

Book Reviews

Bernstein, Dan. *Justice in Plain Sight: How a Small-Town Newspaper and Its Unlikely Lawyer Opened America's Courtrooms*. U of Nebraska Press, 2019.

As cries of collusion and mistrust of government resound across America today, the right for the public and its representative press to receive accurate, timely, and informative news about the judicial system is critical. Dan Bernstein's book *Justice in Plain Sight* provides a historical look at the recognition and protection of this right in two Supreme Court decisions: The *Press-Enterprise* cases. In a time when judges favored secrecy and closed trial proceedings to protect defendants and jurors from press scrutiny, the *Press-Enterprise* decisions cultivated a "soil of openness"¹ for the judicial system (Bernstein 171). Bernstein's writing style makes history come alive, at times seeming more like a thrilling true crime or legal drama rather than a historical review. Through its vivid storytelling, in-depth research, and easy-to-understand descriptions of complicated legal decisions, Bernstein's work invites readers on the journey of a small-town paper's unlikely Supreme Court legal victories protecting press freedoms.

Justice in Plain Sight weaves together the decisions of three California judges to close either voir dire (questioning of jurors in jury selection) or preliminary hearings in their capital murder cases. After being denied court access, the editorial team of the local newspaper *Press-Enterprise* began to "pound on courtroom doors until they opened" (3). The judges, defense lawyers, and some district attorneys in these three cases argued press coverage of the proceedings would bias juror pools and limit juror privacy; however, *Press-Enterprise*'s lawyer Jim Ward, who had no previous constitutional law experience, argued open courts build public trust in government, allow the media and public to function as a watchdog of the judicial system, and protect press rights. Ward believed "unless the media is [able] to gather

¹ Robert (Bob) Allen Long Jr. is believed to have written this in a memo to Justice Powell in reaction to Justice Rehnquist's conference remarks. Powell, Washington and Lee, Docket 82-566, handwritten notes on Rehnquist conference marks.

the information, the right to disseminate is meaningless” (19).² Ultimately, Ward and the *Press-Enterprise*’s editor Tim Hays and executive editor Normal Cherniss appealed all three closure decisions to the Supreme Court. While the first case was just shy of the needed votes to move forward, the legality of the other two closure rulings were argued before the highest court in the land. *Press-Enterprise* won both cases, resulting in the Supreme Court setting a standard of openness and creating specific guidelines on what was considered acceptable reasons for closures during voir dire or preliminaries. Chief Justice Warren Burger considered these rulings to be a “safeguard against the corrupt and or overzealous prosecutor and against the compliant, biased or eccentric judge” (189).³ The rulings in the Supreme Court cases, later called *Press-Enterprise I* and *Press-Enterprise II*, have been critical determining factors for judges ruling on press coverage of trials ever since. As Bernstein notes in the epilogue, these rulings continue to serve as a litmus test for ensuring balance between a trial’s adherence to both first and sixth amendment rights.

Beyond just detailing the historical significance of these court decisions, *Justice in Plain Sight* is intriguing for its insightful account of the underdogs who rose to victory in the face of the court’s “ominous progress”⁴ toward limiting press freedom (134). Despite their limited resources and influence nationally, Hays and Cheniss passionately believed in championing press freedoms at any cost. They acted without fear of economic or sociopolitical repercussions. In addition, their lawyer Jim Ward was an unlikely advocate for *Press-Enterprise* with his limited experience, but he received not only one but two victories before the Supreme Court, highly unusual for even the most elite lawyers. Bernstein masterfully crafts these three Davids’ narratives in winning their Goliath battles. In an age where the bottom line is often more important than fighting the blurred lines of press freedom, *Justice in Plain Sight* reminds journalists, academics, and legal experts alike of how important it is to defend the press regardless of political, social, and economic pressures.

² This quote is from lawyer Jim Ward in the Joint Appendix submitted to the US Supreme Court (No. 82-556) by the *Press-Enterprise*, 47.

³ Justice Burger’s conference statement can be found in Brennan, Library of Congress, Dockey 84-1560.

⁴ This phrase was written by the *Press-Enterprise* editorial staff written in 1984 about the Supreme Court cases entitled “Open Trials, Open jury Selection.”

While Bernstein's work is comprehensive, informative, and entertaining, there are times when the overly detailed accounts of the many players in the story become confusing and teeter into filler content. There could also be an increased emphasis on the impact of these court cases today. Only a handful of high-profile cases are listed as citing *Press-Enterprise* in the book's epilogue, missing the broader impact of the decisions on other First Amendment cases and the continuing legal battles for press freedoms. The ending also lacks the invoking call-to-action that could have tied this historical event to current climates. Bernstein maintains an air of journalistic neutrality throughout the book, but the epilogue especially could have shared more conviction that a need exists for future generations to maintain and protect press freedoms, weeding away the restrictions and biases against the press in an effort to till the "soil of openness" that *Press-Enterprise* fought so hard to harvest.

In conclusion, *Justice in Plain Sight* is a quick and enjoyable read that would make an excellent addition to reading lists, newsrooms, and syllabi. Utilizing a narrative journalistic style that both informs and entertains, Bernstein captures history in a way that appeals to a wide range of audiences. It is a fascinating case study of two Supreme Court cases, but it is so much more than that. The book presents a critical perspective on our government's past determination that "openness should prevail" (115). *Justice in Plain Sight* serves as a spotlight on the importance of transparent government through press scrutiny, when "fundamental questions should not be permitted to fester in secrecy but must be exposed to the cleansing light of public inquiry" (83).⁵ In his 1981 majority opinion written in favor of *Press-Enterprise I*, Chief Justice Burger said, "People in an open society do not demand infallibility from their institutions, but it is difficult for them to accept what they are prohibited from observing" (130). Burger's words ring loudly in today's political climate. It is up to media representatives and their allies to shed light and fight for transparency, just as the *Press-Enterprise* editors did nearly four decades ago.

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⁵ This argument from Ward can be found in the paper's brief in Joint Appendix, *Press-Enterprise I* (No.82-556)

Ciafone, Amanda. *Counter-Cola: A Multinational History of the Global Corporation*. U of California Press, 2019.

Coca-Cola, announces Amanda Ciafone in the opening line of her book, is “an icon of globalization,” sold in more countries than there are members of the United Nations (1). This achievement is impressive, but how did it occur and what does it mean for us? These questions animate Ciafone’s project, which traces Coca-Cola’s development into the brand and global corporation we know today. Her book makes two principal arguments. First, that The Coca-Cola Company is defined by interlocking systems of material production (of soft drinks) and immaterial production (of a brand and a way of life) (2). Given that much of its production and sales occur overseas, the Company’s attempts to navigate its place as a U.S. corporation participating in the markets, politics, natural environment, and culture of other countries is a key tension the book explores. Second, Ciafone argues that people have pushed back against the processes and consequences of unchecked capitalism that the company represents; Coca-Cola’s resistance to, and eventual co-optation of, such critique is another important strain in the book.

Counter-Cola is arranged chronologically, with much of its story told through the company’s activities in India and Colombia, which are central nodes in Coca-Cola’s global system. We begin in Chapter 1 with a narrative of the company’s bottling franchise system in the 1920s through 1940s by which Coca-Cola sold—and continues to sell—concentrate to franchisees who produce and bottle Coke products while the company retains control over how these products are marketed. Hence, as Ciafone explains, Coca-Cola does not actually produce much of its own physical product, making its mark—and money—by dictating how its product should be sold and by profiting from these sales.

Chapter 2 traces Coca-Cola’s projection of itself as an “ambassador” of democracy to its post-World War II host bottler countries (70), forging a linkage between a consumer’s choice of Coke and a voter’s choice in a democracy (88). In casting itself as a conduit to U.S.-style capitalism, Coca-Cola sought to sew itself into its newly independent hosts’ desires to modernize following long periods of colonialism. Ciafone’s analysis of Coca-Cola’s advertisements from this period illuminates how the company depicted itself as contributing to its host’s economy through local bottling plants that facilitated not just local consumption but employment (94-5). Yet, as Ciafone reminds us, most profits from these plants

flowed back to the U.S., and the small independent bottlers championed by Coca-Cola tended to be powerful conglomerates rather than the scrappy small businesses the company described them as (98).

Chapter 3 shifts from economics to culture, showing how Cola-Cola sought to use its ads to imbricate itself into its hosts' cultures. Here, Ciafone explicates Coca-Cola's use of "pattern advertising," by which the company created ads for the U.S. market and then had overseas subsidiaries tweak the ads to incorporate elements of local culture while hewing to the U.S. blueprint (106-7). Hence, although the ads featured local ethnicities and dialects, they always "had an American accent" and functioned as vectors of U.S. values (117). Such cultural imperialism was challenged by 1960s anti-capitalist groups, environmental groups, and labor unions in India and Colombia. This youth counterculture and rebellion presented a new target market, one the company capitalized upon by trying to convey "wokeness" through ads portraying Coca-Cola as a bringer of harmony (140-5) and a figure of counter-cultural cool (132-3).

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 delve into modes of resistance that Coca-Cola could not co-opt or capitalize on quite as easily. Chapter 4 narrates the Coca-Cola Company's exit from India in 1977 because it would not comply with the government's requirements for more Indian involvement in making, selling, and profiting from Coca-Cola. Chapter 5 examines the labor union pushback against working conditions in bottling plants in Colombia, along with the often violent reprisals against such resistance. Chapter 6 traces Coca-Cola's return to India in the 1990s, a triumph that soon faded in the face of pushback and organized resistance from local communities after reports of pesticides in Coca-Cola's drinks and mounting evidence of bottlers draining scarce groundwater from poorer communities to produce its drinks.

The final chapter addresses what happens when political, economic, and environmental realities such as the one in Chapter 6 cannot be papered over with advertisements. Here, Ciafone interrogates the trend toward corporate social responsibility, in which companies such as Coca-Cola acknowledge that their survival depends on improving conditions in their communities and thus they make some commitment to social welfare by sponsoring education initiatives or high-tech solutions to scarce energy and drinking water. Ciafone is troubled by such moves, seeing them as avenues by which governments relegate responsibilities to the private sector and make communities dependent on the whims of corporate entities.

The book is well-served by Ciafone's deep research into the political and economic context within which Coca-Cola operates, amassed from impressive archival and ethnographic investigations. Yet the book's most compelling moments are when it analyzes Coca-Cola's advertising strategies and unpacks specific advertisements. Ciafone has discovered gems in the older campaign materials and her careful contextual research facilitates not only her own insightful analysis of the ads, but allows readers to see what she sees, arming them with the ability, one hopes, to look deeper at the next Coca-Cola ad they encounter and wonder about the political and economic considerations that shaped it.

Ciafone's book cover is a bright red backdrop drenched in water droplets, evoking the condensation on an ice-cold Coca-Cola. The book's title is rendered in the famous cursive script and bold white font of the Coca-Cola symbol. Yet this is not ultimately a book about Coca-Cola but a much larger story of global capitalism and its corollary dynamics of resistance and co-optation. Let us pay attention to this story by stocking our shelves with *Counter-Cola*.

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Eckard, Sandra, ed. *Comic Connections: Reflecting on Women in Popular Culture*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2018.

Although characters such as Black Widow and Wonder Woman are at the forefront of modern entertainment, and "the woman who can be the heroine of her own story is becoming one of the most popular genres in current popular culture," there is a dearth of scholarship on comics for and about women (Eckard xiii). It is this issue which *Comic Connections: Reflecting on Women in Popular Culture*, edited by Sandra Eckard, seeks to remedy. The text does this by providing eight chapters from various scholars which focus on female superheroes and the ways that they "can be examined for cultural, social, and educational relevance that practicing teachers and college educators can use productively to deconstruct women's roles in popular culture" (Eckard xiii).

More specifically, each chapter examines a specific female hero, ranging from well-known figures like Wonder Woman and Buffy the Vampire Slayer to less

overtly heroic individuals such as Pepper Potts and Lois Lane. The scholars apply a variety of analytical frameworks to these characters, noting, for instance, the paradoxical dualities of masculine/feminine or Christ-like and diabolical in the character of Elektra (Kennedy). Moreover, every chapter includes a section entitled “Comic Relevance” that lays out the social relevance of a given comic figure, allowing teachers and academics to more readily connect it with the lived experiences of students (and others). In fact, this issue of relevance speaks to another primary goal of the text: to provide useful tools and exercises that enable teachers and students to engage these works in an actual classroom.

The “Classroom Connections” section at the end of every chapter provides several clear, detailed activities that can be used to engage students from primary school to the college level. These exercises range from more traditional analytical essays and journaling responses to incredibly creative activities such as designing one’s own superhero slogan or a Funko Pop! figurine. Admittedly, not every exercise is useful or appropriate for every grade level or teaching style, but much effort has been expended to make the activities adaptable. In his chapter on Elektra, for example, Michael D. Kennedy suggests an activity in which students develop a storyline incorporating the anti-hero into their own lives. He notes, however, that this assignment may be “impossible [or inappropriate] for younger students if it asks them to imagine how an assassin fits in their circumstance... Better call Wonder Woman with her Lasso of Truth rather than someone who is merciless with her sais” (81). He also suggests using the PG-13 Jennifer Garner film for middle school audiences, allowing the main core of the activity to be utilized with only minor adjustments for maturity level. In this way Kennedy and the other scholars included in *Comic Connections* succeed in providing a useful sourcebook for engaging classroom activities.

That is not to say, however, that the entirety of the text is a practical manual. There is still a great deal of comics scholarship on display, much of which may be unfamiliar to those scholars who, like this reviewer, are most familiar with the prototypically “manly” superhero. The backstories of Lois Lane and Pepper Potts, for example, are often relegated to that of mere girlfriends and damsels-in-distress. Eckard notes, however, that although they are (mostly) powerless and ordinary women, they “can hold their own in extraordinary circumstances and become extraordinary in their own rights” (Eckard, 89). For example, despite her initial inclusion as a love-sick secretary for Tony Stark and the fodder for a comedic love-triangle between her, Stark, and Happy Hogan, the character of Virginia “Pepper”

Potts rapidly grew. In the 1970s and 80s, for example, she begins to take on roles of responsibility throughout Stark Enterprises, eventually becoming the Chief Operating Officer in the 2000s. During this period, she established her authority by, among other things, firing Tony Stark from his own company, donning her own set of powered armor as the hero Rescue, and even using the Rescue suit to take on the mantle of Superior Iron Man and contest Stark himself for the heroic title. Likewise, in the Marvel Cinematic Universe Pepper is a competent businesswoman who holds her own against supervillains and tyrants. She not only survives a terrorist attack on her home in *Iron Man 3*, she even joins Tony in defeating the primary villain. Eckard convincingly shows that “to keep up with the evolution of women’s roles, the character of Pepper has also been reshaped to be of value to the story; she transitioned from a superficial supporting character in her early Iron Man comic years to a layered protagonist—capable of both emotional and physical strength—of her own” (91).

Similarly, the chapter by Slimane Aboulkacem et. al. examines the new Ms. Marvel, Kamala Khan, through the interplay of race, gender, and national identities. A Pakistani-American teenager, Kamala gets superpowers that allow her to shapeshift. Initially when using her powers Kamala takes the form of the previous Ms. Marvel, Carol Danvers; a tall, buxom, blue-eyed blonde in a skin-tight lightning-bolt-emblazoned black leotard. Over time, she develops a super-hero persona more based on her own identity, including a costume that “blends her traditional burkini-esque costume with Carol’s costume: a fashionable burkini with a lightning bolt and a bangle that belonged to her grandmother” (Aboulkacem, et al 45). As Kamala struggles not only with her superheroic identity, but her identity as a Muslim teenager in the United States, she provides a uniquely relevant insight into issues of culture and identity for American teens, allowing students to have a great appreciation for such literature. Which is, as stated, the primary purpose of the text.

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Foster, David William. *El Eternauta, Daytripper, and Beyond: Graphic Narrative in Argentina and Brazil*. U of Texas Press, 2016.

David William Foster's *El Eternauta, Daytripper, and beyond* constitutes an important contribution to the English-language bibliography on comic-book production in Latin America. More specifically, the book presents a sophisticated introduction to the rich world of "graphic narratives"—the author's term of choice—originating from Argentina and Brazil. Foster selects five works from each country, and they range from classic works by well-established authors such as *El Eternauta* (originally serialized between 1957 and 1959, and written by Héctor Germán Oesterheld and drawn by Francisco Solano López) or *Perramus* (written by Juan Sasturain and drawn by Alberto Breccia between 1984 and 1989) to recent works from the 2010s such as Fabio Moon and Gabriel Bá's *Daytripper* and Angélica Freitas and Odyr Bernardi's *Guadalupe*. Foster dedicates a chapter to a work by an author or authors, often presenting both the social and political context in which the works were produced as well as an analysis of the thematic, structural and visual elements that make them relevant within and beyond Argentina and Brazil. Instead of providing a methodical systematic analysis to graphic narratives, though, the book demonstrates a remarkable agility when approaching each work in its uniqueness and specificity. In this regard, besides exposing the reader to an impressive selection of foreign graphic narratives that might be new to them, Foster also develops different approaches to their analysis that could be applied by other scholars to other contexts.

The book addresses the radical difference, when looked at from the historical perspective, between the graphic narratives that Foster has chosen. Most of the Argentinian narratives analyzed are connected to the military dictatorship of the *Junta Militar* (1976-1983). Thus, *El Eternauta* can be seen as a forewarning of the oppression that was to come, while *Perramus* presents one of the earliest cultural artifacts to attempt to construct a memory of life under military control in the immediate past in Argentina. Even Patricia Breccia's work, some of it produced under the *Junta* and some after the restoration of democracy, allows Foster to trace the continuity in women's situation under the two political systems. Brazil, a country that also suffered a military dictatorship between 1964 and 1985, did not, according to Foster, produce graphic narratives with "the sort of highly defined analysis of the period of repression Argentina did" (xii). Following this verdict, the second half of the book is centered on how contemporary Brazilian narratives focus on issues of modernity, globalization, and the shifting location of Brazil within networks of economic and cultural exchanges.

Within the larger interpretative and national paradigms that the book poses, each chapter presents different theoretical approaches that showcase the diversity of graphic narrative production in these countries, while certain common threads also emerge. For instance, Foster identifies a continuity of issues related to gender and sexuality in a significant number of works. Immediately in the first chapter, his analysis of *El Eternauta* pays special attention to the role of masculinity in the community of resistance that the narrative constructs. Likewise, Patricia Breccia's work allows Foster to read the visual and thematic experimentation that she deploys in connection to the existential despair that afflicted a specific set of young women in Buenos Aires at the time.

Foster also delivers a compelling analysis of the articulations of queerness in contemporary rural Mexico in *Guadalupe* by Freitas and Bernardi, as a quest of lines of feminist and queer solidarity across national frontiers in Latin America. Further, Foster can develop other connecting themes and tropes across time and space, and an existential search of meaning (or a denial of such a possibility) emerges as another important plotline in the book, connecting Patricia Breccia to contemporary Brazilian works such as *Cachalote* or *Mesmo Delivery*. This book allows for such linkages to be conceptualized, while also offering suggestive sketches of other interpretative and analytical possibilities. When discussing Moon and Bá's *Daytripper* the relationship of these Brazilian authors to the English graphic narrative industry (and, indeed, the relationship between the Brazilian and U.S. graphic narrative markets) becomes a clear example of complex global connections between hegemonic and emerging powers. Foster explains how, for *Daytripper*, the two authors shifted from graphic narrative production in Brazilian Portuguese for the Brazilian market to English and publishing directly in the U.S. market via DC Comics. Their case is a perfect example of the cross-cultural and transnational movements that generate the contemporary graphic narrative industry, and it deserves further analysis.

This book is a valuable ally for scholars who want to further research into Latin American contemporary cultural production, and specifically for those working on Latin American or Global graphic narrative. Similarly, it offers a great selection of materials for scholars working on a variety of issues, such as memory versus history in societies transitioning from dictatorship or civil conflict to democracy, or women's and gender issues in contemporary Latin America. Only one problem exists with Foster's approach: although present in the title, it is confined to the preface, a couple of pages (i.e., 83-4), and some notes at the end of the book. The

author clearly sets up borders between different actualizations of comic book art as a medium. By advocating for the use of “graphic narrative” as referring to a body of work distinct to “comic books,” Foster replicates former distinctions between the “high” and “low,” and actually identifies “graphic narratives” as “publication units that vied for academic recognition and advanced critical analysis” (x). This re-hierarchization of the field of cultural production is highly problematic and debatable, and although it might be satisfying for scholars anchored in literary studies, it raises many questions. At the same time, though, and bearing in mind the scope and breadth of the current work, Foster’s distinction could also be positively interpreted as an invitation for the reader to think critically about conceptual and theoretical frameworks when approaching graphic narratives. As such, this initial problem can be inverted as another positive aspect of this impressive volume.

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Jeffries, Dru. *Comic Book Film Style: Cinema at 24 Panels Per Second*. Austin: U of Texas Press, 2017.

While Dru Jeffries never mentions prominent media theorist Marshall McLuhan by name, medium theory guides *Comic Book Film Style*, as Jeffries defines his titular concept not based on the content of comic book film adaptations but how films remediate comics on screen. Resisting the allure of superhero media, namely fidelity discourse’s concern for how a film “captures the essence” of a comic book it adapts (3), he defines film’s remediation of comics as ruptures in Classical Hollywood film style (4). His definition begins with a simple idea: comic book film style is rooted in “the form and content of comic books,” understood by how comics influence film style (12-3).

Chapter 1 explains comic book style in “six modes of interaction”: 1) “diegetic content” from the comics, 2) direct recall of specific panels, 3) use of “actual comics,” 4) comics’ “conventions” on screen, 5) “use of comics’ formal system,” like split screen, and 6) “mimicking comics’ elastic temporality and staccato rhythm” (23). To better understand these concepts, he focuses on one film, the adaptation of Vertigo Comics’ *The Losers* (2010), applying each mode and

explaining the high and low risk of remediated style, since some remediations go unnoticed by uninitiated spectators, while others—like a panel moment’s “successive speed ramping to visually remediate the process of closure” (45)—are stylizations meant to be seen.

Chapter 2 focuses on how comics remediation highlights “artificiality,” calling attention to style, instead of favoring the invisibility of Classical Hollywood (55). To this end, he addresses comics’ image/text relationship through textual tropes like onomatopoeia, stylized words like “Thwack!!” that appear in a comic book to accentuate action. In some instances, films replace onomatopoeia with entirely visual moments—how the camera focuses on Spider-Man’s hand as a “thwip” sound occurs, sans on-screen text (64)—but he focuses on the more artificial moments of onomatopoeia that occur in *Batman: The Movie* (1966) and *Super* (2010), where text actually appears on screen to accentuate action. He sees in these moments not redundancy, since film motion negates need for onomatopoeia, but something that stylistically accentuates scenes in atypical ways conventional filmmaking does not. He also addresses the use of text captions in *Kick-Ass 2* (2013) instead of subtitles, normally designed to be unobtrusive in most films (78), and how *American Splendor* (2003) remediates actual illustrations and text clouds, when coupled with a freeze frame, momentarily mimicking a comic book’s use of time on a static page (74).

Chapter 3 focuses on film’s aspect ratio and experimentations with comics panels in films like *Danger: Diabolik* (1968), which features a scene filmed through an empty bookcase that resembles panels on a comic book page. But he ultimately argues this moment does not tap into comics remediation as it shares more in common with the experimental cinematography first employed by Orson Welles. Instead, he highlights examples like *Hulk* (2003), which features various “panels” of the same cinematic moments from different perspectives, much like the television series *24* (2001-2010). Yet he does not see this as a perfect translation of comics panels on screen. Comics pages are always static, often constructing sequential motion through the combination of multiple panels, while *Hulk*’s use of split screen increases “narrative efficiency,” opening up the visual space (108). Ultimately, Jeffries argues something new occurs during this type of remediation that neither conventional comics nor cinema undertake.

Next, Chapter 4 delves into compositional mimesis, how films capture dramatically staged moments in comics, like Spider-Man throwing out his costume (129) or the “cover image” effect of a dramatically staged Batman atop a city tower

(137). While such moments might make spectators aware of comics style on screen (Batman could easily stand somewhere more practical, less picturesque), Jeffries uses the term “expressive intermediality” to explain more blatant tactics, like the use of motion lines on throwing knives in *V for Vendetta* (2006), which are clearly “ornamental” but “not at the expense of substance but in addition to it” (144), or the alternating “speed of playback” in *300* (2006), which remediates a series of “panel moments” during stylized action sequences (154).

Chapter 5 provides an analysis beneficial to both new media scholarship and medium theory for its detailed examination of the broader implications of remediation through film’s polymedial function. Just as film can remediate comics, film can also remediate other media. In close readings of *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* (2010) and *Watchmen: The Ultimate Cut* (2009), he notes how a film can remediate the style of comics, video games, laugh-track sitcoms, Bollywood musicals, and anime, as *Pilgrim* does, and “paratextual” material like DVD extras and extended film cuts available only on video, as found in the “Ultimate Cut” of *Watchmen*. Here, Jeffries joins scholars like Lev Manovich and Henry Jenkins in addressing how media interact and influence each other, never evolving in a vacuum.

Comic Book Film Style extensively provides many new terms to explain the language of comics film style, from panel moments to compositional mimesis, and he follows each explanation with multiple examples, most of which include figures that directly visualize concepts at hand. While Jeffries spends ample time fleshing out his new terminology for understanding comics film style, he also clearly states what remains beyond the scope of style, rejecting the notion that any comic book adaptation or superhero film that feels like a comic book should be included in this stylistic category by proxy. In fact, Jeffries argues that current superhero films premiering over the last twenty years rarely remediate comics, instead believing comic book film style is more suited for “the art house rather than the multiplex” since films like *American Splendor* and *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* (2015) better remediate comics style (217). That said, he does speak optimistically about *Deadpool* (2016).

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Johnston, Brian and Susan Mackey-Kallis. *Myth, Fan Culture, and the Popular Appeal of Liminality in the Music of U2: A Love Story*. Lexington, 2019.

As an admitted and often chastised non-U2 fan, I cannot help but find irony in the ways U2 has emerged in my life. The first time was at my Master's graduation, in the spring of 2004, from the University of Pennsylvania, where Bono was the speaker. He wore his iconic blue sunglasses, stomped around the stage in combat boots, and told the audience about his journey from rock star to social justice advocate. He encouraged us all to be rock stars (in our own way) and advocates for social justice. The university was criticized for having a rock star as their speaker, but the thrill of seeing Bono in person was the only reason I bothered to attend the hours-long graduation.

Years later, my Master's thesis advisor Susan Mackey-Kallis, and co-author of *Myth, Fan Culture, and the Popular Appeal of Liminality in the Music of U2: A Love Story*, finds me and asks me to write a review of her recently published monograph. As one of the first scholars who told me to treat media seriously and encouraged me to write about the media I love, I could not help but review the book; yet again finding myself emerged in the world of a band I have no interest in. Although, now after having read the book, I am admittedly more intrigued, and I find myself wanting to give U2 another chance. Author Brian Johnson's almost obsessive love for the band and the authors' combined passion for the music is infectious—the book truly is a love story.

Using a multi-methodological approach of lyrical analysis, autoethnography, and cultural criticism alongside a vast knowledge of philosophy, religion, mythology, and music, Johnson and Mackey-Kallis analyze tours, albums, shows, fan culture, websites, advertisements, and a film about the band's 2016 Innocence + Experience tour to argue "U2's ongoing popular appeal is constructed in the spaces between band and fan and commercialism and community" (169). Such a space creates a relationship that transitions "from one epoch (electronic) to another (digital)" (169) as a co-constructed mythic journey akin to Campbell's hero's quest. In this intersection of band and fan, U2 exists in a liminal space of politics and religion, electronic and digital eras, postmodernity and transmodernity. In fact, it is the band's transmodern perspective that allows for a consideration of them as more

than “*mere* entertainment” (113). U2 shows the world how to reinstitute a sense of spirit into an interpretive lens of popular culture.

Coming from similar, deeply Christian households as children, Johnson and Macky-Kallis revel in the ways that U2 and Bono provided them the space to understand love, compassion, and the joy of community through something other than church. This book is not just an analysis of U2, but a fascinating and thorough examination of the three types of love—agape, amor, and eros—and their manifestations in Western popular culture.

Part one of the book, Agape, brings readers into the beginning of the hero’s journey and the band’s emergence as a rock phenomenon. This coming of age story tells about a loss of innocence and an initiation into a source of power. Alongside lyrical analysis of the band’s early work, which reveals themes of leaving home, uncertainty, and religious doubt, Johnson and Mackey-Kallis also share their stories of coming to love U2 and taking the band seriously as a scholarly endeavor.

Part two of the book, Amor, is the quest itself as well as a biographical narrative of the band from punk rockers to spiritually conscious beings. The section follows U2 from the 1980s to Zoo TV, highlighting a shift from modern to postmodern music making and offering a creative comment on the Narcissus-Narcosis mentality of our age. Johnson and Mackey-Kallis argue that within the ZooTV era of technological overload, one situated within Marshall McLuhan’s notion of a Global Village, Bono enacts McLuhan’s figure that marches backwards into the future (89). His stage character, The Fly, is the prodigal son of the postmodern age, he is Frankenstein’s monster, he is: “a cybernetic incarnation of repressed spirit for technological embodiment” (92). Thus, the revelatory experience of “human touch” becomes salvation. Re-centered with a sense of spirit, the band can begin to come home, which may just be the hardest part of the journey.

Part three, Eros, the journey home, is both productive and destructive. This section focuses on the ways in which social media gave U2 a new platform to communicate with fans but also a platform that empowered and entitled fans. The merging of fan culture is best told through Johnson’s autoethnographic rendering of his own experience as a fan, a shift and evolution that directs both him and the larger culture towards individuation. Fandom and the integration of social media becomes a spiritual path to make sense of the world. The move through technology, which was once a means of dividing us, becomes a “force that connects us both to each other and to the global community” (162). The audience must share “one love” and “one life,” because, in the band’s words, “we need to carry each other.” U2

believes people have the power, individually and collectively, to change the world. That potential for change is where the authors end their analysis and where they claim the band to be now.

Early in the book, a comment is made about pop-culture criticism being seen as “less than”—less important than political rhetoric, less serious than film criticism—and it is here, in this concern of being “less than,” that the book’s fault emerges. There are so many details and facts and so much information it is nearly impossible to process everything. At times, it seems as if the authors are proving the worth of studying popular culture. Perhaps, it is their love for the phenomenon that is U2, like all loves, that makes the authors blind to just how much detail an average reader needs. Or perhaps, it is just this reader’s distaste for the band that makes it all seem like too much.

As an aside, while reading *Myth, Fan Culture, and the Popular Appeal of Liminality in the Music of U2* and writing this review, a U2 song came on in my local coffee shop exactly seven times. That happenstance seems oddly suiting for a book about universal and unconditional worldwide love.

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Loza, Susann. *Speculative Imperialisms: Monstrosity and Masquerade in Postracial Times*. Lexington, 2018.

From postcolonial and settler studies perspectives, Susann Loza’s *Speculative Imperialisms* ranges over current popular science fiction screen texts (a.k.a. speculative fiction) that include James Cameron’s *Avatar* (2009), the South African *District 9* (2010), the BBC’s *Doctor Who* reboot (2005-present), the rebooted trilogy of *The Planet of the Apes* (2011, 2014, 2017), and the cultural phenomenon of steampunk fan criticism. Loza systematically exposes and challenges the oppressive and nimble settler logic of these popular texts that through their allegories deflect racism and endorse white supremacy. She argues that in many of these texts, the figure of the alien or monster operates as a stand in for neocolonial discourses that fail to engage with the genocidal colonial histories that most white people are reluctant to confront. Loza charges these screen texts’ use of red and

black face and orientalism support neocolonial ideology. This archive inevitably appeals to white savior tropes where neocolonial nonwhite actors or white actors playing aliens endorse racism in science fiction drag.

The title of this book suggests its initial writing started in an Obama-like era where the project aimed to rebuke these texts' "postracial" thinking as a way of countering a liberal humanist politics that insists on a colorblind world free of racism without a history of colonization, slavery or genocide. Loza's final two chapters situate this archive in an explicit white supremacist Trumpian moment where an urgency exists to demonstrate how this popular archive of cinematic pleasures reflects President Trump's extreme populist xenophobia (146). The book could be a bit more cohesive if the introduction explained that the chapters were written in different moments that move from an earlier millennial aspirational "post racial" moment into the "Trumpocalypse" mirroring the chapter structure that moves from earlier screen texts and culminates with the most recent *Planet of the Apes* film (Loza 145). Nevertheless, its call to challenge popular culture that endorses virulent militarism and xenophobia is timely and provocative.

Loza does not offer a Žižekian diagnosis of settler societies' inability to face their legacy and privilege, but instead documents how speculative fiction operates as a hegemonic form to resist discourses that might lead to decolonization or reconciliation. She puts into play counterarguments that suggest the contemporary science fiction archive might reflect a productive crisis in whiteness. For example, she suggests one could read *The Planet of the Apes* reboots as subversive cases of what Arata, writing in reference to Stoker's *Dracula*, calls "reverse colonization." An Arata-inspired reading of *The Planet of the Apes* reboots would argue the apes have colonized the humans thus giving viewers the "opportunity to atone for imperial sins" (120). Instead, she convincingly argues these films bypass settler guilt and insist on pernicious white innocence.

Loza demonstrates conclusively the pernicious and wily neocolonial narrative of contemporary science fiction films that give producers license to repeat a colonial image gallery bent on containing anti-colonial and progressive discourses. The lovely chapter on steampunk fan fiction moves away from film analysis to celebrate the work of black and aboriginal fan-writers. These fans-writers question why the prevailing sentiment in the genre can imagine all manner of fanciful invention located in an alternative Anglo imperial 19th century, but resists imagining an alternative reality that challenges the colonial trappings and tropes (66-9). This chapter suggests that while the mass producers of popular science

fiction and many of its fans might not be able to conceive of anti-oppressive narrative, certain fans, aware of the real and emotional political stakes in these narratives, seek imaginative spaces for such endeavors.

Given the science fiction premise of Jordan Peele's black horror-comedy *Get Out* (2017), I wished that, beyond the chapter on steam punk fan fiction and the mention of the subversive video game by Plague Inc called "Simian Flu" released in 2014 to promote the oppressive *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (135-6), this book had featured discussion of science fiction explicitly undermining whiteness. I appreciated the detailed discussion of *District 9* and *Doctor Who* in relation to the historical slave trade, yet part of me yearns to know more precisely how the contemporary politics of both South Africa and England informs these texts. Given the audience for the book is likely scholars in the United States, the text can be forgiven for its American focus. Yet with a focus on the popular screen culture of Anglo-settler societies, I wished the book had looked at Canadian, New Zealand, and Australian science fiction, which I trust also repeats many of the tropes unpacked by Loza. The apocalyptic Australian film *These Final Hours* (2013) resonates with many of the settler white savior themes of the texts under discussion and would add to the argument that settler culture, despite its different national inflections, continues to draw from the same racist imaginary to deny the material history of colonization.

Loza's afterword suggests the far right in America are winning the culture war with its title "Trumpocalypse Now, Decolonized Tomorrows" (145-52). This afterword passionately demonstrates how Donald Trump's white supremacist politics have filtered almost word-for-word into the promotional copy for *War for the Planet of the Apes* (2017) (147) in a way that echoes D. W. Griffith's *Birth of Nation* (1919). One might be tempted to despair for the state of popular culture arguing recent film and television science fiction only perpetuates neo colonial attitudes. However, Loza demonstrates science fiction can tell different stories that might decolonize the imagination. Her analysis coupled with her expansive reading of blogs and newspaper reviews demonstrates there are many viewers and readers of science fiction who resist the neocolonial pull of this archive.

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Stache, Lara C. *Breaking Bad: A Cultural History*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2017.

Breaking Bad: A Cultural History covers AMC's hit series from an approachable stance of a fan and scholar. Author Lara C. Stache declares her fandom for the series early in her book and gives easily understandable nuance to this powerhouse series. Stache's analysis is geared more toward a lay audience. Fans and people who generally recognize the power of media are cited as the more particular audience for the book early on. The analysis is well-informed by the context of American culture and pertinent societal issues when the series aired on network. *Breaking Bad* is an esteemed example, and continues to be, of AMC's tagline: Life Imitates AMC. Stache explains, "*Breaking Bad* aired in 2008, during the housing bubble burst, and methamphetamine production was increasing year over year. Media scholars argue that media construct narratives that both mirror and create society" (xvi). The series, articulated well by Stache, explored the relevant and timely issues of its day with rich storytelling, nuance, and complex characters. After reading the book, the series' relevance and staying power are both palpable.

Breaking Bad is divided into three parts and nine chapters. The first part of the book focuses on the main character, Walter White. The second part delves into the series and its interplay with cultural and societal issues present during the run on AMC. The third and final part of the book, "Being *Bad* in Walt's World," investigates the roles of other major characters. I will devote the most detail on the first part, which mirrors Stache's attention in the book to Walter.

Chapter 1, Antihero or Villain: How Walter White Resists the Labels, explores the inability to categorize Walter and how the character ultimately defies generic

convention. Stache argues, “To me, Walter White dies not as an antihero or a villain, but as a tragic and complex human figure, at once an everyman and a villain: Walt *and* Heisenberg” (16).

The two personae, Walt and Heisenberg, are the subject of the second chapter. “The Evolution of Heisenberg,” dives into the personae shifts of Walter White’s character. Stache identifies the key moments in which these evolutionary shifts are most notable. The most poignant being when Walt sees Jane overdose and does nothing to prevent her death. This moment plays out in the series in major ways and impacts the entire city where the Walt resides. Interviews from Bryan Cranston, who plays the main character, and Vince Gilligan are cited with great regularity in this chapter. It is definitely a plus for fans of the series to hear so much from those two sources.

Chapter 3, “Does Walt Want to Die?,” rounds out the first part of the book by exploring the complexities of Walter’s motivations and decisions. Arrogance and hubris are the most compelling tropes used to explore the motivations and complexities of his character. Stache explains, “Although he finds himself in danger of being killed multiple times through the series, including twice in the first episode alone, Walter both cheats and courts death in his chaotic journey” (33). The opportunities to cease *breaking bad* are also highlighted to demonstrate this presumed death wish in the main character.

The second part of the book consists of three chapters. Chapter 4, “Morality, Legality, and Everything In Between,” is where the book hits its cultural and contextual stride. Drugs become the driving trope, as does the excitement of the series answering the question “of what people might do if they only had a short time to live” (47). For most of the audience, the laws and morals that are assumed as standard in the United States are key to that answer. Those presumed morals are put in tension with and challenged about how we deal with drugs in our society. It is part of what makes the series a hit. Chapter 5, “Just Say No?: Drug Use and Abuse in *Breaking Bad*,” looks at drug culture in the United States and how that was highlighted by the series. Chapter 6, “Marketing *Breaking Bad*,” enlightens the reader about the tact and skill that AMC deployed. It is a stratagem worthy of its own chapter. Additionally, the role of AMC as a network, the series streaming on Netflix, and the marketing genius of AMC round out the more series-driven arguments.

The third part of the book focuses on the other characters. The most in-depth, cultural argument in this part of the book delineates the dynamics of Skyler White,

Walt's wife. Chapter 7 is highly focused upon the cultural and societal response to Skyler's role in the series. Stache argues, "Skyler can be understood as a woman who is at once enacting and resisting traditional female roles, which ultimately works against Walt realizing his goal to enact a traditional male role in the public sphere as the breadwinner for the family" (106). The final two chapters cover the "baddies" and the "Anti-Walts," Jesse and Hank. The analyses of the villains, and there are many to choose from, are rather brief. They serve to support Stache's larger arguments about the cultural resonance and relevance of the series. The clearly bad characters keep the audience on their toes about where they stand with Walt. Jesse and Hank's objectives and goals are, as Stache articulates, "rarely compatible" with Walt's or each other. The two characters keep the audience in an "intense game of tug-of-war" (134).

Stache's goal to, "explore how media is both a mirror and creator of reality," is achieved by the end (152). The book is thorough, explores the cultural dynamics of the series, and is compelling. While an enticing read, it fits best for a general audience, as it does not rely heavily upon academic terms. Scholars wanting to introduce students to more general media concepts would be served well by this book. A brief note: watch the series beforehand.

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Steeves, H. Peter. *Beautiful, Bright, and Blinding: Phenomenological Aesthetics and the Life of Art*. State U of NY Press, 2018.

I am with you as you read this. My writing, printed and bound or floating before you on a screen, makes me—a total stranger—present in your consideration. Later, should you think back on this review, I will be there, too, myself unaware of our dialogue yet nonetheless there: present, though absent. This dialectic of presence and absence pervades aesthetic encounters writ large, whether they be in the art of scholarship or the more "traditional" arts of painting, cinema, songs, etc. While Plato feared that art as a representation of reality could overshadow the contours of reality itself, others in the tradition of Continental philosophy argue that "art does not represent" (61). Rather, as H. Peter Steeves argues in *Beautiful, Bright, and*

Blinding, “A picture or image of something is one way that that thing can be present to consciousness” (61). That thing is absent, in one sense, yet present in another. Hence: I am with you as you read this. My writing (though its aesthetic merit be debatable) makes me present to you, though you yourself remain absent to me. Which is also to say that I have spent a considerable amount of time with Steeves through the reading, contemplation, and now review of his book. One could argue that through my quotation of him he is also present to you as you read. Presence and absence are tricky.

The preceding may seem like a game, but these considerations are at the core of what Steeves aims to interrogate, play with, and explore throughout his book, making the adoption of this style not trickery but an essential element of considering the aesthetic. Steeves brands his approach to the aesthetic as grounded in phenomenological thinking and method, taking seriously the phenomenologist’s project of evoking how experience presents itself to the one experiencing. That Steeves’s work brings the reader into dialogue with other aesthetic objects that are themselves removed from the pages of his volume means that his writing must be that much cleverer and more deliberate. Some chapters in *Beautiful, Bright, and Blinding* are thus relatively straightforward, synthesizing scholarship and art; others are extended ruminations on vegetarian recipes; and in one particularly vivid chapter, Steeves writes in the form of a play, with characters as diverse as Descartes, Socrates, and Koko the Gorilla lending aid to Steeves’ project of examining the ethics of aesthetic objects and experiences, particularly in light of the complicated dialectic of presence/absence that pervades aesthetic experience. To approach these complex relations in the traditional manner of scholarly analysis and argumentation is to miss what the experience of these experiences brings to the individual, to the artist, and to understanding or comprehension for either party.

Forgive me, to this point I may seem to have been unclear. With *Beautiful, Bright, and Blinding*, Steeves undertakes the goal of removing consideration of the aesthetic from the realm of metaphysics, instead engaging a “phenomenology of aesthetics” and discovering that “life and art are fundamentally intertwined—so much so that there is no room to separate them” (2). This phenomenology of aesthetics is intimately tied to matters of presence, absence, and perspective, and acknowledges the conundrum of presence implied above; as Steeves says, “The fact that I cannot even really have your experience, but can only have an experience that is mine in which I try to take up your experience, is yet another reason that the object is an inexhaustible reserve of perspectives” (6). Recognizing the

complexities of experience, and the ties between experience, aesthetics, and life, necessarily requires Steeves to engage with the objects of his inquiry in a manner reflective of his experiences of these objects. Steeves the scholar, Steeves the fan, and Steeves the entertained/shocked/disturbed (aka Steeves the emotional human being) cannot be distinguished, for to do so is to introduce a false reality to the discussion, to unrealistically disentangle one part of an identity from the whole that comprises that identity. This is the innovation and deliberateness of style that Steeves brings to this work, which carefully engages with the objects mentioned above while also ruminating on Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, zombies, violence in the films of Michael Haneke, the vagaries of conceptual art, and the post-ironic humor of *The Simpsons* and Andy Kaufman.

To this point, in a sense, I have said little about the actual content of Steeves's book. This has not been by accident. To some extent I wonder what the point would be. Steeves makes arguments and assertions here, particularly in his exploration of *Beauty in the Beast* and in the final two chapters on post-irony and performance art. But I question whether these arguments are the point even for Steeves. For instance, in the setup to his chapter on the postmodern, post-ironic humor of *The Simpson*, Steeves asserts that he intends to show "what was new—and arguably still is new—about *The Simpsons*" in relation to modernity (182), which he does only partially, asserting by the end that "all that talk up front about needing a new theory of comedy to deal with the show was just, well, talk" (197) before moving into an extended consideration of Andy Kaufman, the comedian known for being so antithetical to traditional understandings of comedy and humor that it is arguably fair to question his status as a comedian at all. That these chapters—and the aforementioned chapter written as a play or dialogue—are possibly performance art is part of the intrigue of Steeves's phenomenological method. He deconstructs the complexities of performance art through his examination of prominent performance artists all while engaging in performance art himself, with a self-awareness to his writing that strains the reflexivity of the phenomenological style and method in relation to his early assertions regarding the inseparability of life and art in order for us to consider the concomitant ethical component of aesthetic experience.

Steeves's book is bold. It is challenging. At times, it is maddening. And disappointing. And intriguing. And at the end of the day, I am not sure that the text itself matters so much as, strangely, the reading of it. While the words add up to meaningful sentences and (at times) argue for specific perspectives on art and

popular culture, the whole of the project is far more important than its individual components. Steeves argues that life cannot be divorced from art and vice versa, and as we read with him, he intentionally makes that so even for us. Through his style, through the number of beautifully reproduced color photographs spread throughout the volume, and through his presence with us as we read, Steeves makes the aesthetic and the ethics of aesthetics felt. I do not believe that his aim is for this work to necessarily be quoted and argued with or about even in the manner I have done in this brief review. Instead, his book requires a different sort of commitment to lived analysis and engagement, intermingling presence, absence, ethics, and aesthetics in the everyday. Having been present with me as I read, this was Steeves's challenge to me. Now, present as you read, I pass that challenge on to you.

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Stoddart, Scott F. & Michael Samuel, eds. *True Detective: Critical Essays on the HBO Series*. Lexington, 2018.

The first two seasons of *True Detective* are a challenging set of texts for an edited collection of scholarly essays. The two anthological seasons diverge wildly in terms of premise, tone, and setting. Moreover, the first season received almost universal critical praise while critics roundly panned the follow-up season. Scott Stoddart and Michael Samuel's *True Detective: Critical Essays on the HBO Series* reflects and addresses these two sets of challenges by including a diverse array of essays that draws more heavily from the critically acclaimed first season. A third season has subsequently aired after the book's publication.

True Detective: Critical Essays on the HBO Series is the second collection of essays published about the series. Jacob Graham and Tom Sparrow's *True Detective and Philosophy* was the first. Rust Cohle, one of the protagonists of Season One, is an amateur philosopher, specializing in pessimism, nihilism, and anti-natalism. Consequently, Season One particularly lends itself to philosophical analysis, and several of the authors in Stoddart and Samuel's collection focus on the philosophical implications of the show. In one of the strongest essays in the

collection, “The Secret Fate of all Pessimism,” Rich Elmore examines Nietzsche’s notion of eternal recurrence as explored by Rust Cohle in Season One. The most oft-quoted line from *True Detective* is Cohle’s declaration that “time is a flat circle.” Here, Cohle is engaging the notion of eternal return, which has Nietzsche positing the rhetorical question: What if the life we live we have already lived an infinite number of times and will continue to live an infinite number of times? For Nietzsche, each person should ask if they would choose to live their life if they had to live it on repeat. As Elmore explains, “In the face of eternal recurrence, it does not matter what one does, chooses, or wills, since every apparent ‘decision’ is merely the repetition of something one already did in a past life. Hence, eternal recurrence is proof of the illusory nature of decisions, development, progress, and resolution” (86). This is the crux of Nietzsche’s nihilism, as Nietzsche believes that most would not choose to live their life *ad infinitum*; however, Elmore suggests that in the final episode of Season One, Cohle has a change of heart. He writes that “Rust’s worldview changes over the course of the show, morphing from pessimism into fatalism” (85-86). Elmore challenges the myriad critics who read Season One as an endorsement of nihilism. Instead, he sees the final episode as a rejection of the Nietzschean nihilism that the season explores through Cohle: time is not, in fact, a flat circle.

One strength of the collection is the multiple analytical and disciplinary approaches of the authors. In addition to philosophical analysis, authors employ literary analysis, meta-narrative analysis, critical gender analysis, and often use multiple strategies in their critical readings of the show. One particularly captivating chapter is Helen Williams’s “Petrochemical Families,” in which she takes the Louisiana landscape that provides the setting for Season One as a frame for understanding the disturbing gender politics that haunt the entire season. For Williams, the key to understanding the mysteries that abound in the season is to read the narrative as cyclical, rather than linear. She uses the show’s bayou setting to stand in for the cycles of destruction that petrochemical industrialization has wrought on the Louisiana coastline. She contends that the “tension between industrial expansion and the repeated ‘return’ of natural forces in the form of flooding in particular [...] forms a fitting backdrop for a narrative largely preoccupied with exploring cycles of conflict and competing pressure” (23). In her schema, the violence that inheres in the show, mostly directed toward women, has a deep history in the land. Just as the petrochemical plants enact cyclical violence upon the landscape of the bayou, the patriarchal culture imparts cyclical violence

onto the women and girls who live there. She argues that “surrounded by destructive cycles of weather systems causing untold damage to the natural and man-made landscape [...] it is perhaps little wonder that these processes of repetition [...] are normalized into becoming the central controlling forces either organizing or ruling the lives of the various men and women in the narrative” (46-47). The show’s protagonists are only able to solve the case when they understand the ways in which the cyclical patterns of destruction are deeply imbricated into the culture’s cyclically repeated patriarchal violence, metaphorically represented by the ecologically cyclical destruction in which they are working.

While given short shrift compared to Season One, Stoddart and Samuel’s collection does examine the second season, which features an entirely different cast and moves from the swamps of Louisiana to the City of Angels. The last three contributions to the collection examine Season Two through the lens of Greek tragedy, a natural point of entry as one of the protagonists in the season is named Antigone (Ani). In “Names So Deep and Names So True,” Isabell Große reads Season Two through Sophocles’ *Antigone* and positions Ani as a “gender transgressor” (140). For Große, “Ani portrays herself as a modern version of Sophocles’ unfeminine heroine Antigone, but by the end of the season she is reduced to playing the role of a mother” (143). Große argues that critics largely lambasted Season One for its lack of anything resembling a female character with any sort of agency, and that Ani offered perhaps the only hope in Season Two for a feminist charter. For her, a cursory reading of the show would reveal that *True Detective* failed to offer any kind of feminist agency for Ani. Because by the end of the series she is reduced to playing the mother, “from a feminist point of view, this constituted one of the series’ most severe disappointments” (150). However, she offers an intertextual reading of Season Two and *Antigone* that reads agency into Ani’s character. She explains that “if one reads Ani’s character as an adaptation of Sophocles’ Antigone though, she remains true to her script” (150). In Große’s analysis, one cannot assess Ani merely within the confines of the text; one needs to understand her intertextually by understanding the context of her namesake. She maintains that “*Antigone* can be read as a representation of disparities, not only between private and public norms, but also and more significantly between the sexes and gender stereotypes. What Ani shares with Antigone is her self-confident deviation from conventional expectations of femininity” (145).

Stoddart and Samuel’s *True Detective: Critical Essays on the HBO Series* makes a meaningful contribution to the field of television studies. However, the

range of its essays make it a useful collection for scholars of literature, women's and gender studies, popular culture studies, communication, American Studies, philosophy, and other related fields. The diverse scholarly approaches of the chapters reflect both the range of disciplines that are currently invested in the study of television, and the wildly divergent nature of the first two seasons of *True Detective*.

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Sullivan, Randall. *The Curse of Oak Island: The Story of the World's Longest Treasure Hunt*. Atlantic Monthly, 2018.

Oak Island, situated in Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia, has been a site of intrigue since the alleged discovery of the Money Pit in the late 18th century. The failure to discover a treasure of significant monetary or historical value has led to much speculation as to what (if anything) is buried on the island and who is responsible. This speculation has transformed the island into a cultural icon as it has been featured in documentaries, served as the backdrop for numerous novels, and currently acts as the setting for the popular television series *The Curse of Oak Island*. Randall Sullivan's book *The Curse of Oak Island: The Story of the World's Longest Treasure Hunt* is one of the more recent texts to explore the history of the Oak Island mystery and its associated theories. Sullivan is no stranger to the island as he wrote an article for *Rolling Stone* magazine, published in January 2004, that explored the history of the treasure hunt and some of the theories circulating as to the nature of the treasure. However, Sullivan was concerned that he "accepted the semiofficial legend" of the island "without sufficient examination" when he wrote the article (1). Sullivan's objective for *The Curse of Oak Island* was to write the

most comprehensive investigation of the Oak Island mystery and explore the topic with a more critical lens than he was able to achieve previously.

The first part of *The Curse of Oak Island* examines the history of the Money Pit's discovery and deconstructs some of the myths surrounding its discovery. Sullivan weaves together some of the earlier known texts that recount the discovery of the Money Pit to present an argument that the narrative is "mostly true" (7). Some of his reservations are directed at the part that entails McGinnis travelling "to a mysterious uninhabited island where he was startled by the discovery of a weird depression in the ground" (14). Sullivan continues his examination of the Oak Island mystery by providing glimpses into the activities of some of the major and minor treasure hunt companies that have operated on the island leading up to the present. This provides a list of the discoveries made on Oak Island, some of which have been carbon-dated to provide a window to narrow down possible candidates of who may have created the Money Pit. Furthermore, through this analysis of past activity on the island, Sullivan identifies patterns to which Oak Island treasure hunters have fallen victim since the mid-nineteenth century: the assumption that using more sophisticated technology than previous treasure searches would play a role in extracting the treasure. The damage done to the island by the excavations of failed treasure hunts has made it more difficult for future operations to be successful (50).

It is evident that Sullivan believes a treasure of some kind was buried on the island, and he has identified various theories that could possibly account for the nature of the treasure. Sullivan provides a comprehensive investigation into the origins of some of these theories and presents information that challenges their validity. After his analysis, Sullivan tends to suggest there are varying degrees of flaws in these theories, but no evidence exists that categorically disproves many of them either, which Sullivan concedes is part of the "perplexing thing about Oak Island" (391). This comprehensive analysis allows Sullivan to construct a spectrum with theories possessing minor flaws positioned on one extreme end of the spectrum and debunked theories on the other extreme. Sullivan is then able to position each theory on different points of this spectrum. Sullivan deviates from the belief that the Oak Island treasure is simply one of precious metals and stones as he believes the existence of Nolan's Cross and the amount of labor required to construct the flood tunnels suggests a treasure of religious, spiritual or historical value has been hidden on the island (245). Furthermore, the relationships that Sullivan has formed with some of the treasure hunters who have dominated the Oak

Island story from the 1960s to the present not only offers tantalizing insight into their respective theories regarding the Money Pit, but a well-informed perspective on some of the activity that has occurred on the island. The final chapter tries to connect with the title of the book and the television series as it examines some of the paranormal activity that people claim to have experienced on the island. Although Sullivan discusses the six deaths that have occurred in trying to recover the treasure, his book omits a discussion of one of the foundational legends that the television series emphasizes: the treasure will only be recovered after the seventh person has died.

One of the greatest strengths in Sullivan's text is the insights he provides via his participation on the television series *The Curse of Oak Island*. Sullivan's presence on Oak Island for approximately one month during the filming of season four helped him to present tantalizing insights into the personalities and the relationships of people involved in the series. For instance, Sullivan notes the suspicions the Lagina brothers harbored that the producers of the series engineered the discovery of a Spanish coin dated to 1652 that was shown in the final episode of the first season; a finding that helped convince Marty to continue with the treasure hunt. The producers repudiated these suspicions, but Sullivan notes the Lagina brothers threatened to cancel the series if the producers were caught lying on that point (338). Furthermore, Sullivan is also able to offer insight into the behind-the-scenes dynamics and decision-making process of the show. Sullivan sheds light as to why Daniel Ronnstam was invited onto the island to discuss his Baconian theory in season two instead of Petter Amundsen, who made an appearance on the show in the first season. Sullivan's investigation into this revealed that Amundsen wanted archaeologists involved when major excavations occur on the island so that artefacts and markers connected to his theory were not destroyed. Unfortunately, Amundsen's collaboration with some of the individuals responsible for creating the Peterson-Rafuse bill was interpreted as an action that could present major barriers in recovering the treasure, making him "persona non grata across the entire production" (339-40). Sullivan's interactions with Kevin Burns, the one responsible for creating the series, also reveals his perspectives as he was "continually surprised by viewers' obsessive fascination with Oak Island...[which]...even infected the show's crew" (390). Sullivan's book sheds a little more light on why individuals were willing to spend fortunes on their Oak Island quests.

As noted above, Sullivan's main motivation behind writing this book was to become more acquainted with the Oak Island legend, and he accomplished this in an easy-to-read book geared toward a popular audience. Although some errors have crept into the pages of his book, Sullivan does an admirable job exploring the history of the island and the origins of many of the theories as to what may be buried on the island, and he provides the reader with insight on the current efforts of the Lagina brothers to discover the treasure. Sullivan is convinced the Oak Island mystery will not be cracked in the immediate future, which is not an unreasonable belief given that the mystery has eluded treasure hunters for over two centuries. That said, Sullivan offers up a tantalizing question for his readers and fans of the television series to consider: the fact that the television series is so interconnected with the Lagina brothers' search for the treasure forces one to consider the future of that search should the series be cancelled before the treasure is extracted (396-7). With a seventh season coming, we will have to wait at least a little more time before that question is answered.

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Williams, Monica. *The Sex Offender Housing Dilemma*. New York UP, 2018.

How would you feel if you were notified that a "sexually violent predator" (SVP) was moving in next door? Author Monica Williams reports that many people not only feel moral outrage but take up action to block SVP placements in their neighborhoods. In the book *The Sex Offender Housing Dilemma*, Williams closely examines specific community responses to SVP placement. More than 750,000 individuals are registered as sex offenders in the United States, and California's sex offender registry alone includes more than 120,000 individuals (199).

Williams focused on three cities in California to analyze their activism resisting sex offender housing. She calls the three cities Ranchito, Deserton, and East City. Ranchito was an unincorporated town in Southern California with 20,000 mostly white residents. Desterton was also unincorporated, but rural, with only 200 residents. In northern California, East City was urban, with a substantial proportion

of racial and ethnic minorities, persistent poverty, and higher than average crime rates (17). Williams argues that despite portrayals of communities panicking at specific sex offender individuals, communities typically focus their frustration at the institutions superseding the local control.

After the introduction, Williams devotes one chapter to each city. She uses legal documents, interviews, and public neighborhood meetings to analyze the three community's activism styles. The thesis of the book is that activists rarely blamed individual offenders for their housing need, but mainly aimed their advocacy at institutional decision makers (6). She encourages re-framing the SVP housing conversation to include local community members. That could release the tension of their lack of control over unfavorable people and projects in the community.

Additionally, she uses Ranchito, Deserton, and East City to illustrate various tactics neighborhoods employ to oppose sex offender placements. Their strategies were influenced by the socioeconomic demographics and historical marginalization of the cities. For instance, Ranchito, a community used to governing themselves, employed political mobilization. Deserton, used legal strategies because legal influence had helped them in the past. In East City, "orientations to both types of authority had contributed to the community's oppression and disenfranchisement, neither political nor legal mobilization took hold as a central strategy for opposition" (201). Ultimately, Ranchito assembled enough political sway to stop the SVP placement. Neither Deserton nor East City were able to block their SVP placement.

Even the term SVP is problematic. In California, the term includes all variations of sexual misconduct. Only four states (including California) do not have a tiered system of naming sexual offenders based on the severity of their crime. The label is an obstacle in persuading landlords to rent to SVPs and makes it near impossible for politicians to support SVP placements. Williams explains, "In effect, the sex offender housing dilemma has become a zero-sum game in which any advocate for effective housing solutions is perceived as threatening 'good' citizens. To remain in office, politicians have little choice but to speak out against policies that would encourage sex offenders to live in their districts" (199). Not only does the SVP label and SVP notifications to the community make it more difficult for sex offenders to find housing placements, but without reintegration and connection to a community, the likelihood of reoffending is higher.

The closing chapter promises "Solving the Sex Offender Housing Dilemma," but lacks many practical steps. The intricacy of housing sex offenders is clear, and

while many people suggest long-term incarceration or segregating sex offenders forever as solutions, Williams argues that is not feasible or helpful. The incarceration system is overcrowded and overrepresents people of color, so long-term incarceration of sex offenders would only stress an already broken system. Segregating sex offenders will also not prevent new sex crimes from occurring (205). The majority of perpetrators know their victims, so the assailants are “already in our backyard”. After refuting the suggestions most lay people would give, Williams fails to suggest how to house SVPs.

Her major appeal for change is local governments inviting community participation in local decisions. I appreciate her advocacy that local communities should have a voice in institutional decisions related to their community, especially placement of SVPs. However, I wanted tangible ideas for sex offender housing. Williams quickly mentions Circles of Support and Accountability (COSAs), in which volunteers create a network to hold sex reoffenders accountable after release. COSAs have been implemented for high-risk offenders in a number of countries, including the United States, and they have contributed to successful reintegration efforts (207). I wish Williams’s book included an exploration of programs that have had successful outcomes.

Overall, the book complicates and subverts typical public knowledge about housing sex offenders. Williams writes, “While communities do react to sex offenders out of fear, their opposition also involves deep-seated, ongoing concerns about how political and legal institutions have differentially empowered some communities to maintain local control over local issues” (203). I imagine readers will begin to assess sexual offender housing regulations in their own community, likely finding no easy answers.

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Zoglin, Richard. *Elvis in Vegas: How the King Reinvented the Las Vegas Show*. Simon & Schuster, 2019.

In 1992, the United States Post Office offered Americans a chance to vote on two possible images of Elvis Presley for a stamp commemorating the singer. The first,

depicting the 1950s Elvis, triumphed over the second which depicted the Elvis of the early 1970s, by a factor of three to one. Synonymous with Las Vegas, the white-jumpsuited figure of the second image has become a cultural signifier of kitsch, embodied by a multitude of Elvis impersonators and film, television, and musical parodies. The Vegas-era Elvis has also come to embody something of an American understanding of tragedy, with the all-conquering hero reduced to an overweight, drug-impaired joke barely capable of performing even as his lavish lifestyle made it necessary to do so. One of the great strengths of Richard Zoglin's new book, *Elvis in Vegas: How the King Reinvented the Las Vegas Show*, is that it reminds its readers of why the stamp vote was mistaken. The Elvis who returned to live shows in 1969 after a nine-year hiatus spent making increasingly atrocious movies was, if not the most revolutionary Elvis, then certainly the greatest performer. The brilliance of the 1969-1970 shows, as Zoglin makes clear, were unmatched by any of his performances before or after, not even the jaw-dropping 1968 comeback special on ABC.

Las Vegas was, Zoglin argues, a big part of Elvis's identity, even before he became the first major star to establish a regular residency in the city, paving the way for later big names such as Celine Dion, Elton John, and Britney Spears. The book opens with an account of Elvis's disastrous first appearance in the city in 1956 when a brash young upstart with greasy hair and cringeworthy stage patter bombed with an older alternately appalled and disinterested audience. Despite this rare early career failure Elvis made Vegas a regular recreational stopover, especially during his Hollywood years. As he rarely gambled, Elvis preferred taking in the Vegas shows and the showgirls, and Zoglin suggests Liberace was a significant influence. Although Zoglin dismisses Elvis's 1964 movie *Viva Las Vegas* as "a pretty bad film" (105), perhaps unfairly so, his account of Elvis's affair with his co-star Ann-Margret captures her importance to him in a way that underlines the unsuitability of his 1967 marriage to the far-less worldly Priscilla Ann Wagner. (Zoglin fails to note that the singer had been involved with the woman who became his wife since she was fourteen years-old, behavior that might now demand a reconsideration of his legacy).

Zoglin's dismissal of *Viva Las Vegas* also extends to the lyrics of its title song which he criticizes as "some of the clunkiest in the Elvis canon" by having "three *theres* in two lines!" (106, italics in original). This strange criticism reflects some of the book's weaknesses. In the first instance, by focusing on the words over the feel of the song Zoglin seems to miss why it is significant (and thus, why it has

been covered by everybody from the Dead Kennedys to Shawn Colvin to Bruce Springsteen). In the second, Zoglin occasionally gets lost in the details and also frequently gets those details wrong. There are not, for example, three “theres” in the opening two lines of *Viva Las Vegas*, there are two and one “they’re,” an error made all the more egregious by Zoglin quoting the relevant lyrics immediately before making his erroneous assertion. It is not his only mistake. Early on in the book he asserts that Elvis died from “a drug overdose” (18), a claim that remains unsubstantiated (not least because the autopsy report was sealed). It is telling that having made this bold assertion, Zoglin walks it back towards the end of the book, asserting that of the fourteen different drugs found in the singer’s system, “at least five” were “in potentially toxic doses” (236). This is quite a different claim and it is not clear why Zoglin did not seek to fix the contradiction. Similarly, Zoglin asserts that in his later shows, Elvis began “performing a medley of patriotic songs [...] that he dubbed ‘An American Trilogy’” (232), a medley that was put together and named by country music singer Mickey Newbury in 1971. Such criticism might seem unnecessarily picayunish, but there are many such errors and the reader might be forgiven for being concerned about the veracity of some of the other claims made by the author.

These concerns aside, there is much of value in the book. Almost half of it is given over to a history of the development of Las Vegas as desert resort. Many stories exist of acts large and small who made Vegas a major attraction. The book also contains a valuable account of the city’s racial politics: a remarkably long-lasting commitment to Jim Crow segregation aimed at appeasing white southerners who flocked to Vegas in large numbers. Above all, however, the book offers a compelling glimpse into a brief moment when Elvis Presley cared about, and felt challenged by, what he was doing and the incredible artistry that he produced in the then-unlikely environment of a Las Vegas showroom.

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