Pop and Sadcore music with dark lyrics relating to trauma to create an ambient sound that makes it hard not to empathize--“He’d hollowed out their bodies so they’d feel just empty as him... You ruin everything you touch and destroy anyone you love, you’re all over me” (“Dog Teeth”). Though all of these songs have different messages, different sounds, and different ways of executing their points, they all create the same sense of community and empathy that we see in Midwest Emo songs.

“Matter” - Kayak Jones

The authenticity of Midwest Emo music can be found with the small bands, the intimate settings of their concerts, and the way that the bands interact with the fans. Many of these bands are very connected to their fan base, getting involved in small projects and joining in on their community to show that they are just as much part of the community as they are the facilitators of the space and creators of the culture.

Small bands like Kayak Jones typically played at house venues and small local venues, creating an intimate feeling to their concerts, and they often hung out with the fans during and after the shows. This, in turn, made them feel to the audience more genuine and like regular people rather than idols. “Today’s musicians are earthbound, under pressure to build connections with listeners... today musicians relentlessly seek relationships with audiences,” says Nancy Byam in her book *Playing to the Crowd: Musicians, Audiences, and the Intimate Work of Connection* (3). This need to be connected to an audience is only amplified by the vulnerable music of Midwest Emo, causing the bands to seek out the connection with their audience that the crowd often feels between themselves. This connection is important because this genre of music is so personal that not having a sort of personal connection to these bands can make the audience feel like they don’t matter, even if the band says they do. “You keep saying that I matter but it doesn’t make me feel anything” (“Matter” - Kayak Jones). Through these intimate settings, songs, and connections, we are able to feel empathy for each other and the bands as well, recognizing them as real people with real struggles and real lives, something that can be easy to forget when we idolize them. They are just as much in need of care and compassion as we all are.

“Skeleton Bones” - McCafferty

With the current state of the world, mental health on the decline and often at the forefront of our tough conversations, and nostalgia for the better times when we were younger so often sought after, it is hard to deny the appeal of Midwest Emo sad songs that cover all of these bases. It is important to feel empathy, not only for yourself but for those around you, and Midwest Emo music does exactly that, drawing on the feelings of loneliness, depression, and longing for connection. It then provides us with a catharsis after we hear those songs, allowing us to let some of those emotions out, and in turn, helping us feel a sense of community with the other listeners who so seek that connection. Midwest Emo is more than a genre of music, it is a way to feel seen, a way to feel linked to other like-minded and like-experienced individuals, and a way to express yourself when you feel at your lowest. Midwest Emo is music for the soul, the community, and the world.

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The Nature of Humanity

Hunter Meister

The more people distance themselves from nature and differentiate themselves from animals, the more people lose empathy for nature, leading to not only animal and environmental suffering, but eventually also human suffering. People have harmed animals and nature in general. These harms have occurred in the name of convenience, sport, development, innovation, science, people just being horrible such as in instances of animal abuse, and much more. As time has progressed, respect for nature and animals' lives has decreased.

Native Americans had profound respect for the animals that they hunted and would thank them for their lives. They also held the belief that land could not be owned and that it was for the use of everyone. Ancient Egyptians worshiped cats, and in India, cows are seen by most as sacred beings never to be harmed. In many cultures, including the overall culture of the United States this respect for animals has been all but completely wiped out. We allow trophy hunting, solely for the thrill of killing a large buck and keeping its corpse as a "trophy." There are whole farms designated to trophy hunting. Deer are bred specifically to have prize-winning antlers at these places, and they are so used to people that they have no fear of the hunters who are there with the sole intent to kill them. These deer have no chance of survival. We allow cows, chickens, and pigs to live the majority of their lives in cramped indoor spaces at factory farms such as Tyson. And we treat liminal animals such as pigeons like nuisances even though we are at fault for their presence

in urban areas and their dependence on humans. We destroy forests and pollute waterways, and the air in an abundance of ways every day. We pump chemicals and pollutants into the air and water while manufacturing goods, driving, and much more, and deforestation occurs in the name of building more homes and expanding towns and cities.

People such as Val Plumwood, Aldo Leopold, and Henry David Thoreau believe and argue that humanity is just as much a part of nature as any other living, wild creature. They are on the outskirts in their opinions of humanity's place in the natural world, as for the most part people see themselves as other than nature, even superior to it. Their beliefs are the most accurate, as people are a part of nature and even years of differentiating ourselves from it cannot change that fact. We all evolved just the same. Many people don't see themselves as belonging to the natural world, preferring to spend the vast majority of their time indoors. There is nothing wrong with spending time indoors and preferring to avoid things that occur outdoors such as sunburn, bug bites, boiling hot weather, miserably wintry weather, and rain; however, completely separating yourself from nature is not ideal. Nor is seeing oneself as other than or superior to nature.

It makes complete sense as to why people see themselves as superior to the life that exists in what we perceive to be the natural world. We are raised in societies that contribute to this feeling of superiority. We spend the vast majority of our time indoors; some are even taught to fear the outdoors or live in places where nature is inaccessible to them. We are also taught that we are superior to non-humans everywhere from school to church. We are taught that we are superior because we are the only species with written language, we are the only species with the reasoning skills to solve complex problems, we are also the only species with introspection. However, corvids have been observed using tools and reasoning skills to solve complex problems. Evidence of introspection has been seen in primates, such as chimps and gorillas, and prairie dogs have a fairly complex language that consists of many different sounds (Moeller). We aren't even the only species with agriculture. Leaf cutter ants cultivate a fungus that they feed on and gophers have been known to excavate and harvest roots (Quaglia). We are the only species with written language though, and we are the only species who are capable of creating energy sources such as electricity, cooking food, and creating complex tools and electronics. Other than that, though, there aren't a ton of differences. On top of that, corvids such as crows are in their stone age, as they've been observed using tools for an abundance of things, so who knows where we'll be in terms of superior technology in

a millennium. They might surpass us. It's unlikely, but one may never know. Only the future will tell.

In "Being Prey," Val Plumwood chronicles her experience of being brutally attacked by a crocodile in Kakadu's wetlands. She states that before the attack she was barely even wary of, she treated the crocodile as an object of interest. She was close to it, but unafraid of its presence and proximity. Then, it began nearing her and it hit itself against her canoe, repeatedly trying to knock her out and she for the first time, realized that she was prey. She describes her experience, her attack, and the aftermath of her attack in great detail. She was alone and gravely injured in an unfamiliar place, filled with more creatures who would be just as eager to attack her as that crocodile was (Gruen 32-33).

Humans are just as much a part of the food chain as any other animal, of course, we are at the very top of said food chain. However, Val Plumwood's story is proof that we are not always at the top of the food chain. There are times at which we are hunted, no differently than a gazelle or deer would be hunted by a lion, coyote, or even a crocodile. If we are in their habitat and unprotected, heck, even if we do have weapons and are protected, we can still be preyed upon by predatory animals. If we as humans become more mindful of our occasional role in the food chain as prey rather than predators who sit at the very top of said chain, we will become more mindful of the animals that we use for our benefit. We will be more mindful of the lives and treatment of animals that we traditionally eat. We would be more considerate of our prey, even though these "prey" animals are raised by humans with the sole intention of killing them, giving them absolutely no chance for survival beyond the age at which they are usually killed for meat. For cows, this age is usually two to three years old, unless it is veal, in which case the animal is butchered as a calf aged sixteen to eighteen weeks. For chickens, it is six to twelve weeks old, and for pigs, it is four to seven months. For comparison, cows and pigs can live up to twenty years, and chickens can live up to ten years. These animals are all killed at an early age for their species. It would be considered a tragedy if a human were to die at a similar stage in life. It would be extra tragic if a human were to be brutally killed and eaten at that age, especially after spending their entire life in what many would consider deplorable conditions. Conditions in which clean, open, outdoor spaces are rarely if ever offered to them (Anomaly). Conditions that deny them natural light and fresh air.

We as humans are killing animals incredibly early in their lives without giving them any chance to escape or live longer for convenience and convenience only. There are plenty of farms, both big and small,

that allow animals pasture time and allow them to live longer lives. Some of these farms are large and produce products for stores, while others are just small-town farmers who farm for themselves and their communities. They may sell directly from their farm, their own stores, at farmer's markets, or local grocers. Even though these ethical farms exist, they do not discount the fact that cause immense harm to animals and deny them rights as basic as natural light and fresh air. At least humans as prey still have the chance to escape. With all of this in mind, we as humans should at the very least offer the animals that we farm long, happy lives in clean, open, outdoor environments.

Remembering our place in the food chain should also lead us to take our current hunting practices into consideration. There are plenty of ethical hunters who follow all of the laws, including but not limited to taking hunter and gun safety classes, getting hunting licenses, only hunting animals that are in season, and hunting for food and population control rather than solely selfish reasons. However, there is also an abundance of so-called hunters who do not hunt ethically. Some hunters, or rather poachers will kill more animals than they are legally allowed to in a season, for example in many states, Kentucky included, hunters are only legally allowed to kill one buck, or "deer with visible antlers" per season (Hunting Guide). Some people staunchly hate this law and will kill multiple bucks, cut off their antlers as a trophy, and then dump their bodies, leaving them to rot and be scavenged. This is just one small example of what poachers will do. There are also poachers who kill animals that are out of season or animals that they are unlicensed for. They will also poach on protected land, and on property on which they are trespassing. Oftentimes they will go as far as poaching animals that are labeled as vulnerable, and even endangered and critically endangered animals. Poachers do these things for purely selfish reasons, such as wanting a "trophy buck," or having lifelong dreams of killing some endangered species (Hall). Some just don't want to pay the price for a hunting license. The cost of one differs based on location and the species that is being hunted, but as an example, a Kentucky deer hunting permit for an adult is only twenty-seven dollars for a year. People can even get permits that last for only a few days and cost even less, usually seven dollars for a week (License and Permit Fees). These permits are very reasonably priced to the point that nobody should be poaching because they don't have a license. It is a ridiculous excuse, and the money goes towards wildlife conservation. This paired with the usual other reasons for poaching means that there is absolutely no excuse for it.

If people keep the usual reasons for poaching in mind, while also finding ways to relate more to animals and see ourselves as part of the food chain, it will lead to less poaching. If poachers are able to see themselves in the creatures that they kill, some of them will feel more empathy for these animals and be less likely to dump their bodies and they will care more for the survival of endangered creatures. On top of this, people who don't poach, both hunters and nonhunters alike will call for harsher penalties for poachers. Most ethical hunters already loathe poaching, but that paired with more relatability to animals, and more awareness of humanity's place as prey could be the perfect storm to primarily eradicate poaching.

Poaching is not the only unethical hunting in existence. Trophy hunting is oftentimes seen as just as unethical. It is also usually substantially more sensationalized than poaching, a very well-known example being Cecil the Lion. Cecil was a well-known, thirteen-year-old black mane lion living in Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe. Cecil had been tagged and was being observed by researchers at Oxford's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit. All this to say, that he was a popular lion. In 2015 Cecil was shot and killed outside of the park that he was known to frequent by a United States dentist and hunter named Walter Palmer. Walter Palmer paid fifty-four thousand dollars to bow hunt for a lion on a guided hunt. When Walter shot Cecil, he did not deliver a fatal blow, which led to Cecil wandering injured for eleven hours while Walter and his team tracked him down in order to deliver the final blow. This sparked a worldwide discussion and debate about trophy hunting and its questionable ethics. People argued that the hunting fees led to conservation efforts, while others brought up that only 20,000 black mane lions live in the wild. Cecil's death did lead to changes, such as airlines banning trophies, and some countries outlawing the transportation of trophy animals across their borders (Hall).

This is just one example of trophy hunting, one of many. There are also farms that raise animals, lions included, specifically to be hunted for copious amounts of money, tens of thousands of dollars. Some of these "farms" are much closer to home than one would expect. The ones that people from the United States would be most familiar with usually contain deer, specifically bucks with unnaturally massive antlers. The deer on these farms are also usually not at all wary of the people who are there to kill them. There is evidence that this industry of captive whitetail deer farms threatens the wild population of whitetail deer. Things such as sickness spreading from captive to wild deer are a great concern (Adams). These farms are definitely fairer than what traditional

farm animals are put through, but if hunters are going to kill these deer for trophy purposes, they should at the very least work for it, and actually have a challenge waiting for them. Otherwise, they can't even say that it was hunting for sport. What they're doing is not a sport. They're walking into an easy kill that will give them bragging rights. Not only is it unethical, but it's also cheating. This is an opinion that is common among hunters, many of whom are against these farms. Many believe that these farms "undermine the public's perception of hunting (Adams). Once again if the hunters that frequent these farms keep in mind that they can also be prey and put themselves into the shoes of these deer, they would likely have more empathy towards them and their situation. These are practically tame and they trust the people who are there to kill them. Empathy would likely compel these hunters to realize that their hunting practices are not ethical and that these farms need to change their ways in order to be more ethical or just shut down altogether (Adams).

In Henry David Thoreau's "Walking," Thoreau chronicles how he connects with nature through his exceptionally long, sometimes four-plus hour walks through the forest. On these walks, he observes all that he can. He studies the plants and animals, he pays attention to each stone, insect, log, and leaf. He discusses how he wishes for nothing more than to live away from society, and to have no cities or towns near him. He wants to spend most of his time free and outdoors. He gives credit to those that work inside for not having all committed suicide long ago (Thoreau 208). He believes that people should be a part of nature rather than a member of society. He then goes on to say that "life consists with wildness. The most alive is the wildest" (Thoreau 226), and he famously says, "all good things are wild and free" (Thoreau 234). Thoreau makes many points equating goodness to wildness throughout his essay. He tells people how he connects with nature, how he reminds himself that he is a part of nature, and he pushes others to do the same. He even argues against the way that society functions, saying "Hope and the future for me are not in lawns and cultivated fields, not in towns and cities, but in the impervious and quaking swamps" (Thoreau 226-227). He then discusses how people are attracted to wildness in everything from literature to music as a sort of proof that wildness equates to goodness, meaning that people need to connect with nature and realize that we are no different from it. He mentions his love of creatures that embrace their "native rights" and fight against those who would tame them.

Thoreau has some wonderful points about the beauty of the wild, humanity's attraction to wildness, and the wildness that dwells within people. He is not wrong when he says that people are drawn to wild

things. Many people are inherently and inextricably drawn to things like camping, hiking, and rock climbing. There is ample evidence that people love spending time in isolated, natural areas for an abundance of reasons. There are multimillion-dollar businesses dedicated to creating products for people who participate in these activities. People are so dedicated to these activities that they sometimes risk their lives for them. People die climbing mountains or when they decide to hike the Appalachian Trail, many parts of which are isolated and without supplies and shelter. When people go on hikes like this they are on their own. Not only are people drawn to the wilderness and wildness in real life, but many folks are also drawn to wildness in media, such as fantasy films and books that take place in wondrous, fantastical natural areas. Stories that contain giant mountains, huge untouched forests, and wonderful, untamed creatures. Fantasy media has been and remains popular for a reason.

This also reigns true for creative nonfiction, such as the 1996 book *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer, which was turned into a film in 2007. Poetry is another prominent genre in which people are drawn to the wild. Nature imagery is and has been incredibly prominent in an abundance of poetry, both famous and amateur. This, as Thoreau mentions, is even seen in ancient works such as *The Illiad* and *The Odyssey* by the famous, blind poet Homer. These are some of the most well-known works on Earth. There was a whole era of poets and poetry that orbited around nature imagery.

The Romantic period of poetry took place from about 1798 to 1837 and produced famous poets such as Robert Burns, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Blake, Percy Bysshe Shelly, Edgar Allan Poe, and many more (Allegretti). This era was defined by poems about the natural world. Romantics celebrated nature and “tried to heal the sorrows of human beings by writing their verses about nature,” and they believe that “nature is a source of revelation” (Ibrahim). Many of these poems are still well-known and read in schools today. Some more well-known poems include Edgar Alan Poe’s “Anabel Lee,” which portrays the wild. It includes powerful, nature-related lines such as “That the wind came out of the cloud by night,-Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee” (Poe, lines 25-26). Another famous Romantic poem is John Keats’ “Ode to a Nightingale,” which is quite literally an ode to a nightingale and how the poem’s speaker, who is old and sick, wishes he could live the life of one as a carefree, beautiful creature and fly away from his troubles. It contains lines such as “In some melodious plot - Of beechen green -Singest of summer in full-throated ease” (Keats, lines 8-10). It tells the story of both the admiration of and wanting to run away and become

a part of nature. This era of poetry further perpetuates the idea that people are, and always have been drawn to the wild.

On top of being drawn to nature in literature, tons of people are also drawn to living wild animals. They take interest in them and see beauty in them. This is all likely because we know, deep down, that we are just as much a part of nature as the deer, wolves, and bears that we marvel at, that we spend hours trying to get the perfect photo of, that we hunt, or that we admire from afar. They dedicate their lives to the study, observation, and protection of these animals. Some people simply cannot stay away from them. They genuinely love and are fascinated by these creatures.

If we can learn from Thoreau and the Romantics and remind ourselves of the beauty of nature, taking time to observe, respect, admire, and take in the absolute beauty of it, then we will see that we are a part of nature, we belong in it. It will lead to us spending more time in nature and finding ways to relate to every creature in the forest, from the ants on the ground to the hawks soaring far above our heads. We will see ourselves in both animals of prey and predators. We will even see ourselves in the plants. This greater respect and relatability will lead to more empathy for the animals that we use for our own benefit. They are just as alive as we are, and if we are going to take their lives we should remind ourselves that we are not that different from them and provide them respect and dignity before, during, and after their lives are taken for humanity's benefit.

Plumwood, Thoreau, and the Romantics were not the only ones who urged people to respect or see themselves in nature. Aldo Leopold does the same. In fact, he encourages a land ethic. His stance is that we should extend our ethics to the land surrounding us. We should see ourselves as a part of the natural community rather than just a part of our immediate community of the people around us. He compares ethics to animal instincts and says that "Ethics are possibly any kind of community instinct in the making" (Gruen 20). Leopold argues that we should include the land in our ethics and see it as our community by bringing up how people sing praises for the land. He claims that including the land in our ethics would not "prevent the alteration, management, and use of these resources, but it does affirm their right to continued existence, and at least in spots, continued existence in their natural state" (Gruen 21). Leopold brings up that in humanity "the conqueror role is self-defeating" and that "conquests eventually defeat themselves" (Gruen 21).

Leopold makes some wonderful points in this, and his idea should be entertained. Humans entering or creating a land ethic would lead

to more respect and care for nature. We would consider it more when making decisions that may affect the environment and the creatures living in said environment. This ethic would also ensure the safety and preservation of at-risk species, leading to more people caring about and protecting their environments. It would also lead to humans seeing nature as a part of our community, therefore seeing themselves as a part of nature, causing people to relate more to animals, which will lead to more empathy toward and less suffering for the animals that people so often disregard.

Much of humanity is severely lacking in empathy towards nature. We ignore and disregard the suffering that we cause. This suffering comes from environmental destruction, such as drilling for oil, deforestation, and pollution. It also comes from unethical farming practices, unethical hunting practices, and much more. People very often seem to forget that we are causing immense harm to the natural world every day. It seems that many people seem to think that it doesn't affect them, therefore they don't have to care about it. We are able to ignore the suffering in the natural world that is being caused by humanity because we don't see ourselves as having had any part in creating that suffering, and we see ourselves as more important than and superior to the creatures that are being impacted by human activities. People simply do not realize what is happening in factory farms, nor do they realize the extent to which environmental and ecological harm is occurring all over the world. They are simply uneducated on the topic.

If humanity is able to develop a land ethic and see ourselves as a part of nature and realize that we are not always, nor have we ever been at the top of the food chain, we will begin to care more about the suffering that we are causing. We will put ourselves in the shoes of the creatures that we are causing to suffer, and in doing so, will find ways to lessen that suffering. The empathy that we develop for these creatures will lessen crimes such as poaching and will give farmed animals better lives. There will of course still be people who still do not care about things that aren't directly affecting them. People will still poach, and some may even be against more ethical farming and hunting practices. However, none of that negates the idea that many people will change their ways, and push others to do the same. Seeing ourselves as a part of nature will do wonders for the rest of nature. It will create change. Leopold, Thoreau, Pulmwood, and the Romantic poets all knew what they were doing when they wrote about nature. We must treat nature and the land as a part of our community, and we must respect it and see its beauty. It is for the betterment of us all.

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White Power, Native Pain

Chloe Mullins

That hand is not the color of yours, but if I prick it, the blood will flow, and I shall feel pain. The blood is of the same color as yours. God made me, and I am a Man.” This quote is by Standing Bear, who was the leader of a small Indigenous group called the Poncha tribe. Unfortunately, this was one of the groups that was killed as a result of the Indian Removal Act, created by Andrew Jackson in the early 1830’s. The act sparked a large genocide for Indigenous people, quickly killing and “civilizing” a majority of Native Americans to make room for whites. Throughout history, white people have constantly looked down on minorities groups and Indigenous people are no exception. White people have repelled at the thought of other cultures and ethnicities in their presence, thus kicking them out of America, punishing them for having different views on life and religion. The main three authors and historical documents that prove this argument are Andrew Jackson’s “On Indian Removal: The President’s Message to Congress,” John Ross’s “Letter to Andrew Jackson,” and Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “Letter to Martin Van Buren, Pres. of the U.S.”

Andrew Jackson was the seventh President that ruled America. However, his motive regarding power was only beneficial to white people. In 1830, Andrew Jackson signed away the respect of many Native Americans, sending these “savages” to the west of the United States to help the economy, popularity, and population of whites grow.

In the President's message to congress regarding the Indian Removal Act, Jackson states:

It will separate the Indians from immediate contact with settlements of whites; free them from the power of the States; enable them to pursue happiness in their own way and under their own rude institutions; will retard the progress of decay, which is lessening their numbers, and perhaps cause them gradually, under their protection of the Government and through the influence of good counsels, to cast off their savage habits and become an interesting, civilized, and Christian community. (Jackson 2423)

Andrew Jackson only cares about the power that white people carry by separating the Indians from American life, pushing Christianity on these poor individuals, and attempting to make them "civilized" through the President's eyes. Jackson attempts to make himself seem like a great guy and believes this to be an "opportunity" to the Native Americans.

How many thousands of our own people would gladly embrace the opportunity of removing to the West on such conditions!" [...] "And is it supposed that the wandering savage has a stronger attachment to his home than the settled, civilized Christian? Is it more afflicting to him to leave the graves of his fathers than it is to our brothers and children? Rightly considered, the policy of the General Government toward the red man is not only liberal, but generous. He is unwilling to submit to the laws of the States and mingle with their population. To save him from this alternative, or perhaps utter annihilation, the General Government kindly offers him a new home, and proposes to pay the whole expense of his removal and settlement. (Jackson 2424)

This clearly exemplifies that Jackson believes that the American Government is doing a favor to the Indigenous people. There are certain words that support Jackson wanting praise from the group such as "would gladly embrace," "to save him," and "kindly offers." But instead, America is ripping these people from their homes, their culture, and everything they knew as comfort. While it may seem like a "norm" in American society, it is clearly an injustice. Americans cannot grasp that others have different outlooks on the world, which causes them to assimilate Indigenous peoples to follow the Caucasian's rules.

"We cannot, and dare not lose sight of our political rights, which have been recognized and established by the laws and treaties of the United States—for it is on them solely that our security and protection hang" (Ross 2433). John Ross was the Chief of the Cherokee people, whose tribe was dramatically affected by the Trail of Tears and completely wiped out a massive majority of their community. While Ross begged and pleaded for Andrew Jackson to be unbothered, it did

not work. Ross continues “We have already assured you, with the utmost sincerity & truth that the great body of our people have refused and will never voluntarily consent to remove west of the Mississippi” (Ross 2432). Throughout the letter, Ross clearly states that his people do not want to leave because this is their home, and the Government has zero right to take this away from them. He even gave examples of times where the U.S and Natives were comrades in the war. However, due to the color of the Indian’s skin, it automatically sets them up for failure in the eyes of America. It is wrenching and upsetting to see the heartbreak through a Native American’s eyes, only wanting peace but receiving hate, disgust, and demand for their land.

“Almost the entire Cherokee Nation stands up and says, ‘This is not our act. Behold us. Here we are. Do not mistake that handful of deserters for us;’ and the American President and the Cabinet, the Senate and the House of Representatives, neither hear these men nor see them” (Emerson 2441). Ralph Waldo Emerson was known for his writing and gave a letter to Martin Van Buren, stating that this is a completely wrong action for the United States to attack and ruin the Indigenous people’s lives. Throughout the letter, Emerson presents to the audience that there is an extreme lack of justice for the American Indians. There is an absence of understanding and uncertainty from the white race, which causes fear in American society. Therefore, the fact that white people have more power, causes the Native Americans to suffer. One quote provides evidence of this extreme privilege, “In common with the great body of the American people, we have witnessed with sympathy the painful labors of these red men to redeem their own race from the doom of eternal inferiority, and to borrow and domesticate in the tribe the arts and customs of the Caucasian race” (Emerson 2441). Ralph Waldo Emerson is explaining that no matter how hard the Indigenous people try to save themselves, they will always struggle under the watch of Andrew Jackson and the public. The United States of America wants to make them suffer, become vulnerable, and then obey whatever the dominant race requests of them.

The history of Native Americans is a heartbreaking to learn about. While tribal peoples provided compassion and understanding based on their beliefs, it simply wasn’t enough for a white world. The Trail of Tears relocated 60,000 people and killed 16,500 from hunger, dehydration, and disease. While individuals such as Ross and Emerson tried to warn Andrew Jackson of the aftermath, Jackson proceeded with his efforts to wield power over the Indigenous populations in the United States, and we are still living with the consequences today.

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Matters of the Heart

Angelica Poe

Did you know that, on average, there were 31,238 heart transplants in 2021. People who receive this organ transplant range from those who are hospitalized to those still performing daily functions while waiting for their new heart. The people who are lucky enough to receive a heart are not out of the woods even when they leave the ICU after the transplant. There is a lot that goes into the aftercare and the never-ending appointments after leaving the hospital. So many people who are affected by a loved one getting a heart transplant have questions about the ins and outs of this life-saving procedure. How is it decided? What is the expected life of a transplanted heart? What happens after the surgery? All these questions and more will be answered within this brief informative essay.

What is the first step? When getting the news that you will need a heart transplant, the hospital that has given the diagnosis will then do extensive tests, or if they are not equipped to provide you with the best care, they will refer you to another hospital that can help you. They do this to make sure you are eligible for a new organ. They will look at your BMI, if you have hypertension, high cholesterol, diabetes, if you are a smoker, and they even go as far to make sure that mentally you can handle it. They will have a social worker come in and give you a cognitive test and talk about if you have a history of depression or anxiety. They will also test the heart itself to make sure a transplant is the best option. For example, maybe a pacemaker is a better option to

save someone from undergoing a very invasive surgery when a transplant really isn't warranted.

After getting tested and placed on the wait list, you will then have an appointment with the hospital every other month. It can also be monthly. In these appointments, your doctor will order blood work and listen to your heart and see how you are feeling. The main reason for these appointments is to gauge your heart failure, and if it is too bad, you will then get hospitalized while waiting for your turn to receive a transplant.

Who decides when someone gets a transplanted organ? Well, there is a national scale that gives a person a number. This number corresponds to how a person is feeling, if they are in the hospital, as well as how many organs need transplanted. There are several different levels when it comes to receiving a heart transplant. These levels are as follows:

“Status 1: Critically ill and on mechanical support. Status 2: In the hospital on mechanical support or with several ventricular arrhythmias. Status 3: In the hospital and having complications with a ventricular assist device. Status 4: Stable with a VAD or a serious heart condition, such as congenital heart disease or hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. Status 5: In need of a dual heart transplant (heart-lung, heart-liver, heart-kidney) and do not meet the criteria for status levels 1 o 4. Status 6: Stable without need for mechanical support or IV medications. Status 7: Inactive.” (Temple Health)

As you can see, each level is organized by how desperately the person needs the transplant.

Let's talk about other factors that can determine if someone is eligible for a heart transplant. Your blood type plays a fairly big role in this, especially if it is one of the rare blood types such as O negative. Another factor is your body build. Medical personnel do try to match patients up with someone who is built similarly. A really important factor relates to antibodies. This is because you do not want a heart that your body sees as a threat. This most often happens in multiple heart transplant patients because they already have antibodies built up from their previous heart(s), so when getting retransplanted, doctors will try and get a heart that the body will not reject. The last thing the doctors want to happen is for your body to reject the new organ, so they will put you on immunosuppressants. These medications help suppress your immune system so your body doesn't attack the new organ. Like all medications they do have their drawbacks. Taking these medications can

make you more susceptible to getting sick and getting infections. You will also need to pay attention to the type of vaccines and medications you take.

There are many medications that are not suitable for heart transplant patients. If you have any questions about them, I suggest reaching out to your transplant coordinator. You also need to pay attention to what you are eating. Make sure to not eat anything with grapefruit in it, or other fruits in the same classification as grapefruit. This is because grapefruit can mess with the absorption of one of your immune suppressants, called Tacrolimus. Smoking weed can also cause a spike in Tacrolimus levels, so it is usually suggested that you do use marijuana, especially if you and your provided are working on stabilizing your levels. You will also need to monitor your blood sugar levels; this is because of the high dose of steroids you get put on. They will give you insulin and teach you how to administer it and give you information on when and how much to administer.

One of the most common questions asked is the life expectancy of a transplanted heart. No matter the organ there is a “life expectancy” of that organ. For lungs, at the lowest, the life expectancy is five years. It is also one of the more difficult transplants to recover from. This is due to the lung being in constant contact with the outside world. For heart transplants the average life span for the heart is about 12 years. While someone may have their new organ for the rest of their life, there are many others who end up getting retransplanted in their lifetime. One of the main reasons for transplanted organs not lasting a long time is due to the constant strain the organ is under. Also you could have something called chronic rejection. As time passes your body builds up antibodies against the transplanted organ, in this case the heart, slowly causing your body to reject it more and more. Sometime people with this type of rejection will also experience clogged arteries in the heart. Most of the time this can be corrected with stents, which open the blocked passage, but in the end getting retransplanted is inevitable. But, don't look at this sadly because with each year we are getting closer and closer to prolonging life with organ transplants and coming up with new inventions to replace the organ. For example, there is a new artificial heart in trials currently. The artificial heart is based upon two rotating magnets that as they circle each other, help pump the blood. Sounds pretty futuristic, no?

I hope that reading this short essay on the functions of heart transplant helps you understand how amazing medicine is. I also hope that if you or if someone you love were ever to experience a heart

transplant, that this article can help better prepare you for what is to come. I believe by spreading awareness of advances in medicine and different medical conditions can help inspire or save someone's life.

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In Favor of Elliot Page’s *Pageboy*

Theo Sells

“Let me just exist with you, happier than ever” (262).
— Elliot Page, *Pageboy: A Memoir*

In the summer of 2023, Elliot Page – known for his roles in *Juno* (Fox Searchlight Pictures) and *The Umbrella Academy* (Netflix) – published his tell-most, thought provoking memoir, *Pageboy*. Page uses his memoir to share his journey of gender and sexual exploration while in the spotlight of modern media and unabashedly advocates for the rights and freedoms of transgender and gender non-conforming people. Within the pages, he shares moments from his life in a chronologically disorganized manner, retelling and interlacing stories to shed light on trans-identities. The language of his work and the wide range of reactions show that expression of identity opens many avenues of rhetorical approaches and audience reactions.

Page opens his book, like many memoirs, with an author’s note where he credits the existence of *Pageboy: A Memoir* to his ability to access affordable, gender-affirming healthcare, something that - he recognizes - many trans adults and children do not have access to. He concludes his author’s note with a call to action, urging the readers to vote, protest, and advocate for the protection of trans kids and people across the world, and specifically in the United States (x). Page also expresses an awareness of his audiences. He writes with an understanding of what discussions and conclusions people will jump to when the topic of trans

identities is brought up in conversation and masterfully disarms them with his diction.

Page addresses the demand and necessity for memoirs and stories like his within the industry. When discussing oppression he's faced within his work he writes:

Hollywood is built on leveraging queerness. Tucking it away when needed, pulling it out when beneficial, while patting themselves on the back. Hollywood doesn't lead the way, it responds, it follows, slowly and far behind. The depth of that closet, the trove of secrets buried, indifferent to the consequences. I was punished for being queer while I watched others be protected and celebrated, who gleefully abused people in the wide open. (106)

The open discussion of "being trans" is still a very taboo subject. Page highlights the specific power of these social expectations within his memoir, inspiring and encouraging others to share their experience as well. There is an undeniable sense that Page wants other transgender and gender non-conforming individuals to share their experience and step forward towards change.

Additionally, Page addresses the need for improvement across the acting industry. He encourages his readers (and those who just hear of this story) to reflect on the A-List celebrities we all know, praise, and claim to love. Making readers evaluate the morals they are choosing to uphold and, more importantly, ignore when participating in industry related discourse.

"It often seems like more people step forward to defend being unkind than they do to support trans people as we deal with an onslaught of cruelty and violence," he shares (268). Page knows that when transgender, gender nonconforming, and queer people share the way they've been threatened, oppressed, or attacked, that the response from the media is less about who was harmed and why they shouldn't have been but why it makes sense.

Page calls for, "A never-ending exercise in empathy, opening the heart, hoping it all sinks in, waiting for that release of emotion" (79). He knows his book would be for many: an exercise of empathy. Page had many intended audiences when writing this book, ones who need to exercise empathy for themselves and ones who need to exercise empathy for others – though, aren't we all in need of both. He states, "The movement for trans liberation affects us all" (x). His book is one that can – and should – be read by individuals who identify as transgender or gender nonconforming, those who are allies, those who are indifferent, and those who are uneducated of transgender existences.

Along with knowing who he was speaking to, Page is aware of who he was speaking for. He notes that this is only his journey, and his words cannot be used to speak for any other queer, transgender, or gender nonconforming person (x). Still, Page knew that some would see his existence, read his work, and still spread his story over any transgender or gender nonconforming person they know. He knew that speaking out about his identity, speaks out on behalf of his entire community. Although this is something the community is encouraging people to stray away from, Page forewarns readers of this important separation, noting that although many queer journeys share some themes, none of them are the exact same. Page’s story is not only a story of advocacy but also of triumph and hope. He writes:

I don’t want to disappear. I want to exist in my body, with these new possibilities. Possibilities. Perhaps that is one of the main components of life lost to lack of representation. Options erased from the imagination. Narratives indoctrinated that we spend an eternity attempting to break. The unraveling is painful, but it leads you to you. (265)

Elliot Page’s 2023 memoir, *Pageboy*, is a captivating, rhetorically sound and aware retelling of his life and journey as a transgender and queer high-profile actor. He utilizes a strong rhetorical awareness – of his audience and the world around him – to discuss the hardships, oppressions, and joys he’s faced in his gender exploration and expression. He writes, “I’ve nothing new or profound to say, nothing that hasn’t been said before, but I know books have helped me, saved me even, so perhaps this can help someone feel less alone, seen, no matter who they are or what journey they are on. Thank you for wanting to read about mine” (xi).

— Elliot Page, *Pageboy: A Memoir*

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Sexual Attraction in Relation to Nella Larson's *Passing*

Katie Tillman

Imagine being a woman in the 1920s decade in which you were expected to raise children, keep the house clean, support your husband, and be the overall perfect homemaker. Take this a step further and imagine being an African American woman during this time as well and imagine the racism you grow up around. Would it be safer for you to be a strong African American woman or to pass as a white woman? Nella Larsen's novel *Passing* takes place in Chicago in which Two African American women choose different paths in the way that they pass as white women during this period. Childhood friends, Irene, and Clair rekindle their past relationship in which they come across their two different lives. Irene passes as a white woman throughout the city for convenience while Clair passes as a white woman throughout her entire life, even with the marriage to her white husband. This story travels through the lives of these two women and how they go about passing throughout their everyday lives. Could this novel go even deeper into the lives of these two women to show them as passing beyond just the color of their skin?

When thinking about Nella Larsen's novel *Passing*, what the reader often thinks about is passing in the context of race. For example, how Clare passes as a white woman rather than an African American woman within society and her marriage to her white husband. Some of us

may look at the term as passing between classes, as Irene tries to pass in middle-class society. However, often the reader tends to not see how passing can reveal itself as sexual attraction between the same sex. It is often overlooked due to the period of this novel. Many LGBTQ+ movements did not start up until the late 50's. The fight continues to this present day for marriage equality and adoption equality. However, could it be possible that the relationship between Clare and Irene is some sort of sexual tension or desire rather than just a normal female relationship? To show this side of the novel, we look at not only the relationship between Clare and Irene but also Nella Larsen's background concerning how sexual attraction is presented in this novel. Could this be the true meaning of passing within the novel? If so, how does this change the reader's view of the ending?

At first glance the relationship between the novel's two protagonists appears to be a typical female friendship like any other, but what if we dig a little deeper? When Irene first notices Clare she describes Clare in a very sexual way, starting from her eyes and down to her clothes as if she is scaling her up and down, as many of us do when we look upon something we desire. "An attractive-looking woman was Irene's opinion, with those dark, almost black, eyes and that wide mouth like a scarlet flower against the ivory skin. Nice clothes too, just right for the weather" (Larsen 9). When we look at one of the first letters Clare wrote to Irene she strives to show her desire for Irene using words such as "...ache to see more of you." and "...you could know how glad, how excitingly happy, I was to meet you" (Larsen 34). This shows both sides of this relationship. How both characters have a strong desire for each other. We see this more between these two female characters rather than between each of them towards their husbands.

This relationship pushes the boundaries of sexual attraction and desire with danger. In today's time, same-sex attraction is far more accepted and safer than it was during the publication of *Passing*, which took place in the 1920's. Deborah E. McDowell states that African American women "wrestle simultaneously with this dialect between pleasure and danger. In their reticence about sexuality, they look back to their nineteenth-century predecessors, but in their simultaneous flirtation with female sexual desire, they are solidly grounded in the liberation of the 1920s" (McDowell 369). Not only was this sexual desire between two female characters looked down upon or not seen entirely but sexual drive amongst African American ladies is considered a joke as well in the novel. Both Clare and Irene are married, and even though they are both in heterosexual marriages, they are sexless.

In the novel, Clare talks with Irene and Gertrude about having

children and her fear of having a child coming out as dark (Larsen 26). This could be a fear of having a child not able to pass as she can or her lack of desire for her husband in a way of using an excuse to keep her nonsexual desires to herself. Later, in the novel, Irene is talking to her husband about sexual intentions regarding her children and it seems as if she wants them to know no such thing. On top of this, it looks as if her husband finds sex with Irene to be a joke (Larsen 41-42). So, why is it that these women have no sexual desires towards their relationship yet throughout their interactions towards each other it is all that they show? McDowell states that "Larsen can flirt, if only by suggestion, with the idea of a lesbian relationship between them" (McDowell 371).

Some readers might still be hesitant when glancing at the relationship between these two females and the novel. Some might be hesitant to believe it is a sexual desire, instead might think it is just a female friendship. One author who disagrees with the sexual attraction between the two flames is Ann DuCille. She states, "I am not convinced that the metaphors in *Passing* always hold the erotic meanings McDowell assigns to them" (DuCille 437). She then goes on to describe how Irene and Clare are just simply mirrored characters of each other and that possibly Irene is not longing for Clare but jealous of what Clare has that Irene does not:

Clare and Irene may be read as body doubles or, more precisely, as halved selves through whom Larsen explores a host of dialectics, not the least of which are desire and danger, women-proud promiscuity and repression, freedom, and confinement. Larsen has given us something more than just another simple doubling or dividing, however, for Clare is less Irene's alter ego than her alter libido, the buried, long-denied sexual self whose absence in his wife has led Irene's husband, Brian to conclude, with some bitterness, that sex (with Irene?) Is a joke. (DuCille 438)

The reader could take it upon themselves to see this scenario planned out like this. The reader could see Irene as being jealous of all that Clare has. Clare is not only in a higher class than Irene, but she is also seen as having a relationship with Brian. Along the lines of what Clare has over Irene, she is also able to pass more into the white culture than Irene. Judith Butler has countered this argument of who desired who, and who was jealous of what. Butler states that the "grammar of the description fails" to show if Irene truly desires Clare and that she is not the one having the relationship with her, or if she is jealous that Brian is having

desires with someone other than herself (Butler 419). So, it is quite possible to see Irene being jealous of Clare and everything she has but it is possible to see it the other way around too. We know that the point of view of the novel is third person limited, being all from Irene's eyes. Yet, Irene is not a reliable source since she does not express all her true feelings outright and she often tries to convince herself of other feelings when she is not around Clare. "They were strangers. Strangers in their ways and means of living. Strangers in their desires and ambitions" (Larsen 44). The reader could see both possibilities from Irene's point of view and her desire but what if we relate the reading directly to the author herself?

Many readers know that when authors are writing a piece of work, they often include personal facts about themselves in their work and characters, even though it might not be obvious to us the readers. When reading about the author of *Passing*, many find it hard to find facts about her. When looking back at Nella Larsen's life it is safe to assume that she might not be a heterosexual female. Is it possible that she portrayed her sexual confusion in her characters, such as Irene? During her short time as an author, she published two novels portraying the sexual desires of African American women. She could have portrayed her confusion with her sexuality in her character Irene:

We might say that Larsen wanted to tell the story of Black women with sexual desires but was constrained by a competing desire to establish Black women as respectable in Black middle-class terms. The latter desire committed her to exploring Black female sexuality obliquely and, inevitably, to permitting it only within the context of marriage, despite the strangling effects of that choice both on her characters and on her narratives.
(McDowell 371)

So, if we look at the time that Nella Larsen lived in and the history, it was likely hard for her to be open about her sexual orientation, and many people, as stated before, try to put their feelings into their work. This shows in her other piece of work *Quicksand*, which tells the story of mixed-race women. This novel also revolves around sexuality in these women. By looking at both of her novels it is safe to assume that Nella Larsen is putting herself into these characters to express her feelings with her sexuality and life.

How do all these topics that have been discussed relate to the ending of the novel? The ending of *Passing* gives the reader their chance to produce an opinion regarding Clare's death and how it could have

happened. It discussed the desire between Clare and Irene but also how during this period sexual relations between the same sex were unheard of. If this is the side of the story you decide to look upon you can state that Irene possibly pushed Clare out of the window. Throughout the novel, Irene is trying to deny all these strong feelings towards Clare. Throughout the novel, sometimes when she was with Clare the desire returned to her but then once away her feelings changed. Irene was much about security, so having these dangerous feelings towards Clare made her lose this sense of security along with believing she might lose her husband as well. "Then came a thought which she tried to drive away. If Clare should die" (Larsen 72). Many of us are known to be self-destructive when it comes to love, desire, and losing our feeling of security. We often push away the ones we love and desire most to keep ourselves safe. Could Irene be feeling the same natural feelings that many of us have ourselves? This could be foreshadowing Irene's plan to get rid of Clare, which will get rid of her desire and sexual attraction to someone to whom she should not be attracted.

"The classic unreliable narrator, Irene is confused and deluded about herself, her motivations, and much that she experiences. It is important, therefore, to see the duplicity at the heart of her story" (McDowell 372). Now with all of this known, the reader has one more view of this novel to look at. Many have different opinions on the interpretation of passing within this novel. However, we readers can now dive deeper and see the *Passing* within sexual desires, especially towards the same sex. The novel shows the sexual desires from Irene's point of view along Clare's. Not only does the novel discuss the desires between them but also shows how both heterosexual relationships with these women are sexless yet their letters and friendship show an extreme sexual desire for each other. Finally, Nella Larsen used her struggles with sexuality as an African American woman and she used this to help her story, having this similar struggle with her character, Irene. This all relates together to the ending and how the reader views Clare's death. In many ways, you can view Irene's safety concerns within her passing as heterosexual and not wanting to lose her husband, so she takes it upon herself to push Clare out of the window. Now, how do you as the reader view the ending and who should be at fault?

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Steal the Street: **A Persuasive Teacher of Pathos**

Kat Wren

10/5/23

*It was late August when I first picked up the book **Steal the Street** by Mark Mussman for my “Writing for Social Change” class. I didn’t expect that I would learn other things in this class besides writing techniques and how to use them to solve ethical issues, but I bet the look on my face was hilarious when the first words out of my professor’s mouth were about rhetoric. He would talk about how it was the art of persuasion, and how this book was a great example of it.*

*I didn’t understand at the time what he meant, but after reading a couple pages, I got the picture. **Steal the Street** was full of persuasive value, from stories of loss and having hope to missing property and struggling. It has value that I wish my writing had. Value that makes me jealous when I look at it, because it led me to realize that my writing is lacking in a lot of different areas. Value that showed how little I am able to connect with readers on a different level unlike how Mussman was able to get me to understand situations I was unaware of.*

One of the main things that I noticed was how I always started any kind of writing with a sense of unknowing or uncertainty. I always use the phrase “I’m not sure” followed by some reason why I can’t write something in a good way. It’s this constant theme of unknown that has made its way into my writing, leaving my writing feeling more forced or uncomfortable to read. But it also showed me how having this connection could create an effect on people.

*Mussman's writing is full of personal experience and vivid moments within each line. The pieces within **Steal the Street** made me want to help. It made me want to write this essay and explore how my technique, my style, could become something more by reading the persuasive, personal words within the many articles of **Steal the Street**, and someday I hope I will be able to have similar techniques to captivate readers.*

*

On Notice: Loss in OTR (5/6/2016)

One of my favorite chapters in this book is chapter two. Specifically, I really enjoyed the very first entry titled, "On Notice: Loss in OTR." it creates and gives the reader a good overview of all the different issues that have/are affecting the area. Mussman uses a unique technique that I don't tend to see much when it comes to serious writings about topics like gentrification in OTR. It's his addition of a personal touch that seems to grip people, readers, in. A great example comes from the very first paragraph of chapter two, "I am a very emotional person, guided by a sense of justice and beauty. What is balanced brings me joy, and right now, I feel no joy about Over-the-Rhine." This moment of emotion, of pathos, really shows how Mussman cares about the topic and the issues he is about to farther explain later on. It's a great line to hook readers into the piece and lead them to possibly continue reading.

This entry goes into an overview of the recent issues that have/are plaguing the streets of OTR, but he decides to use anecdotes to spread the messages. Like his story about a phone call he got from a young artist who was being evicted. Rather than focusing on the facts that lead to the situation...like the artist's name not being on the lease...he put the focus on how this example shows the lack of affordable housing in OTR. This is something that I don't tend to see in writing often. It's actually something that I can personally connect with because I do similar things with conversations. I use my own personal experience to build a connection to someone else's experience in order to understand it better. The way Mussman uses the same "technique" shows how I haven't put as much thought into it as I can. If he's able to connect with an experience by drawing from personal experience and write about it, then I can do the same thing.

This little technique of giving out a little bit of personal information in order to connect a reader to the story is something that I want to add to my writing. I tend to always add my own emotions or connections to different stories that I hear, and I believe that adding this technique to my writing arsenal could give me a new way to reach an audience.

Another great example of his anecdotes would be his experience with the basketball courts, or lack of one. The next part of this entry

slightly covers the losing battle of the basketball courts and how they were turned into a parking lot. Again, the pathos is very easy to see here. It talks about a place that had been special to those who lived in OTR and connects readers to it through a sense of loss. Though this example also uses another “technique” to me. It allows readers to be put into the situation by allowing us to see the difference without the basketball courts. It allows us, in a sense, to walk a mile in their shoes.

I believe that this ability of allowing readers to see from the eyes of another is a beautiful technique that could give a reader a new sense of understanding. It’s what allowed me a chance to understand and create my own feelings toward the situation in OTR. I mean, his writing gave an outsider like me a chance to understand the personal experience he went through. It gave me the opportunity to form my own opinion, and I believe that everyone should get this opportunity. This is why I want to learn about his different writing styles because each one has its own advantages even when I’m a little lost at first.

*

10/8/23

I’m not sure how to do this. How do I change the way I write? How can I take all these “techniques” and use them to better my writing? These were the kinds of thoughts that have plagued me the last few weeks. Because I want to improve my connection to writing and people, overall. But I can’t help it and I have doubts about myself as a writer. I wonder if Mussman had any doubts about his writings. Or about the situation he wrote about. How did he handle it? How did he continue even with all the things stacked against him? I know that I wouldn’t handle it at all. I would be a struggling mess, probably. Especially when it comes to writing. I wouldn’t know how to start a piece like his. It’s personal, yes, but it’s much more real than any of the fictional pieces that I’ve written. He has connections that I don’t have, but I believe it has something to do with his ability to write in such a unique, nonacademic way that makes his pieces shine.

I know that I usually tend to be less confident in my writing especially if it’s about a serious situation. I’m even less confident in my life, so I guess it just makes sense that Mussman’s words have left me curious about his thought process and reasons behind how he writes. It’s personal, has connections, and it even let’s go of doubt because of his style. So, how can I make his style a part of mine...even just a little bit? Be more confident? Understanding? I’m not sure but it’s still amazing to me. It also reminds me of another great story that Mussman wrote

about. It's one about a situation involving the possible harsh reality of losing public spaces like parks and other areas. And how sometimes compromise can lead to a much bigger moment of learning or writing in my case.

*

Battle For Imagination Alley (07/11/2019)

This next entry is about OTR's experience with its public spaces. Though it's really about one place called Imagination Alley, which is a place 3CDC (A private real-estate development company) wanted to become an outdoor setting for a restaurant. Clearly, this wouldn't sit well with the residents of OTR, so it became a kind of fight for the property. It makes plenty of sense to me. Who would want their parks to be turned into a private patio? Not anyone I know.

Back to the article. It's written in a way where you can tell how the writer felt. What I mean is that I can clearly see that Mussman didn't like this idea at all. I thought this was really interesting because it goes back to the earlier note of being able to read his personal experience. Though this goes even further into the concept of it. It begins to express his, the writer's, actual viewpoint of a topic. This could be a great tool for being persuasive to an audience as it can captivate a reader. I say this because it's one of the things we are trained not to do. A great example comes from my own life. I'm a journalism major, so I'm trained to not use personal connections or views in my writing. It's just how people are used to writing, so having this opposite concept can hook readers as well as have a chance to better connect with the audience. This is something that I would like to start doing more. It would give me the ability to further my connection with readers and be more persuasive about what I'm trying to convey.

Another thing I wanted to mention is the way he talks about the people of the community like Bonnie Neumeier. It's very clear that he's had some personal experience with Neumeier based on the way he writes. His words are very clear but also kind in a way. For example, he writes that Bonnie "...continues to educate and inspire people within, and outside, of our community," which uses the phrase "outside of our community" and "our community." The line "outside of our community" expresses the idea of her words being able to reach people outside of the community, like Mussman has. And the line "our community" expresses Mussman's own belief of joining and being a part of the community. This example explains to readers that he has a background into this topic and can, again, add to the persuasive value

of the entries as it places him as a kind of “first person narrative” in a way. I would like to add this to my writing because it gives me, the writer, a sense of knowledge to readers as I would be a “member” of the situation, at least in a way. Plus, I would be able to reach people inside or outside of a community because of my persuasive “first person narrative” style which would only add to my knowledge of what I’m writing about.

*

10/11/23

I feel a bit better about my writing. I feel like I’ve learned a thing or two about connection and have a handle on his style. The only thing I’m concerned about is how to apply it to my own writing. Being personal on paper, it sounds easy but it’s a lot harder than I thought. It’s a bit uncomfortable for me. It feels permanent like everyone will know everything about me. I know it is a stupid feeling but it’s one I can’t seem to shake. It’s like I want to hide it, bury it far away even though I know it will help me out in the long run. It’s like I’m nervous, scared of using this persuasive technique. I really don’t understand why, because I write personally all the time when it comes to poetry. Maybe the difference is the literal telling of it. Poetry isn’t as “in your face” as an essay or a story.

Actually, this reminds me of another entry that I read in my other class. It had a very similar concept of hidden agendas. Though unlike my fear, this one was more about helping a company by covering up a story involving a sweet lady named Mary Page. What I’m referring to is the piece called “How To Bury A Story,” which expresses the experience Mary Page went through involving a soccer company and housing issues.

*

How to Bury a Story (4/11/2019)

Burying a story is something that I hope to never have to do. The idea of hiding information from people isn’t something that I would like to do. It’s actually hard for me to believe that a journalist or a newspaper would actually try to do this, so reading this entry was almost heartbreaking for me. Though I did like how he started with the line “If it bleeds, it leads” because it’s something I can connect with as a journalist student, but it also leaves me wondering why hide a story like this? A story where people are being displaced because of a soccer company. That seems like a major media storm to me. I would be talking about it at least. But my feelings as a journalist aren’t what I’m writing

about. It's about how Mussman decided to write about the possible injustice of the media.

It's clear to see that he does have a very understandable belief about the situation, but even with it, he is still being honest with the information. His writing is not being swayed because of his position though it's easy to see that he's trying to be persuasive. Though I would say it's in a slightly different way than before. This time he has added the use of statistics to the mix of his word choice and point of view. For example, "...more than half the residents of the West End, not including public housing, are at risk of losing their homes in the next 3-5 years," which shows his ability to do research on a topic. Once again, this shows how he has a right to talk about this subject.

His research ability is something that I want to start using in my own kind of writing. While I have a little bit of experience in research gathering because of my journalism classes as well as other essays, it's still a struggle for me. It's not something that I'm the best at and I believe that if I increase my strength in information gathering, it could lead me to becoming a better writer. Though, I'm not really sure how to start. I could just go around asking people who have some knowledge on the subject, which is similar to how Mussman did it. But I feel that there's another way it could work better. Like in this entry, I could use real life examples of someone else's life to grasp a better understanding of a situation or use it to help others to understand with the help of some data that I researched. I think this could be a great way to take Mussman's style of personal experience and mix it with the idea of research gathering.

Overall, though, I like the idea of researching a topic. I think it would only help me with my writing and my understanding of a situation or topic. It can also help people feel more comfortable with reading my works because of the factual evidence supporting it. And from there, the piece would be even more persuasive because of all the support I would have for the piece, very similar to Mussman's book.

*

10/16/23

If I can say anything about this book, it would be that it was eye-opening to how much I still have left to learn when it comes to upgrading my writing and my writing style. I'm now working on being more open to "bending the rules" a bit by being less academically inclined in my writing and working more creatively with how an essay can actually be. Plus, I realize that not everything has to be "perfect" for a reader to be captivated and connected to a story. Rather, a little bit of personal detail

and emotional emphasis could create enough buzz to inspire readers to take a look at something new.

If I'm being honest, I never would've thought that I could learn a thing or two from a book before this class. Yes, I tend to read a lot, but I don't usually pick up a book thinking "what can I change in my writing style based on this?" I've learned that, at least in this book, persuasion can come from a lot of different writing styles. Whether it's through facts/statistics or by simple word choice, it all can affect the persuasive rhetoric of a piece. And I think that will always, and forever, be crazy to me.

Contributors

Anna Bohn

Anna is a senior at NKU and is double majoring in English and History. She has previously been published in *Loch Norse Magazine* and is currently a hybrid editor. She loves to watch the 2005 film *Pride and Prejudice* and cuddle on the couch with her cat Fishbait.

Cecilia Field

Cecilia Field is a senior at NKU majoring in English in the creative writing track. She lives in Florence, Kentucky, with her husband and two children. She has previously had work published in Gateway Community and Technical College's *Voices Magazine*.

Harrison Hall

Harrison is a senior English major at Northern Kentucky University. He enjoys living, laughing, and loving.

Hannah Henriques

Hannah Henriques is a writer and artist based in Cincinnati. She utilizes her talent over a diverse range of subjects and has written for several publications including *Girlish.com*. She has experience in academic writing, grant writing for anthropologic organizations, poetry, CNF, full-length screenplays and more. She is a senior at Northern Kentucky University studying English and Anthropology.

Autumn Howard

Autumn Howard is a senior English major in the creative writing track minoring in Journalism at Northern Kentucky University. She has written articles for *The Northerner* (the student-run newspaper on campus). She enjoys watching TV and listening to music.

Taryn Markle

Taryn Markle is an English major in the creative writing track at NKU. She has had poetry published in the *Ambient Heights Anthologies*, *drip lit magazine*, and *Loch Norse Magazine*, and has also had fiction published in *Loch Norse Magazine*. She was invited to read at the Kentucky Women Writers Convention in 2018 and is a 2019 GSA Creative Writing Alum.

Hunter Meister

Hunter Meister is a senior at NKU where she is an English major in the creative writing track with a minor in Philosophy. She's from Dillsboro, Indiana, where she can often be found at the local creek looking for cool rocks or reading in a hammock.

Chloe Mullins

Chloe Mullins is a poet, writer, photographer, and speaker in a podcast on Spotify titled *Spoken Words*. Mullins is an English major and is minoring in Pre-Law at Northern Kentucky University. Chloe hopes to write her own children's books and novels someday.

Angelica Poe

Angelica Poe is a senior at NKU majoring in English with a focus in Education. She hopes to return to NKU in the fall of 2024 to pursue her passion in healthcare. Her favorite song is "Tear in My Heart" by 21 Pilots.

Theo Sells

Theo Sells is a senior English major at NKU. He enjoys writing creative nonfiction and has pieces that have been published in *Loch Norse Magazine*. When he is not writing, he enjoys reading, going to coffee shops, and cooking with/for his friends.

Katie Tillman

Katie Tillman is a senior at Northern Kentucky University majoring in English in the creative writing track and minoring in Business. They are a non-traditional student. They can usually be found at home with their Beagle, Flynn, and a cozy book.

Kat Wren

Kat Wren is a Journalism and English major in the creative writing track. She has worked with *The Northerner* along with an OTR paper *Streetvibes* and has published a poetry book called *Written Scars*. She plans to continue her creative writing after graduation by writing novels and children's books.

NORTHERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
LANDRUM 500
HIGHLAND HEIGHTS, KY 41099
859-572-5416

english@nku.edu
nku.edu/english

