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CONSTRUCTED LANGUAGES AND POWER

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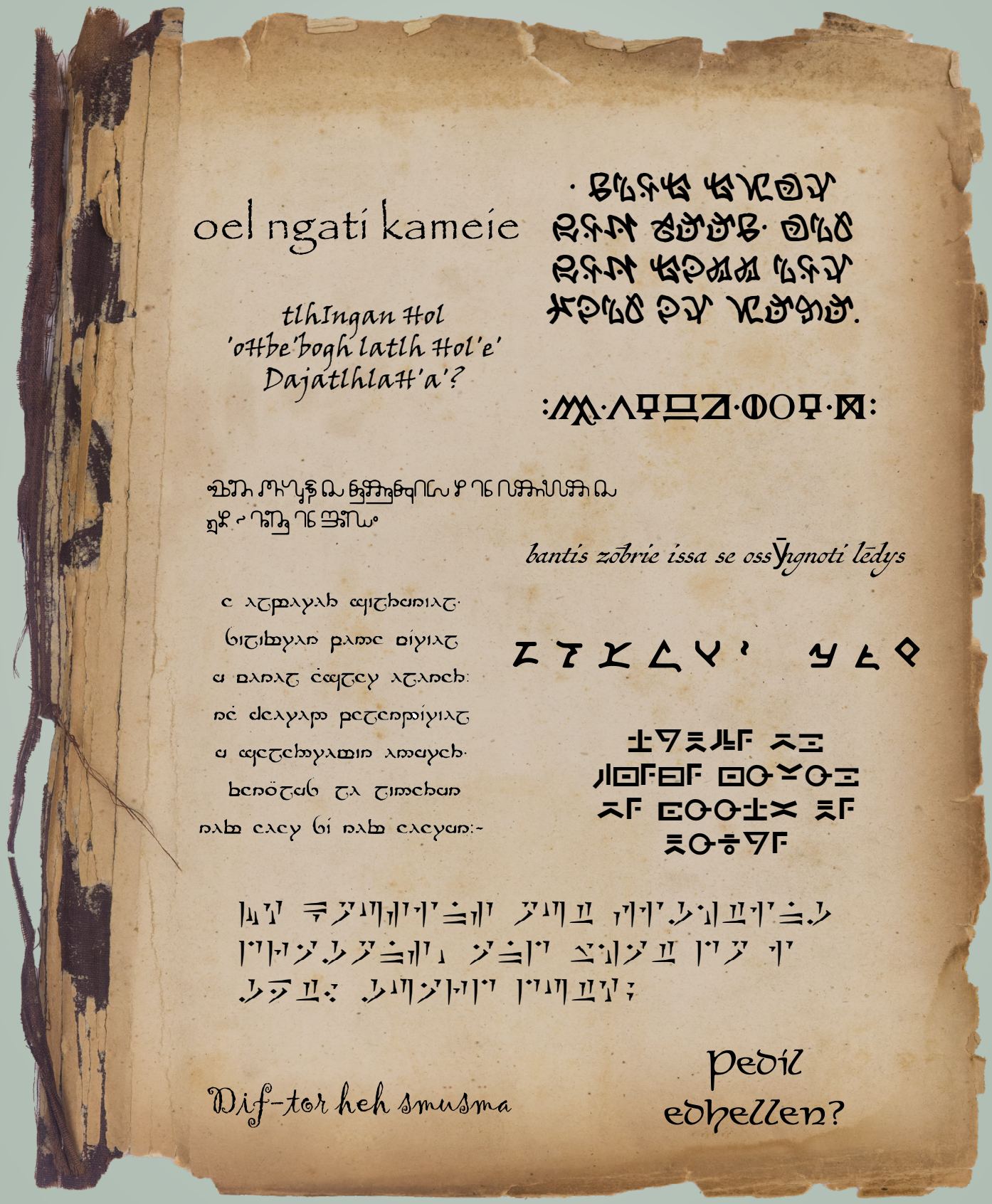

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CARRIELYNN D. REINHARD AND CHATGPT[1]

Popular culture, in all its diverse forms, is a product of human creativity, expression, and innovation. Popular culture focuses on cultural artifacts. Everything we consider as popular culture, including music, literature, film, fashion, sports, language, and more, is created by humans. These cultural artifacts are the result of human thought, imagination, and effort. We use symbols and texts to convey our authentic interactions and interpretations of objective reality, which includes nature and one another. Thus, popular culture is an example of our co-constructing a subjective reality, as popular culture is subjective and culturally dependent. What is considered popular culture varies across different societies and over time. The concept of "popularity" itself is shaped by the beliefs, values, and tastes of human communities. Popular culture is not static. It constantly evolves and changes as humans create, adapt, and reinterpret cultural elements. This dynamic nature allows popular culture to remain relevant and reflective of societal shifts.

In essence, the idea that all popular culture is constructed by humans emphasizes the agency and creativity of individuals and communities in shaping the cultural landscape. It also highlights the power of culture to influence and reflect the collective consciousness of society, making popular culture a vibrant and ever-evolving aspect of human existence. Humans, as creators of popular culture, have the power to influence and impact society. Cultural products can shape opinions, beliefs, behaviors, and social norms. They can also serve as a mirror that reflects the collective consciousness of a given time and place. As a form of expression, popular culture serves as a means for individuals and communities to communicate their ideas, emotions, identities, and experiences. Through popular culture, people express their creativity and connect with others who share similar cultural touchstones.

[1] As an experiment, this introduction was written with the generative AI program from OpenAI, ChatGPT, to demonstrate the extent to which this computer program has learned how to read and write in the constructed language that is modern English. You can see our entire conversation at chat.openai.com/share/fbe4b70a-f514-45d6-9829-93584e6ec920. It was then fascinating to see how the Microsoft Word AI interacted with and corrected ChatGPT’s grammar, as Microsoft deemed some of ChatGPT’s academic flourish unnecessary.

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Thus, popular culture is often intertwined with cultural identity. The choices people make in terms of what they consume and create in popular culture can reflect their individual and group identities. It is a way for people to assert and celebrate their cultural heritage and values. Popular culture fosters shared experiences and a sense of belonging among individuals and communities. It provides a common cultural language through which people can relate to each other, share stories, and engage in cultural dialogues.

In the diverse tapestry of popular culture, one thread has emerged over the decades as a testament to human creativity and linguistic innovation: constructed languages, often referred to as "conlangs." These meticulously crafted linguistic creations have transcended their humble origins in literature, film, and gaming to become a dynamic force in contemporary popular culture. This special issue is dedicated to unraveling the intricate web of constructed languages, shedding light on their profound influence and multifaceted impact on our global society.

Constructed languages are far more than just a means of communication; they are cultural artifacts and a reflection of the complex interplay between imagination, language, and culture. Through the pages of this issue, scholars, linguists, enthusiasts, and aficionados delve into the fascinating world of conlangs through in-depth exploration and critical analysis of constructed languages, their evolution, and their profound effects on the realms of literature, film, television, gaming, art, and more.

Constructed languages, or conlangs, matter for popular culture for a multitude of reasons, as they play a significant role in shaping and enriching various forms of entertainment and artistic expression. According to ChatGPT, here are some key reasons why conlangs matter for popular culture:

1. World-Building: Conlangs are essential tools for world-building in literature, film, and gaming. They contribute to the creation of immersive and believable fictional worlds by adding depth and authenticity to the cultures and societies depicted. For example, J.R.R. Tolkien's Elvish languages add a layer of cultural richness to Middle-earth in "The Lord of the Rings."
2. Cultural Identity: Conlangs are often used to represent and explore cultural identity. They provide a means for authors, filmmakers, and creators to express the uniqueness of fictional or imagined cultures. Conlangs, like Klingon from "Star Trek," have become iconic symbols of the cultures they represent.

3. Fan Engagement: Conlangs have a dedicated fanbase, and they can serve to engage and captivate fans. Fans often learn and use these languages, fostering a sense of community and participation within fan communities.
4. Inclusivity and Diversity: Constructed languages can help promote inclusivity and diversity in popular culture. Creators can use conlangs to incorporate underrepresented languages and cultures, thereby broadening the representation of various linguistic and cultural groups.
5. Linguistic Innovation: Conlangs are a testament to human linguistic creativity. They provide a platform for linguistic experimentation and innovation. Creators often develop entirely new grammatical structures, writing systems, and phonologies, expanding the possibilities of human language.
6. Artistic Expression: Conlangs are an art form in themselves. They offer creators a unique medium for artistic expression and exploration. The creation of conlangs requires attention to detail, creativity, and linguistic expertise, which can be a form of artistry.
7. Language Learning: Conlangs can be used as tools for language learning. Learning a constructed language, like Esperanto or Dothraki, can be an engaging and enjoyable way to acquire language skills. This adds an educational dimension to the use of conlangs in popular culture.
8. Economic Impact: Popular culture products featuring conlangs often achieve commercial success. The presence of a well-developed conlang can increase the marketability and global appeal of books, films, and games, contributing to the economic success of these industries.
9. Cross-Cultural Communication: Conlangs can facilitate cross-cultural communication and understanding. By exploring the intricacies of constructed languages, people from different cultural backgrounds can find common ground and foster mutual appreciation for linguistic and cultural diversity.

In conclusion, conlangs are not mere linguistic curiosities; they are powerful tools that shape the narratives, characters, and immersive worlds in popular culture. They contribute to the richness and authenticity of storytelling, promote diversity and inclusivity, and serve as a source of artistic innovation and creativity. For all these reasons, conlangs matter significantly in the realm of popular culture, making them a fascinating and integral part of our entertainment landscape.

“Introduction”: Conlangs and Power

MATTHEW BARTON, KYOKO KISHIMOTO, MICHAEL DANDO, AND SHARON COGDILL[i]

Constructed languages, or conlangs, have risen in popularity in the past few decades, thanks mostly to their heightened media exposure in video series and films like *Game of Thrones* (Dothraki, High Valyrian), *Avatar* (Na’vi), *Star Trek: Discovery* (Klingon), *The Expanse* (Belter), and *The Rings of Power* (Quenya, Sindarin, Dwarvish, Orkish). Indeed, even *Star Wars,* not known for being particularly concerned with scientific fidelity unlike much of sci-fi, has even developed a conlang for *The Mandalorian* and *The Book of Boba Fett*, which feature what we might call a proto-conlang in the form of signed and voiced languages for the Tuskens. Meanwhile, the popular language-learning app Duolingo offers programs in several conlangs, including High Valyrian, Dothraki, Klingon, and Sindarin as well as the historically important conlang Esperanto.

Why would anyone want to learn a conlang? Ramsey L. Cardwell, an assessment scientist who blogs for Duolingo, offers these reasons in “Why Learn a Made-Up Language?”:

1. To “connect and communicate” with other speakers at conventions and other fan events
2. To express yourself creatively: “Imagine fictional cultures and explore the possibilities of humanity’s future”
3. To develop “metalinguistic awareness,” or the “ability to consciously think about different properties of a language such as pronunciation and grammar” (Cardwell)

Also, people express their fandom of a video series, film, or book by learning and speaking a conlang (or reading one, if a conscript exists).

So far, most scholarly attention paid to conlangs is from a linguistic perspective. Some academic linguistics programs have even found that teaching conlangs is useful for attracting new students. Many popular conlangs are designed to be easier to learn than natural languages. As students of popular culture, however, we are less interested in the linguistic aspects of conlangs than in what they can teach us about power and marginalization. What roles do conlangs play in shaping our

ideology? How does learning, hearing, or speaking them influence our perceptions about the way things ought to be, both on and off the screen?

We all know that language plays a strong role in our everyday lives and is never a tool that functions simply for communication. As Gloria Anzaldúa writes, “ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity,” and “as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate” (59). Though Anzaldúa is writing about natural languages (Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex, and others) and not conlangs, her point that a power imbalance is at work when the dominant group’s language is accommodated – or, in the case of sci-fi and fantasy, when the audience is accommodated by the universal use of American English – is relevant in understanding the ideological role that conlangs play in popular culture. For example, when an audience hears Belters (*The Expanse*) or Klingons (*Star Trek*) speak to each other in their languages instead of English, an argument is being conveyed that these characters have legitimacy and subject positions. A fan learning these languages might well be developing not just a “metalinguistic awareness,” but also a rhetorical awareness that their language (and the culture that produced it) is but one of many possibilities, and the choice to speak in one language rather than another may have something to do with power. Having a Klingon speak Klingon is often an important creative as well as rhetorical choice, especially in a fictional context where a “Universal T ranslator” exists that could easily – at least in the fictional world – render their language in English.

The world of conlangs goes far beyond conlangs created for novels, television, and films. Perhaps the most well-known is Esperanto, developed by L. L. Zamenhof (“Esperanto”). Created in 1887, Esperanto now has over a hundred organizations and two million speakers (including J. R. R. Tolkien). Intended to become an “international language” that is “politically and socially neutral,” Esperanto is classified as an “international auxiliary language” (Peterson 8). Though Esperanto has been used in many fictional works, including by a young William Shatner in *Incubus* in 1966, the conlangs that interest us here are those intended primarily for fictional purposes, often to add richness, believability, and subjectivity to a fictional people and their world. Convenient devices like *Star Trek*’s Universal Translator aside, why would we expect people from different planets to speak American English? Increasingly audiences find characters speaking gibberish as an “alien” language unsatisfactory, and studios hire a professional conlanger (usually a trained linguist) to write a language both for the characters and for the audience.

Interview with David J. Peterson

One such conlanger is David J. Peterson, whom we interviewed for this collection. The creator of around 50 languages, Peterson is perhaps best known for his work on Dothraki and High Valyrian in *Game of Thrones* and its spin-off *The House of the Dragon*. He argues that a conlang is a language that has been "*consciously* created by one or more individuals in its fullest form" (emphasis on original, 18). For Peterson, "fullest form" means a language is a "fully functional linguistic system" (18). Though not all conlangs are created by trained linguists, they should (from Peterson's perspective) be compatible with what modern linguists understand about human languages. For example, a conlang should have coherent rules for aspects of language like noun case and number, interrogatives, negation, and so on, such that someone could articulate new statements in that language in a predictable fashion. Thus, for Peterson, conlanging is compatible with the "hard science fiction" tradition, which values scientific plausibility in questions of space travel or advanced technology. Just as a hard-science-fiction audience would reject stories in which the known laws of physics are ignored, a conlanger of Peterson's stamp would likewise reject stories in which an "alien language" violates well-established principles of linguistics.

However, just as not all great science fiction is hard science fiction, conlangs that are not "fully functional" in the linguistics sense also have a place. In fact, unlike J. R. R. Tolkien's writings about Middle-earth, many books that have a version of a conlang in them – like Edgar Rice Burroughs (in his *Barsoom* series), Ursula Le Guin, George R. R. Martin, and James S. A. Corey (pen name for Daniel Abraham and Ty Franck) – do not have fully functional languages, especially a grammar, but they do have the beginnings of a vocabulary, which is often just nouns. Not all of even Tolkien's conlangs are completely worked out, and Peterson himself has a con-sign-lang for the Atreides in *Dune* that is not a full conlang.

In our interview, we asked professional conlanger David J. Peterson to talk more about the role of conlangers in video series and films, the relationship between conlangs and culture (or worldbuilding), and conlangs and conscripts in different shows as well as whether they should be copyrighted or not. Conlangers may find themselves at odds with producers or authors who insist the language should sound "foreign" or "harsh," Peterson says, but he considers conlanging an art and believes conlangers should have as much control over the process of creating and

implementing a conlang as possible (Peterson "Interview"). He describes his inspirations and methods for creating conlangs and conscripts and the impact his and similar work has made on popular culture. For Peterson, although we do not commonly talk about how important it is, the quality of a conlang depends on "how much the language creator knows about language and creation, what their intent is, and their context and purpose for creating it" (Peterson "Interview"). He also discusses the many challenges he has faced because of the realities of television and film production, where he often works with actors, producers, and other writers with limited time and resources. He talks candidly about working on the conlangs for *Game of Thrones*, *Defiance*, *Vampire Academy*, *Star-Crossed*, and *The 100* – and even how *Star Wars* handles languages. He also gives us details about what Tolkien, Marc Okrand (Klingon), and George R. R. Martin did well and badly and what they did and didn't care about.

The "Conlanger Test"

Further, as with language, conlangs go beyond being means of communication and expression into the territories of socio-linguistics and rhetoric. Used in a way that locates them in a culture, they can challenge the power difference among groups and reveal the power relations between languages, race, and groups. For us, the ontological question of whether this or that conlang is somehow a "true" or fully developed one is not very interesting. What is fascinating, though, is how a conlang *functions* in the narrative and how power and marginalization are shaped by how it is used. Tusken, for example, is not a full language, but how it functions is extremely important to the video series it appears in. What we have found is that depending on how they are deployed and interpreted, conlangs can challenge or reinforce hegemonies, not just for groups of speakers within a fictional setting but to the actual world of the audience.

The 1985 Bechdel-Wallace test for the validity of female characters in films was designed to expose structural misogyny. It was translated for race by Nikesh Shukla (Bechdel, Latif). Recently Ava DuVernay and sisters Nadia Latif and Laila Latif developed separate sets of questions that look more deeply into structural racism in film and video series (Latif, DuVernay). Our Conlanger Test is built on these earlier tests that critique the way Others are written into the artifacts of popular culture, focusing in our case on cultural artifacts that have conlangs. Like the earlier tests for misogyny and racism, our test hopes to reveal systemic forces

at work in the fictional cultures that have conlangs and in the world we live in. Looking at those characters who have the conlang, then:

1. Do some of them have names?
2. Are any of them individuated?
3. Do any of them talk to each other in that conlang, and are we able to understand them?
4. What do they talk about? Do characters speak to each other in the conlang about anything other than the dominant species? Do they, for example, have normal conversations about their own people and things in their culture?
5. How is their literacy understood? Does a conscript exist? A writing system is not necessary, of course, but if one is present, is it used to communicate within the conlang community or does it only provide historical or cultural context? Is it a "flavor conscript" (Schreyer "Constructed") to give the idea of another world and culture or an actual, fully realized constructed written language? (Schreyer "Interview")
6. How often is the conlang spoken? Is it being used to "set the scene," or is it used throughout? (Schreyer "Interview")
7. Do we see subjectivity for any of those individuals and for the group itself? That is, do we see anything from their point of view? If so, how is that done? With camera focus, with language, with the development of empathy in the audience?
8. Are we shown any social structures, like family units?
9. Are we shown their everyday lives, like cooking, sleeping or just hanging out?
10. Are we shown a culture for those characters that suggests they have a history and a spirituality?
11. Do they get to tell their story in their own voice? Do we hear or see their unmediated language? (Mediations might be, e.g., C-3PO or another character, the Universal Translator.)
12. Is there evidence that the conlang was developed from the languages and cultures of marginalized people? If so, does it appear that vocabulary, grammatical structures, phonemes, etc., from historically underrepresented groups were borrowed ethically?
13. Do these beings "fulfill harmful, simplistic, or down-right racist stereotypes"? (DuVernay)

14. If the artifact is a film or video series, are marginalized people included in the production team?

This list of questions is not a taxonomy to define successful representation of Other or even to evaluate a conlang. (A *no* answer does not guarantee that the conlang is racist or misogynist and a *yes* answer does not guarantee a progressive stamp of approval.) Our attempt is to reveal the ways power differentials might be working in the book, film or series that might be difficult to see clearly without understanding how those differentials work in the outside world. It describes, based on our analysis of them, what makes for example the Klingons have subject positions in *Discovery* (see Barton, et al., in this issue) or the Tuskens seem like a people in *The Mandalorian* and *The Book of Boba Fett*.

The Conlanger Test – or the Conlanger Cultural Artifact Test, Schreyer’s suggested title – which helps us analyze the *function* of conlangs, serves as a beginning point to understanding the power dynamics at work in fictions with conlangs. All these tests expose problematic practices and systemic racism or misogyny in the real world. Rather than stopping with whether the representation is good or bad, we need to look at structural issues such as how the representations perpetuate hegemony or justify colonization. Otherwise, we risk reverting to the practices Edward Said criticizes, conceiving of and representing other, non-human cultures in ways that are just reframed versions of colonial discourse, like the familiar tropes of the frontier saloon, the White Savior, and the open marketplace as well as, for example, appropriating indigenous cultures and languages “for the purposes of control and external dominion” rather than “coexistence and humanistic enlargement of horizons” (Said iv).

Interview with Christine Schreyer

We are interested in how fans use conlangs and what their actions reveal about power relations in the real world and asked Christine Schreyer, who is a scholar and a language creator, to talk about how she sees fans’ engagement with conlangs. She researches revitalization of indigenous languages and has also studied conlangs, especially Na’vi, its fans and their language use. Referencing the work of Mark Duffett, she discusses how studying conlangs and fandoms can reveal insights into the operation of power within and beyond popular culture. Speakers of conlangs use them not only to participate in a fandom but also to bring aspects of that fandom into their own lives and society. For example, her work has shown

that Na'vi learners have been led to embrace environmentalism in their real lives. We showed Schreyer a version of our Conlanger Test as part of our interview with her and based on her extensive knowledge of conlangs and their use in social contexts, her response was to suggest modifications in order to delve more deeply into cultural artifacts and practices around them. She influenced the current version of the test, pointing out an unconscious orality bias and helping us flesh out the questions around cultural practices. Our current Conlanger Test cites Schreyer's interview where her suggestions make it more generally applicable and useful. (In her interview, Schreyer applies an earlier draft of our test to Na'vi, demonstrating its potential usefulness for analyses of identity and subjectivity.)

The Essays in This Issue

Others in this issue also think about the way a conlang can construct subjectivity and influence how readers, viewers, and fans are brought into the fictional world. Parvathy Rajendran and Andrew Korah's "Power through Othering: How Conlangs Find Value within Narratives" explores how fictional languages can take part in the building of, or the challenging of, power structures by comparing the *Earthsea* novels of Ursula K. Le Guin to Christopher Paolini's *Eragon* series and J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. They make the argument that Ancient Language was "simply the placeholder for power itself" in *Eragon*, and Tolkien "intently positions the development of his conlangs within the narrative history of Middle-earth." In contrast, Le Guin's fictional language "disrupts […] assumptions of ancient languages by intentionally subverting several tropes of fantasy fiction" and "welcomes and celebrates ambiguity and disruptions of societal norms." Fictional languages like Le Guin's Old Speech can both build up or break down social dynamics like gender roles within the narrative world but also "create a network of subjective and objective positions and related hierarchies" that readers can then apply to enrich their understanding of language, culture, and power in the real world.

When analyzing conlangs, some scholars may focus only on the fictional world and follow how a language evolves along with its speakers. Famously, J. R. R. Tolkien was a "language creator before he penned his major works" and "understood that language itself is inseparable from the culture that produces it" (Peterson 9). As a philologist and someone well versed in linguistics, Tolkien saw clearly that languages evolve over time as members of language families. Many

linguistic changes depend on political events in "the real world" like contact between two groups of people speaking different languages or colonization. (The British colonization project and the American practice of chattel slavery of the 19th century have influenced all of us in how we understand racialization.) Tolkien addresses race in his works, almost always in minute individual moments, and as an inheritor of Victorian terminology, his use of the word *race* includes ideas of families and clans, and their languages. Maria Beatrice Brancati, Giulia De Marchi, and Bogdan Groza's "The Linguistic Shifts in Tolkien's Elvish Languages from a Socio-political Lens" focuses on the internal world of the fiction, treating it as if it were real. Their analysis is a technical description of the shifts in the Elvish languages, with some attention to how internal socio-political forces in the narrative influence those shifts. Brancati et al. do not get into an analysis of how the conlang functions in the fiction (even as an index to the political and social well-being of its speakers among groups in the fictional world). This essay, however, analyzes the representation of the development of a sophisticated conlang in fiction.

As it has almost from the beginning, *Star Trek* continues to play a key role in the establishment and rising popularity of conlangs. While Klingon gets most of the attention, several episodes of all the various incarnations of the franchise have explored the role of language and culture in various ways. Addressing a key episode in the *Next Generation* series, Craig A. Meyer, in "Shaka, When the Walls Fell: Conlangs, Metaphors and (Mis)Communication," makes an argument that even though a fictional language may not technically be a fully-fledged conlang, metaphors can make it function as one. Early *Trek* typically relies on the Universal Translator (UT) to elide the problems and problematics of language. However, in this episode, the UT seems to fail; while it transliterates the Tamarian language, the result is a series of metaphors that baffle the crew of the *Enterprise.* Meyer shows that as Picard and Dathon struggle to overcome this seeming limitation of the UT, they gain a better understanding of the metaphorical nature of language and why learning someone's mythology is as important as their syllabary.

Matt Barton, Kyoko Kishimoto, Ed M. Sadrai, Mike Dando, and Sharon Cogdill explore the Klingon conlang as a means of giving subjectivity to Klingons in "'They Are Coming': Klingon Subjectivity and Critique of the Federation in *Star Trek: Discovery*." The strategic use of Klingon and conscripts in the first season of *Discovery* helps the viewers see the world from the Klingons' perspective and get a glimpse into the diversity within the Klingon clans including the different visions they have for their future, which ultimately reveals the oppressive and

assimilationist power of the Federation. Klingon subjectivity – through the use of conlangs and conscripts – pushes us to imagine what a more just world may look (and sound) like in the real world. We argue that while it is important to analyze the ways power works in popular-culture artifacts like *Discovery*, we must go beyond a power analysis for its own sake – our attention must go beyond the artifact into the progressive restructuring of power in our society. Critiquing the problems of society is the first step. But we also need to imagine what society could look like and most importantly to think about the ways to get there. The fully developed conlangs and conscripts in *Discovery* disrupt the narrative of a United Federation and present deeper and more sophisticated Klingons than we have ever seen before.

John Paul Walter, Kyoko Kishimoto, Matt Barton, and Sharon Cogdill summarize the complex ways in which conlangs, race and power interact in J. R. R. Tolkien's novels as well as in the adaptations – including games –in "Opinion: Tolkien and Race (The Primary-source Accounts) and the Adaptations."

Finally, Matt Barton reviews David J. Peterson's *The Art of Language Invention: From Horse-Lords to Dark Elves to Sand Worms, the Words Behind World-Building*. While the book is intended mostly for aspiring conlangers, Peterson's experience working with authors and studios is invaluable for popular-culture critics.

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[i] This interdisciplinary team of editors and writers (we call ourselves the Khanlangers) includes scholars who share a deep interest in and passion for critical analyses of popular culture as well as having specializations in linguistics, culturally relevant pedagogy, ethnic studies, rhetoric and literature. Recent relevant publications include "*Welwala* at the Borders: Language, Space, and Power in *The Expanse*" (2023) and "'Am I Real?': Hybridity, Multiplicity, and Self-Actualization in *Star Trek*: *Picard*" (2021); as well as conference presentations: "The Queen Speaks English: The Universal Translator, Hybridity, and ConLangs in *Star Trek*" (2020); "Elvish, Belter, Dothraki, Klingon, and Wakandan: ConLangs, Superfans, and Rhetoric" (2019); "Constructing Languages for Fantasy and Fiction" (2018).

MATTHEW BARTON is a professor of English at St. Cloud State University. His research interests include rhetoric, popular culture, and professional communication. He is the author of *Dungeons and Desktops: The History of Computer Role-Playing Games* (2019) and four other books on video game history and culture in addition to articles in *Computers & Composition*, *Technical Communication Quarterly*, and *Game Studies*. He also produces *Matt Chat*, a YouTube series featuring interviews with notables from the games industry.

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Interview with David Peterson

In this interview, we delve into Peterson's process of creating languages, the challenges he has faced, and the impact his work has made on popular culture. From his early fascination with language to his involvement in the creation of languages for major television shows and films, Peterson has a wealth of knowledge to share about the art of language creation and its role in shaping our entertainment landscape. This interview is an insightful exploration of the intersection of linguistics and popular culture, as seen through the eyes of one of its most accomplished practitioners.

In one place we supplement this interview with Peterson's *The Art of Language Invention* to answer a question particularly important to us in this special issue of the *Popular Culture Studies Journal*.

What are Conlangs?

Editors: We've noticed that many conlangs, including the more popular ones, weren't created completely from scratch. For example, the con-creole Belter borrows from many real-world languages, as we would expect, given that it's a creole, including Polish, Persian, and Zulu. A conlanger may have studied existing languages like Arabic and admits being influenced by them when creating their conlang. Sometimes non-western languages seem to be borrowed more frequently than others when constructing languages, perhaps due to how different they sound from English.

DAVID J. PETERSON is the creator of around 50 constructed languages — including Dothraki, 3 versions of Valyrian and 5 others for the HBO series *Game of Thrones*, Trigedasleng for the CW show *The 100*, Shiväisith for Marvel's *Thor: The Dark World*, and many others. Peterson, who earned his MA in linguistics from University of California, San Diego, has been a prominent figure in the conlanger community for more than two decades. He produced a YouTube series and wrote the book *The Art of Language Invention: From Horse-Lords to Dark Elves to Sand Worms, the Words Behind World-Building* (2015) to assist other conlangers in inventing new languages and to provide an insider's view of conlang culture. He was executive producer on the documentary film *Conlanging: The Art of Crafting Tongues* (2017) and wrote *Create Your Own Secret Language: Invent Codes, Ciphers, Hidden Messages, and More* (2020). He also created and expanded Duolingo's curriculum in High Valyrian.

David Peterson: Let's start off with some definitions. First of all, a conlang is just a constructed language, and that's a top-level term. Some terms underneath that can be, I think, a bit more useful.

All languages have been constructed by humans, as far as we know. But conlangs are intentionally constructed whereas natural languages, despite our best efforts, are unintentionally constructed and then carried on. Certainly, history is rife with attempts by individuals or organizations to try to control a natural language or to change its course, and they usually meet with varying levels of success – usually not very successful.

Constructed languages can be subdivided in many ways. The best way is by intent, but other ways exist. First, you can divide between what we call *a posteriori* and *a priori* languages.

An *a posteriori* language is one that is built from other languages intentionally, usually because of the intent of the language. One of the more famous examples within the conlang community is Brithenig, an alternate history project, complete with a full alternate history timeline, where Andrew Smith's idea was, "What if speakers of Latin remained on the British Isles? What might have happened had the language stayed there, but undergone some of the sound changes that happened with P. Celtic?" And so he applied those sound changes to Latin to produce a new Romance language that looked and sounded like a Celtic language.

Other conlangers liked the idea and the spirit of this project and so joined in Smith's shared world. Another famous conlang, Ill Bethisad, is Wenedyk by Jan van Steenbergen. It's another romance language but imagining if Polish sound changes had applied to Latin. These are examples of *a posteriori* conlangs, and in the case of III Bethisad, all the words, all of the grammar, come from Latin. They don't do so by accident or because the creators happen to like Latin. The creators used Latin on purpose because it made sense for the backstory of the language.

Aside from *a posteriori* conlangs there are also *a priori* conlangs, where all the conlang's grammar and words are original. The conlang might show slight influences here and there, with maybe even a favorite word borrowed in from an existing language, but ninety-nine percent of the grammar and ninety-nine percent of the vocabulary of an *a priori* conlang is completely original and obeys all the rules that the conlanger themselves created regardless of any other language.

Conlang Quality

David: Now with that understanding, of course, things also happen slightly in between, either intentionally or unintentionally, getting to a different question that's rarely engaged with both in the community and outside of the community, and that's quality. Creating a language creates an art form like any others, and so, even though it's subjective, some examples are better and some are worse. And you'll see a lot of rather sophomoric examples if you poke around the Internet just on the big communities usually by people starting out who will say things like, "Yeah, I created this language, and it's got a little bit of Japanese and a little bit of Finnish and a little bit of Welsh, because I like these things, but then I kind of did some other things with it." And of course, they're usually L1 English speakers, and if you start to really dig into the language, you'll see that a lot of the finer points end up relying on English, not intentionally, but rather unintentionally, because they didn't know any better. What you end up with is a mish mash of an *a posteriori* and *a priori* language because the language itself is purposeless or has more than one intended purpose. "So, this language is just for me, and only because I like it. But then I also have a *Dungeons & Dragons* world, and it's going to work with that, and I also want to use it around the house, and I'm also trying to make it like a naturalistic conlang, but also not doing that." And so it's just a Frankenstein disaster with a lot of unintentionally poor decisions baked into the language.

Tolkien

David: Before the conlang community existed, there wasn't a lot of conscious thought put into the making of the conlang. For example, if you look at Tolkien's languages, we would call them *a priori* because they consist of mostly original vocabulary and grammar. They even have sound changes, but they don't adhere to the standards of a modern strictly *a priori* naturalistic language. Tolkien really liked the aesthetics of Finnish and Welsh specifically and so would put things in that were reminiscent of those languages to him, and sometimes even individual words, which is not something that a modern language creator would do – or at least not without reflection – unless they were a beginner. Because nowadays we are aware that this is a thing that you can do. It's a choice that can be made. And the idea is that if you're the artist, you should be in charge of as many choices that affect your work as possible, so that the work that you're creating is wholly yours. We don't say anymore, "Oh, this is that way, because I forgot about it, or didn't think about it."

Marc Okrand

David: A distinction, I think, needs to be drawn between people who create languages because they enjoy it, they've learned about it, they've studied other created languages, and they more or less know what they're doing versus those who are creating a language for the first time. For example, take Marc Okrand and Klingon. He just happened to be in LA working on the Academy Awards, doing the closed captioning. He was working in the same studio where they were working on *Star Trek II*. The producers needed some Vulcan lines, and since he was there, he helped out with it.

Of course, he was a linguist and had studied Klamath, I believe, and earned his Ph.D. by producing a grammar of the Mutsun language at UC Berkeley. However, he made a lot of choices that were made without reflection because he wasn't aware of the work of other language creators, except maybe Tolkien and Zamenhof. So he made choices as he saw fit. Since he enjoyed Klamath and had worked on it, he incorporated it into Klingon via its system of personal agreement (i.e., verbal concord), simply because he liked it. He also tried to make it intentionally alien by subverting linguistic universals, but not necessarily according to the linguistic understanding of why those linguistic universals are the way they are. And certainly not without the modern understanding that universals should be taken with a grain of salt, especially with respect to conlanging, because, after all, just because this is the way most things are, it's not necessarily the way that they always are, and some implicational universals are not necessarily as strong as we believed them to be in the 1980s.

Writing Conlangs for Pre-Existing Works

David: The quality of a conlang depends largely on how much the language creator knows about language creation, what their intent is, and their context and purpose for creating it.

Studying the most popular created languages is also problematic. It's not studying original languages in the sense that a language creator sat down and came up with the idea for the language and created the people who speak this language. After all, the Klingons existed before Klingon, the Dothraki existed before

Dothraki, and a lot of choices about the languages were made by the authors of the stories the conlangs appear in – and in some cases made rather badly. And so the language creator is in a position to say, well, all right, am I creating a language that reflects this work that exists? In other words, I've been hired to create a language for this. Am I going to do that, or am I going to do something that I think is better, that maybe doesn't fit? It's rather like being between a rock and a hard place. Either you honor a poor choice made by an author or TV writers and produce a conlang that isn't quite as good as it might have been, or you disregard the poorly created bits and create something that's good but doesn't perfectly reflect the speakers that already exist. Many language creators – myself included – err on the side of the established canon, since this is what readers or viewers will want and expect. Since one is being hired to do a job, one should do the job, whether the results are ideal or not.

Appropriating Cultures and Signifiers

Editors: What are some ways to think about people's desire to borrow other cultures' languages and the implications of appropriating other cultures' languages and signifiers and cultural stereotyping? What should an ethical conlanger do to address the power differences behind borrowing languages and the unconscious biases that are attached to the cultures?

Peterson's *The Art of Language Invention*: Sometimes the people involved in a show will want a conlang to sound harsh or guttural to imply primitive or warlike characteristics of the culture of the speakers, as with Klingon. Peterson notes that certain sounds like [x] tends to sound harsh to English speakers (like the *ch* in Bach). However, similar sounds exist in Spanish and French, languages that are seldom thought of as being guttural. "In addition to the history of cultural stereotyping," Peterson writes, "it's the comparison of entire sound systems that produces a phonaesthetic character in the mind of the listener" (26). "German may sound harsh to an American English speaker," for instance, "but might not to a Dutch speaker from the Netherlands" (26). To create a "guttural" conlang, "A conlanger can use the expectations of their users/hearers to achieve a particular phonaesthetic effect" (26). Of course, problems arise if those expectations of the users/hearers reinforce negative stereotypes. While natural languages may provide some guidance, "It's up to the conlanger to choose the sounds for their language" (46). An argument can be made that "guttural" or "harsh" descriptors, or "musical"

or "singsong," would only be applied externally; the actual speakers may well feel the opposite, and there is no linguistic evidence that natural languages mirror culture. A ready example is the "Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax" that asserts Inuit people have fifty different words for snow; a concept thoroughly debunked, and Peterson argues that these and other preconceptions about the supposed links between a language and its culture are a "by-product of cultural stereotyping" and do not reflect sound linguistics. Nevertheless, a conlanger may find themselves at odds with producers or authors who insist the language should sound "foreign" or "harsh."

"It's a difficult thing in conlanging to transcend the limitations of one's native language, or the other languages one has studied" Peterson writes, especially the "invisible aspects of language that operate beneath the surface" (217). In addition to linguistic features like negation and topicalization, to what extent a more general unconscious cultural bias plays a role is worth exploring.

People in Socio-Political and Family Contexts

Editors: It looks like you're one of the conlangers who think about a culture when you think about developing a language, that people are in socio-political and family contexts. We're really struck by how steeped in the past Tolkien's whole project is, for example. It's about how the past – including its languages – leads to the present. So, I wonder if you'd say more about the cultures the way you think about them. We've looked at several shows where you've done interesting work with languages that engage context, like *Game of Thrones* and especially with *Defiance* where you had some say. It looks like you're conscious of that, it's something that you work with, and maybe you see it as part of the art. It's really more than just work made for hire, more than just filling in a blank. Would you like to take this further, to say more?

David: Totally apart from my involvement with them, none of the shows that I've worked on would have been shows that I was very excited about, shall we say? One I wasn't really excited about until I saw it – *Penny Dreadful* – was, I think, the best thing that I've worked on, and it's something that, had I not been involved with it at all, I really would have found to be quite good. The other one that I was excited about till I heard the spell-out of it was *Emerald City*.

I was a really big fan of the *Oz* books growing up, and I thought it was very

interesting that, especially now, a lot of fantasy is steeped in European traditions, a European past. For twenty years or so, a lot of people have been saying, "Well, why don't we do fantasy steeped in other traditions?" which is really cool. Or problematic, depending on the execution. So you see fantasy obviously set in China, Japan, and other places like that, and we have very little that is uniquely American. And *Oz*, with all its warts and lumps, is uniquely American, and I always found that really interesting. Thus, I was very excited for about thirty seconds when I was on this phone call about an adaptation of the *Oz* books, and I was like, "Finally, somebody is going to get it right!" Because I'm not a fan of the Judy Garland film. I'm not a fan of any adaptation of the *Oz* series so far. And then I heard, "Yeah, we're going to take, like, the *Wizard of Oz*, but it's going to be, like, through a *dark* lens!" and I'm like, "Oh, God! Not this again. Not the dark lens…" It was very disappointing, because I would love to see an awesome adaptation that had the unique hope and optimism, and also the aesthetics from around the turn of the century like the pioneering French film-maker Georges Méliès, I thought that would be really cool. Then they could leave the every-single-character-has-a-dark-twist to the 1990s where it belongs.

But with all the projects that I work on, the vast majority aren't things I would have read or shows I would have watched. When it comes to something like *Game of Thrones*, this is a world that's set up, and I see it, and I see the way it's set up and can evaluate it. George R. R. Martin did some things very, very well, one of which was his – not necessarily the linguistic instantiation – but the way that languages are discussed. Language is represented more accurately in that book than, I think, in any other fantasy book I've seen. He actively acknowledges that there are language families, for example, that languages can be related. Not only that, the characters in his book, being people of the day, speak about language in unsophisticated ways, but in ways that reflected language change. George R. R. Martin demonstrates this kind of thing all over the place. He even does it with nomenclature, like naming conventions in Westeros that I think are very neat. And so I thought that was really cool. But then when it comes to world building, if you just look at the kind of plants and animals that exist in various parts of the world it's almost preposterous. These things shouldn't exist here, like a predator that requires an entirely different environment. And so then, as you're sitting down to create the language, when it comes to the question, "Will there be this kind of an animal, and, moreover, a native word for it?" The answer has to be, "Well, probably, even though it doesn't necessarily make sense for the environment." And

so, well, what if they just have tigers here? For some reason they've got tigers and lions, and they're just roaming around with elephants and horses and cows. And so, if that's the world, what are you doing trying to create something realistic? What does it *mean* to create something realistic for a world like that?

Socio-Political Environment

Editors: Let's talk about socio-political environment. We loved *Defianc*e when it aired! It's a wonderful project. We're deeply entrenched in the politics of Pop Culture, and *Defiance* takes place in a socio-political environment. It's funny because one of us lived in St. Louis during its original run and lived near the arch, saw it, and saw it all blown up. And so we see the social and the political mapped onto the linguistic. And is that something that you've considered? A pronunciation in one of Tolkien's conlangs was the preferred one because, in a backstory he wrote, the king liked it better, because it reminded him of his mom, which we think is really interesting. How do you reconcile the political environment with the linguistic environment when you're creating a language?

David: It's very difficult, because these go hand-in-hand with basic cultural questions. The answer is, just how tied into the culture am I? How much do I know about it? How much agency do I have? So, with something like *Game of Thrones*, I feel pretty good about being able to add to and expand the Dothraki culture, because it's presented very clearly. And I feel like, basically, George R. R. Martin doesn't necessarily care about some things. Not that he wouldn't have something to say, but the story isn't going there, and I know that he doesn't mind me expanding it with the language in that way. I try to stay away from certain areas, because I feel like he might have something to say, and his input might differ from mine. Where our opinions differ, his is paramount, as the world is his, so on those matters I will hold off. That's been most difficult with High Valyrian, since it is the language of a destroyed culture that, in the context of the books, we see very little bits of, and it feels like some of what he is holding back is important to the plot and might be revealed later. And so I wouldn't want to create something that I had to overwrite because it was countermanded, I guess. After all, he is the ultimate authority.

So that makes certain things difficult, especially with the very recent phenomenon of people actually being interested in the language because they want to know more about the culture for very sensible reasons. For example, they want to talk about things like days of the week, months of the year, and other things like

that, where I have very intentionally left the area blank, because I don't really know what he would want to do with that. And of course, as he's grown more and more famous, he's been less and less responsive. I used to be able to email him about things, and he used to send me nice responses. Now, it's hard to get a hold of him, and I understand that.

Defiance

David: *Defiance* was a really interesting project, because I did have a lot of input, but at the same time, there were positives, and there were negatives – specifically, my voice was valued very much as a team member, but it was not valued more than any other team member, necessarily. And I remember one big bit of ret-conning [revising that affects how things in the show had been understood] happened where it kind of changed things in an important way for me, in terms of which aliens were on which planets, before the solar system was destroyed. I talked to Kevin Murphy about this. I said, hey, we've actually established this in the lore, and I was basing a lot of things on this. But what he said was, "It was a great line." It's hard to say no to that, and at the same time, I couldn't push too hard because the extraordinary level of freedom and input I was given meant that I had to be a part of the team. And in this case, the leader of that team was saying, "You know what? I like this better for what we're doing for the overall vision." So you just have to go with it.

My involvement in the culture also depends on how the story works and where it goes. One of the problems with a language like Dothraki is that the people who speak it are generally in the same dialect group, using the same idiolect**,** with roughly the same level of prestige. Very little chance to display social differences. It was nice to be able to show Daenerys learning Dothraki – that was really cool – but for the most part the other people speaking Dothraki were Khals or warriors, which doesn't give you a lot of opportunity to display diversity. Even so, George R. R. Martin's books have enough anthropological material to let you guess at other things, even if it doesn't show up in the show.

Vampire Academy

David: On the other hand, very recently Jessie Sams (now Jessie Peterson) and I created the language for *Vampire Academy*, and we're very proud of it. But the

sociopolitical question remains: How is the language used? And then, honestly, after watching the show, I have the same question. It's just not clear at all. But because of the way they're approaching the show, which isn't super realistic, the answer isn't really important. A lot of things are done for effect and for style, and when the question of how specifically this works comes up, it's like, "Who cares? Sexy vampires on the screen!" – just watch that. So, every so often when the writers want something old style or want to show off how sexy vampire-y they are, they have them say something. It's totally unclear who originated the language or what's happening with the characters' accents. How the language perpetuates is totally unclear, and so we're not going to be able to delve into those issues if we're working within that world.

Editors: The tone and tenor of what *Vampire Academy* is trying to accomplish, and how language maps into that, are different from something very political like *Dune*. Yes, it's got giant worms in it, but it's tracing a certain political trajectory. We think even *Defiance* is political. The *Vampire Academy* less so, but still language is important! And when you're thinking about how you're creating those languages, even if it's just sexy vampires, do you think, "I'm going to make some choices" versus "okay, well, I actually think about the entire lineage of this one guy"? Is that something that affects your decision making or the team's decision making?

David: Especially when it comes to adaptive works, it can be very difficult. George R. R. Martin's work was a lot easier because at least in terms of language, it has a lot of what I would hope for in adapting a work. It's not necessarily the linguistic elements, they weren't necessarily very interesting, or at least they don't really push beyond the bounds of what we see in Western European languages. But at least they're consistent, and they make sense, which is way more important than anything else. And then you come to a work like *The Witcher*, which is… It has to be one of the worst things ever conceived. Okay, I guess people enjoy it, but goodness gracious, it's convoluted. Rather than doing research to build a consistent world, things appear to have been grabbed haphazardly from various cultures, languages, etc., and thrown together with no concern as to the sense of it. Unlike something that's supposed to present as random and off-the-wall, like *Aqua Teen Hunger Force* or *Xavier: Renegade Angel*, *The Witcher* is supposed to present as a serious, "high fantasy" work. It's supposed to *look* like *A Song of Ice and Fire* without resting on the type of research that went into producing *A Song of Ice and*

Fire. To the extent that a reader doesn't care about that, it's successful. Taking a peek under the hood at all, though, reveals a sloppy mess – and the "language" is the worst part of it.

The 100

Editors: Yes, what about *The 100*?

David: *The 100* was based on sample chapters of the book, which was forthcoming. It was pitched that way. Honestly that's the way it was and I think it still is in Hollywood: "I have this original idea, and it's this and this and this," and they're like, "No, sorry." But if you say, "I have this idea, and it's exactly the same, but if it's based on one sentence that some famous author wrote," they're like, "Yes, let's do it! We'll put their name all over!" And there was never any chance that the stories were going to be anything alike because the material still hadn't been written. But when I was on *The 100*, I had just finished working on an original series called *Star-Crossed* and *The 100* aired its first season. At the same time the CW was only going to pick up a certain number of these shows because it debuted a whole bunch at the same time: *The Tomorrow People, The 100, Star-Crossed, Reign*… All of these came out at the same time, and everybody thought that *The Tomorrow People* would end up getting renewed. Everybody knew that *Star-Crossed* was going to get canceled because the network hated it. And I knew this because the *Defiance* writer's room was above the *Star-Crossed* writer's room, and the conversations could be heard through the floor, and the writers on both series would chat with each other at lunch. The *Star-Crossed* writers were so miserable because they'd be like, "We have this cool idea," and then they'd get on the phone with the executives, who would be like, "Get all this sci-fi garbage out of this show! Put in more romance! This is not what we want from this!" And they were pulling the purse strings tight and everything, so the *Star-Crossed* writers were having a miserable time of it. So basically, that show was never going to be picked up.

The 100 was a surprise pickup. When the CW renewed *The 100*, a high-level executive named Mark Pedowitz basically in a nice way kind of told them, "There's this guy that created a language for *Star-Crossed*! It'd be so cool if the people that were on the Ground spoke their own language, don't you think?" This was not part of the original idea. The writers of *The 100* had no idea how it could work when they called me up to invite me on to the show. Rather than them telling me what I

was gonna do, they were asking me, “Is there some way that you can create a language that works with this?” And of course, I looked at what they had done, and once I watched the entire first season, and saw that the Grounders were already speaking English, I couldn’t think of any logical reason why a new language should be created for the show. I tried my best to use sci-fi magic to explain how on earth this language that evolved from English could be spoken by people who also spoke fluent English. It doesn’t make any sense linguistically. Then I presented the language I made to them – my best attempt at creating something that was somewhat plausible – and they're like, “You’ve got to make it sound more like English!” So now this thing is going to sound even more like English for these people that already speak English. This doesn’t make any sense, but nevertheless, I dialed it back a little bit. I came up with what ended up being Trigedasleng, or Grounder, and it’s used in season two. It was attached to a group of people led by a character, Lexa, that the lesbian and bisexual community fell in love with. And so suddenly I had a popular language. While beforehand nobody had taken up Dothraki, people wanted to learn Trigedasleng. And honestly for me it was a really positive experience until the seventh episode of season 3 where they killed Lexa with a stray bullet – right after she and Clarke, the main character of the show, had consummated their lesbian relationship, the show basically killed the fandom. And then the show went on for another four seasons.

If you look up *Clexa*, which was the name of the ship [a *ship*, short for relationship, is the name of a fandom for a relationship in a work of fiction], you’ll see some articles from around the time about how basically the show did something really, really stupid. And then the show runner made things even worse, and the writers made things even worse, because of course they did. And so, a lot of people who *were* big fans of the show kept on and formed a community around the study of Trigedasleng, despite the fact that they had completely stopped watching the show. But they loved the idea, and they loved Lexa and Clarke’s relationship, and they wanted to keep kind of going with it in some way but couldn’t stand to watch the show. So, they just started learning and using the language. And since it was based on English, it was all *a posteriori*. They could actually develop their own vocabulary, which they did, and they started using it. This was the first time that that ever happened for me, after I had basically given up on the idea of any of my languages ever becoming popular.

Owning and Controlling the Languages

Editors: We had a question related to that. Clearly a tension exists between the conlang creator and the producers of a show asking the linguist to conform to their ideas. We've heard interviews where the writers of the conlang had to make ridiculous choices, like making up words that don't make sense to fit what the producers wanted or having the sound played backwards, but then in your case with *Defiance*, you had a lot more say in developing the languages. Do you think that, in the case where the linguist had a lot more say in constructing the language, should they be valued more, and should they own the copyright? There's this whole discussion about, like Klingon, for example, who owns the language? Is it the person who created it? Is it the people, the mass of people who started adding on it and created this language? So, what do you think about it? You create a language, and then other people start expanding it.

Can a Language Be Copyrighted?

David: First, I don't believe that a language can be copyrighted. I don't think the idea even makes sense. Certainly, the studios believe that a language can be copyrighted. But let them try to enforce it. Seriously, what would that even mean? You can copyright a definition because that's unique wording, right? But you can't copyright the words themselves because they're ideas. It's obvious how that applies to natural languages, but I think it should be obvious that it applies to created languages, as well. Because, after all, languages, created or otherwise, don't exist. They're not things. They're just ideas. Anytime you write a language down, whether it be in a dictionary, whether it be in a grammar, all you're doing is just saying this is what we know about this language at this time. It doesn't matter how complete it is. You could stop time and write everything about the English language right now in a five-hundred-volume series, but the moment you started time again it would be out of date, because that's how languages work.

Created or otherwise, languages are either living or dead, and that's the only distinction that makes any sense. All the languages I've created are being actively worked on more or less right now by me. At some point in time I will die, and then I won't be actively working on them. If somebody else wants to pick them up and

work with them and create new words, they can. If somebody else wants to say, "Hey, that's not the real language that David Peterson created! That word is not a real part of it!" And then, whatever, just that's your business. It's up to each individual to decide what "counts" as an authentic version of a language. I just wish the fans wouldn't fight. It seems ridiculous. Honestly, it's just embarrassing. David Salo, who was a linguist who studied Tolkien's languages, published *A Gateway to Sindarin: A Grammar of an Elvish Language from J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings*, and for the *Lord of the Rings* movies they hired him to translate things into some of Tolkien's conlangs for the films. Words needed to be added, because the dialogue called for words that didn't exist (that Tolkien hadn't created), and so Salo created some vocabulary. But for the most part, it was Tolkien's languages with a few additional words. But some people within the Tolkien language communities said, "This isn't Tolkien's language! It's barbarous! It's blah blah blah!" I find this childish. They can leave their commentary to themselves. All one needs to say, "These are words David Salo created for Quenya or Sindarin, and these are words Tolkien created," and then just be done with it.

The same is true of my own languages, or really anybody else's languages. If some language creator says, "When I die, nobody can use my language ever again," I guess you can decide if you want to honor their wishes or not. The only thing that is disingenuous would be trying to represent someone else's work as your own. So, if somebody takes one of my languages and says, "I created this. I created all these words." Well, no, that's not honest. But if they want to take that and say, "Here's the language that David Peterson started, and I expanded upon it," that's totally cool. And really I don't think that anything can stop either of those situations. The former isn't really a copyright issue; it's more a fraud situation.

But even there it gets a little tricky, because let's just say, for example, that you could copyright a language (leaving the adapted ones aside). Let's say that I just created it by myself and called it Kamakawi. Let's say that I could copyright that. I certainly have created every single word of it, and I made its dictionary. And then let's say somebody published a book saying, "This is the grammar of the Kamakawi language," and I go and look at it, and I see that they've made a lot of mistakes, and that even though they have actual grammar explanations, they're not the same as mine. What could I say to that? Is it even my language if the grammar doesn't match? Would my copyright have been violated? If yes, what percentage of the grammar would need to be changed for it not to violate that copyright?

Editors: It's technically not the same language.

David: Right, and so it's a type of thing where it's like… Here's an example I like to use. If you have two people learning Spanish in high school and they say to each other, "Hey, man, usted querer, jugar some al basketball" and the other guy says, "Yeah, man, yo querer to." That wasn't correct Spanish. But then what was it? It wasn't English, right? What do you even say about that? You can clearly say it's not Spanish, and yet it's not not Spanish right?

So, the same thing can be said of somebody using a created language badly. And the other thing that makes this so ridiculous is… You can imagine that a place where HBO might get upset is, say, who knows, for whatever reason, without permission or even asking for it, somebody just puts up a movie where all this Dothraki dialogue is in it, and they don't even identify it as having anything to do with Dothraki. Then if you go through it, most of it is correct, but some of it is not. I've seen people translate songs on YouTube into Valyrian. And it's the type of thing where they just use words they found in an online dictionary. So, every single noun is in the nominative singular, and every single verb is in the infinitive, and the word order mirrors English word order exactly. Even if you had a strong copyright for High Valyrian, how could you even say that that was an instance of the language if it's so badly translated? It's very, very difficult, and it seems to me to be a thoroughly pointless endeavor. What are you even trying to do?

And I think HBO really understands this. Paramount never strongly pursued the claim on Klingon because, when you have a language that is so strongly associated with your brand, anytime anybody uses it is just free advertising. And so I think it's the same thing with fan fiction, where, especially in the nineties, authors would come out strongly and say, I am really opposed to this fan fiction, but they wouldn't do anything about it, because they knew, and the publishers knew, too, this is nothing more than advertisement, and it is a good thing. So yeah, I would love to see the copyright of a created language challenged in my lifetime because I want to be an expert witness during the trial. I think it would be so much fun, and I think it's just silly to try to pursue it. So that's a really good question.

Editors: Thank you! We think it's more about, not necessarily the conlanger, but whoever the owner of the show is wanting to make money from it.

David: Yeah, and it's really weird. I wish fandoms especially could be cool about

it. Everything that's happening with Tolkien's legacy is just honestly embarrassing, and the estate is so heavy-handed… And then the fandom squabbling about words not being Tolkien's – who cares?

Editors: We see that with not just the language, but some fans imagine what the *Star War*s world or the *Lord of the Rings* world should look like, and then they hate all these new shows, because they have a lot more diversity, and then they're like "Well, I don't think the creator imagined that way."

David: I mean, maybe they didn't. I wish they could see… I always like to think about this. The 1970s, maybe the 1960s, had this whole movement to do plays with, like, no sets or costumes, but they would do entire Shakespeare productions, with maybe a box or a stool on stage, and that was it. And it's a cool idea, so you can do that, and you could present the same information in many different ways. When it comes to just how authentic the sets are, or how authentic whatever gender or race the people are, I'd rather say, "Just see what they do, and see if it's interesting." I think that a lot of people think an adaptation of something has to be the *perfect* adaptation, and that there can be only one adaptation, and it has to match my idea of the one adaptation to rule them all. I understand this to a certain extent. One of my favorite books of all time was *The Great Gatsby*, and for whatever reason I imagined Jimmy Stewart playing the role of Gatsby when I was reading the book, and it was a very strong association. I'm a big fan of Jimmy Stewart, and it's very precious to me, that mental association, and for that reason, I haven't watched any of the *Gatsby* adaptations. But it'd be so ridiculous for me to then say the other adaptations shouldn't have been made and are automatically garbage because they don't align with my personal preferences.

Conlang Creators as Artists

Editors: One of the things that our questions and your discussion about it brought back to our mind is the way in which writing a conlang, creating a conlang, inventing a conlang is a work of art, or is an act of art. And I think we all agree with you on that. We've thought about that a lot. I think we feel personal loyalty to the conlang writers. We got really into the concreole in *The Expanse*, for example, written by Nick Farmer. We had been imagining a crew instead of an individual writer. But you actually framed this for us. It's not even that. It's a contractor who

comes in from the outside who has no say, and then their stuff is just used.

David: It's very different, how much this is honored. It depends. It starts from the show, right, for the director of a television show or a movie. And I've had very, very different experiences. I've had experiences where I do the translation. They receive it. They put it in the show, and if they decide they don't like it, they cut off a word or change the subtitle later, and suddenly it doesn't even match, and that's the level we're at. And then other times, in *Defiance*, for example, I watched the dailies every single day, and I was able to give my input during production even though I didn't always win out. I've also had every experience in between those two extremes. Similarly, how much the actors care varies. In fact, on the third season of *Defiance*, Nichole Galicia would always text me and ask me to do extra translations, so she could throw them in because she thought her character should be speaking in her own language, even though the line called for English. She wanted to learn the language. She just put her whole heart and soul into it. And then I've also worked with actors where – I heard this from other people – they felt insulted that I sent recordings because they were proper actors trained in the British tradition, and how dare I insult them by sending recordings of a language. *They* knew how to do it. They didn't need input from someone like me.

Editors: Yeah, if you were the conlanger, though, and if you were given the status of one of the writers, would that change things for you?

David: Yes, to an extent the writers certainly do have more say, but it's still going to be the show runner's call. Honestly the only way you'll see it really work is if the conlanger is the show runner and has enough time and wherewithal to be able to focus on the things that need their attention. If *Defiance* had the kind of success that something like *Stargate* had, my dream was that *Defiance* could run as long as *Stargate* did. But of course I don't think such a thing is even possible anymore, the way TV works now. But I always hope that one day down the line every single line in an episode could be in a conlang.

Editors: Yeah, we'd be into that, too.

David: The whole thing would be done with subtitles, and we'd ask the viewers just to deal with it. Yes, that'd be awesome. You need somebody who really

understands language at a fundamental level. And then they need support, to be able to execute that vision. And while there've been conlang authors, there haven't really been conlang show runner slash directors. That may happen in the future, though. That'd be cool.

The Conscripts, the Writing Systems

Editors: We know when you are creating a constructed language, you think of the world, the people, their society. And then you start thinking of the language right? But how do you develop the conscripts?

David: The writing systems? Those are one of my favorite things to do. Writing systems are unique among language material, because languages are systems that are so large that they can never be completed. And furthermore, it doesn't make sense for them to be completed, no language is ever completed, so you just work and work to make it bigger and bigger, but you can never hope to create a language that's as large as a natural language. You need the work of many hands. So something like Esperanto can function like a natural language because people have been working with it for more than a century and expanding its vocabulary and using it. A single person just doesn't have that kind of time.

A writing system, on the other hand, is a small system, and you can create the whole thing. You can't necessarily predict how everybody is going to use it. I'm sure when somebody created the number sign, they had no way of predicting the hashtag centuries later. But you can still create that whole system. And also, unlike spoken language, we have enough evidence to know how writing starts from the very beginning and evolves all the way up to the modern state, which is something we don't have with language. And so, you can actually do the whole thing. Often I do an abbreviated process. It's simulated, but that's what I will start with. I will start with whether it's as far back to the pictograph stage, or a little bit further along. I imagine what things they would have been talking about, what they would have considered important enough to try to draw pictures of, way back when, and what they would have been writing on, what they would have been writing with. And then how does this start to map onto language in a systematic way.

And so you move on from the pictographic stage to maybe coming up with associations between specific words and specific pictures, and then associating specific pictures with sounds, because this is what happened with natural languages.

Systemic change occurs when a writing system for one language is borrowed by people who speak a different language, and it doesn't line up. In our world, what they did when that happened was they took some of the pictures and said, "Well, this kind of starts with this sound. Let's just use it for that sound by itself," which is a really key moment. As a conlanger, you can do that same thing, and then you can change the writing implement, the writing surface, what it's written on, and you can evolve it slowly over the centuries, simulating the evolution, and get to the point where you get to a writing system and a modern font like with *Defiance*, where they had typography. I made sure to tell them, here are some other things that you can do with it, like you can do a blocky style. You can do it as outline. Here's what it might look like spray painted as graffiti. Art departments really like that, like on *Star-Crossed* of all things, and on *Bright*. They're pretty good with imagining, if this is the writing system, we can create something that is similar to it, because every instantiation of a writing system is still reflective of some imaginary glyph, right? It's like they were saying, if this is just one instantiation, what might some others look like?

And some of those art departments were really good at producing some really, I think, wonderful fonts. The Netflix film *Bright* had one such art department. A guy made a shirt for a fake beer, I think it was Pale Orc Ale. He made a shirt that had the image on it with this beautiful version of my typography that he had invented, and I was like, "Where did you get that?" He said, "Oh, I just made it." I should have said, "Can I pay you to make me one? I love it!"

So that's what I do. And then I create a font, and I make sure to tell the art department, it's just a font face (imagine how many other things you can do with the Roman script beyond Arial). And I tell them if you have questions about how to do that, let me know, and so some of them roll with that and some of them don't. Like on *Vampire Academy*, they just used our font. They use it everywhere. I love it. I'm so happy, really, I like that. That was the first time a show actually made things you can buy in the NBC Store – right now – that feature the font that we created. That's never happened before. They should have done that for *Defiance*. But unlike *Star-Crossed* or *Bright*, *Vampire Academy* simply used the font we created as is, without creating any new font faces. And that's a choice! Some don't see the value in writing systems at all.

Con-Sign-Languages

Editors: Another thing we've been really interested in are con-sign-languages, that use gestures and things of that sort. So just wondering what your thoughts are in that area.

On SLIPA

David: Really, some exemplary con-sign languages are out there. In 2006 I created what I called the Sign Language IPA (SLIPA), because one of the reasons that we didn't have a lot of con-sign-languages was because we didn't have a way to write them down. In 2006 we were still dealing with the fact that a lot of people, especially on the Conlang list, had older machines that were not Unicode compliant. And so, we still had to use things, where for example, you have a word like *sham*. In IPA. You'd write it like this: [ʃæm]. In X-SAMPA, you just would use only ASCII characters to convey IPA, so we would write it like this: [S}m]. Linguists and conlangers used X-SAMPA all the time because not everybody's machine could handle Unicode. And so I came up with SLIPA because I wanted conlangers to be able to create sign languages and to use any possible hand shape or body location. The only sign languages you could find support for were ASL and BSL. There wasn't material to support any imaginable sign language. SLIPA, as it was originally conceived, was very clunky because I was trying to make sure that it could work with ASCII – which, of course, is no longer necessary. But it was also at a time where it wasn't easy to take video. Video is the best way to record a sign language, honestly, but it wasn't practical in 2006. But, yeah, I created a con-sign-lang to go along with it as a demonstration, but I was really interested in sign language phonology and Deaf culture largely because of my introduction to it from David M. Perlmutter, who did a lot of work on sign language phonology and sign language typology.[1]

On Peterson's Con-Sign-Langs

David: I never actually got to do any serious con-sign-language work, though, until *Dune*. I actually created two sign languages, and one of them got cut. It's a real bummer, because the one that remained is the Atreides battle language or sign language system. It's not a language; it's a system like the gestures they use in pro

[1] For more on SLIPA, see Peterson's "SLIPA: An IPA for Signed Languages," https://dedalvs.com/slipa.html.

football that indicate penalties and things like that, just a little bit larger.

But a Deaf character was going to be using sign language on the ornithopter, and I created a realistic sign language for him, for his lines, and then, for whatever reason they decided to have him speak instead of sign. The actor is actually Deaf, you hear this in the scene, it plays a crucial part. But originally he was supposed to be doing a sign language I created, and then they just had him speak English, which is weird. But I don't know. Maybe the actor didn't want to do it.

I always figured that the reason more sign languages weren't created was purely a matter of lack of familiarity and lack of ability to document them effectively.

Star Wars and Conlangs

Editors: The sign language Tusken in *The Book of Boba Fett* and *The Mandalorian* has generated a lot of excitement even though it wasn't as far as we know fully developed. But it seemed it was leading to something interesting. A linguist did not write it: it was Troy Kotsur, an actor who knows ASL.

David: *Star Wars* has been very disappointing in that they persistently refuse to have people create languages and see no utility in hiring language creators – those who know how to do it.

I was interviewed for one show, and it felt like the interview went very well, but they never called me back. I don't think that show has come out yet.

It's hilarious what happened in the first J. J. Abrams film. They hired a woman who was really good at making up gibberish sounding like it came from different languages. They asked Abrams about it, and he said, "Well, who better to create a language than somebody who can make up realistic sounding gibberish?" Seriously, who better to do it? How about a language creator? Anyway, she was hired and created a language for one scene.

And even that, though, wasn't treated with respect, because you can see with the subtitles, they didn't include all of it. They changed the subtitles, or they cut the lines short because they were running long, and they didn't really care about the language or how it worked. It's so weird they actually hired somebody to do something for that rather than going with their usual gibberish when they weren't even going to implement it honestly.

Star Wars in particular has just been a very sore spot for me. I was born in 1981, so I grew up with it and I really enjoyed it, and nothing about it makes me happy

anymore. Part of that is also the fandom, their absurd reaction to the second one, *The Last Jedi*. It was just a huge bummer. I remember I was talking with a friend who really enjoyed it like I did, but a segment of our friends were very negative about it in the way that a lot of people were. I remember he was talking to me, and he looked at me sadly. He's like, "Is it Reddit? What's making it like this? How come they don't just enjoy it? I don't know…man." I don't know either.

What Attracts People to Learn a Particular Conlang?

Editors: Why do you think people want to learn anybody's made-up language? Tons of them are out there. One of us was very much interested in learning the languages in *Defiance*. What draws people to learn languages that are conlangs?

David: For the most part I think it's the media that they're associated with, especially if you look at the Grounders and their language Trigedasleng in *The 100*. That section of the fandom was really attached to it, and they really loved those characters; they thought Lexa was really cool! And those characters also played a more prominent role in the show.

Once *Avatar* came out, people were never going to be excited about Dothraki. There are a lot of people who are really excited to learn *some* sort of created language, but it's not necessarily important to them which one it is. When *Avatar* came out, it snapped those types of conlang fans up, and then they were gone. In *Game of Thrones*, Dothraki was *one* of the storylines in a much larger work – it was a major storyline, but it was just one of them. Also, fans of the books know that the Dothraki go away once Daenerys moves on. Even fans of the books were much more excited about High Valyrian. In fact, the first discussion of Dothraki in the *Song of Ice and Fire* forums, says, "Wow, they created a Dothraki language. So that means they're going to have to create Valyrian."

It doesn't have anything to do with the quality of the language itself, at least not for all these languages that are attached to fandom. But for those that are apart from that, it is something about the language itself that people find interesting. In *World of Warcraft*, we called it class fantasy – the idea that you can participate in an invented world in some meaningful way – in this thing that you think is really cool. With Dothraki it wasn't like people were really excited about the language. They were excited about Daenerys. Valyrian is getting more of a response now because a new show features it (*House of the Dragon*), and the ones speaking it are the ones that you wanted to think of as cool, as opposed to side characters.

It would have been a lot easier for people to become attached to Dothraki and use it because it's a head-initial language as opposed to High Valyrian, which is a head-final language. It's more lightly inflectional. The grammar just comes a lot more easily to me for Dothraki than it does for High Valyrian, which I still find difficult. Even Castithan, from *Defiance*, was easier because Castithan is head-final but was a lot less inflectional. I got to really memorize exactly which postpositions assign which of the three case endings, because I used it so much in translation. That made it a lot easier. I'm getting better with that with High Valyrian, due to its increased usage in both Duolingo and in *House of the Dragon*.

What Is Your Favorite of the Languages You have Created?

David: My favorite language that I've created was Irathient, also from *Defiance*. It was very difficult, but I just loved it, and I loved it because of the sound of it. I loved the grammar of it. I loved the way it worked. My next favorite was probably Munja'kin, which I created for *Emerald City*. It's the language that aligns more with my personal interest in language, in terms of languages that I enjoy learning which are head-initial, mostly isolating that type of thing.

Editors Afterword: Thank you very much for this interview and for revising it in written form for readers! And thanks so much for your generosity with information and your candor.

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Interview with Christine Schreyer

Editors: You've observed that there are not many studies of speakers of media-driven constructed languages like Na'vi. These speakers have tended to be dismissed simply as overzealous fans. Yet, from your perspective, these communities deserve more thoughtful and in-depth analysis. Can you elaborate on the need for such study and its potential value for popular culture studies?

Christine Schreyer: My thoughts on the importance of studying conlangs, fans, and fandoms aligns with the work of Mark Duffett, who writes,

> Fandom remains a complex and challenging area of analysis worth studying for many reasons. As Western society shifts further into a digital, tertiary, service economy, its analysis can help to explain why individuals are increasingly constructing their personal identities around the media products they enjoy… A focus on fandom uncovers social attitudes to class, gender, and other shared dimensions of identity… Crucially, its study can expose the operation of *power* in the cultural field. (2-3, emphasis in the original)

In my own research, I was interested in research with speakers of fanlangs, constructed languages tied to popular culture and fandoms (*Conlanging*), because they are a unique group of people. They are the "uber-fans" (Okrent 271; Schreyer "Digital" 1.3) but they are also fans who are actively taking up works of popular culture in a specific way – through the language of the world built for the artistic work.

Fanlang speakers are similar to individuals writing fanfic in that they are engaging with the material through a focus on language. However, while fanfic writers typically use their own languages to build out the world of the fandom, speakers of fanlangs are using the language of the media world to both participate in the fandom and the built world, but to also bring an aspect of the popular culture

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into their daily lives in the "real world." This has potential value for popular culture studies as it allows a new window into how popular culture impacts individuals and society.

For instance, my research with the Na'vi community has provided insights into how learners of endangered languages can model the language-learning techniques of fan communities to encourage more speakers of the endangered language (Schreyer "Media"; Schreyer "Digital" 10.5). However, the research has also shown that for a portion of the Na'vi speech community, learning the Na'vi language, as well as being a fan of the movie *Avatar*, has led to these individuals focusing on environmentalism in their daily lives (Schreyer "Green"). Similarly, the research of my former student, Amy Doricic, has shown that individuals who learned Dothraki, from the television series *Game of Thrones*, were more accepting of the different cultures within the television series, and this acceptance might also be expanded appreciation of cultures in the real world (Doricic). This was seen to be true for Na'vi speakers as well. For instance, one participant commented the following, "I feel that the Na'vi is an analogue of human indigenous cultures and that James Cameron intended to use the film to draw attention to these people and to the destruction of their environments. I have a strong interest in this as well, thus my interest in the film" (Na'vi English survey respondent #148). Others mentioned this connection as well and described how, despite the critiques of *Avatar* as a "fictional *Dances with Wolves*" (Ketcham et al. 199), the film does bring Indigenous issues in the real world, although it is unclear how allyship for those non-Indigenous speakers of Na'vi might have played out beyond this recognition.

Studying fanlang communities also has potential for examining how communities form around artifacts of popular culture, specifically an intangible item, such as a language. For example, research conducted by my former student, Brianna Peacey, has examined how participation in the Trigedasleng community, from the television show *The 100*, has led to greater sense of belonging and a stronger sense of identity for members (Peacey). Studies of fanlang communities also contribute to the field of sociolinguistics through the analysis of how different social factors play out within a new speech community; how do dialects form, if at all. How is slang developed? Are there differences in the speech of different age groups or genders? Fan language communities are microcosms of both the fandoms themselves but also of speech communities writ large.

Overall, returning to Duffett, the study of fandoms allows scholars to better understand how media and popular culture help shape people's identities and how

this relates to the broader world in terms of contemporary social attitudes, whether those are positive or negative, and how these imagine worlds might provide opportunities to imagine new realities as well (2-3).

Editors: We think your research on using Na' vi language learning techniques of fan communities to encourage more speakers of endangered languages is very interesting. Of all the conlangs and conlang-learning techniques, what drew you to look at Na'vi? What is so distinct about the Na' vi learning techniques from other conlang learning techniques? Considering the strong colonial tropes and racialization in *Avatar*, it would make sense to use the Na' vi learning techniques if fans were aware of these power relations and using/learning Na' vi language as resistance to colonialism.

Christine: This is a great question, and it was more a case of timing than anything that drew me to look at the Na'vi community. *Avatar* came out in December of 2009 and I taught my course on new languages, at the time called Pidgins, Creoles, and Created Languages, for the first time in the fall of 2010. In that course we focused much of our attention on Klingon, as a fanlang, and Esperanto, as another conlang which was developed with a different purpose (to be an International Auxiliary Language). However, Na'vi was very much a focus in the news at this time and there were reports of thousands of people learning Na'vi around the world. In fact, ahead of my study of Na'vi speakers, I wrote an article comparing both Klingon and Na'vi community learning practices for endangered language communities (see Schreyer "Media"). Since there was little information I could find on what Na'vi speakers were doing to gain all these speakers I decided to find out for myself, which is how I began this research.

One of the main differences turned out to be the availability of online resources. As Rogers notes in *A Dictionary of Made-Up Languages*, "Being a language born during the Internet age, Na'vi has better online representation than most other made-up languages" (155). This remains absolutely true and is also tied to the marketing and information provided on the language ahead of the movie's release, including a Language Log Blog post from Paul Frommer ("Some), and the book *James Cameron's Avatar: An Activist Survival Guide* (Wilhelm and Mathison). In the end, the study became more about how fans who are passionate about language can support each other in community and learn together via online resources. As many Indigenous communities often have members who live away from their home

territories, I became interested in what these online communities could share and how to model Na'vi communities for language. In fact, in 2015, I gave a TEDx talk at my university, the University of British Columbia, Okanagan, on this topic titled, "How to Be a Language Fangirl" (Gagne). So, while some of the Na'vi speaking participants saw themselves as allies to Indigenous communities and their land protection, this was not the main reason I chose this community of fanlang speakers as a focus of my research – it was more a situation of the right time and the right place – online.

Editors: We're interested in the role that conlangs play in reinforcing or challenging the power dynamics within fiction. For example, we've studied the Tusken people and their language, which originally consisted of animalistic sounds like braying donkeys. This seemed to encourage audiences to deny Tusken people their subjectivity (later series have done much to improve this disparity). On the other hand, *The Expanse* and *Star Trek: Discovery* use Belter creole and Klingon, respectively, to enhance the subjectivity of Belters and Klingons. What role/s do you think conlangs play in establishing or representing the identity of their speakers within fiction? Does hearing characters speak conlangs help establish their identity, as well as their subjectivity?

Christine: As conlangs become more popular, they are being used in ways that dialects have been used to indicate different power structures and social standing (think Hagrid in *Harry Potter*). In my opinion, conlangs can represent the identities of the characters of an imagined world in at least two ways: 1) the sound of the language and 2) the look of the language (as represented through writing systems). The first is still the most prominent in the realm of language creation in popular culture since not all artlangs, or constructed languages in artistic works, have writing systems. It is also possible for a work of popular culture to have a writing system without a full constructed language attached to it, called conscripts (*Conlanging*), but in recent years as production designers and directors have realized fans want more authenticity in their media, these have not been as prominent. Sound, therefore, is still the main point of reference to identity. And, yes, I believe that when viewers hear characters speak a conlang this helps establish the character's identity, their role in hierarchical power structures within a film, but also their subjectivity.

For instance, the language of Klingon is known to be guttural and was made to match the aggressive culture of Klingons (Okrent 266) while Dothraki also has been perceived as guttural and made to match the culture of the Dothraki horse riders (Peterson 25, Kass "Speaking"). In contrast, James Cameron's request to linguist Paul Frommer ahead of the creation of the Na'vi language included direction that the language should sound "nice" to audiences (Shaw). In my research, many speakers of Na'vi (n=40 out of 293) pointed to the musical and pleasant sound of Na'vi as a reason why they were learning the language. One respondent said, "At this point, I'd rather learn Na'vi than Klingon largely due to the way it sounds; Na'vi was designed to sound beautiful whereas Klingon was designed to sound harsh" (Na'vi English survey respondent #76, 2015). As we can see from this quote, sometimes the match between sound and identity is made by fans. In my work as a language creator I have also been directed to build languages with specific sound traits. For the Eltarian language for *Power Rangers* (2018), the director Dean Israelite also requested "guttural sounds" for the language to "feel older" like ancient Greek and Aramaic, as this matched his vision of the Eltarian people, who were the original power rangers. There has been less fan take-up of this conlang, which appears in only a few scenes of the film, so it is difficult to say if these choices have impacted how viewers perceived the characters (Zordon, Rita Repulsa, and Alpha 5) speaking the language.

Similarly, for the language of Beama in *Alpha*, the director Albert Hughes requested that the language sound similar to Spanish and Italian with shorter syllables (Consonant-Vowel, Vowel-Consonant, Vowel), which also matched the academic research on the earliest human languages as well; I considered both when developing this language (see Schreyer and Adger). I think the combination of artistic vision and academic research led to the characters speaking this language being perceived as "realistic" or "authentic," which was the aim of this film that was set 20,000 years ago. For this film, I also created a dialect of the language, which was spoken by a neighboring tribe although, unless they were listening closely, viewers might not notice this difference in speech. However, I felt it was important to highlight how we can imagine these early human communities as similar to our own modern speech communities with different structures. On a related note, there was also an early storyline, which did not make the final cut of the film, where the main characters in Alpha encounter Neanderthals. The first draft of the scripts I read did not have the Neanderthals speaking their own language, but rather communicating through grunts. As you note in your question, this choice

would have limited the subjectivity of the Neanderthal characters, but it also contradicts modern research on the origins of human language. I argued for a Neanderthal language, and was eventually asked to create one, although this language and the associated storyline did not make the final cut of the film. Finally, Bettina Beinhoff's work has examined both the sound symbolism of conlangs, as well as how conlangs are perceived alongside other natural languages.

In regard to writing, if media includes writing, whether that's as an art piece, such as the writing systems of Gallifreyan, which appear in *Dr. Who* (Vultee), or a writing system based on a constructed language, such as Kryptonian in *Man of Steel*, the producers of that media are also using this aspect of the conlang to project an imagined society, which has an impact on how the characters associated with that society are portrayed. Is the writing complex or unusual, such as that which appears in *Arrival*, or something that reminds viewers of a particular human writing system? There are two kinds of Kryptonian writing in *Man of Steel*; one is a logographic writing style, designed as the ancient system, where a symbol represents concepts, while the other is the more modern syllabic writing, where Consonant-Vowel combinations are represented as one symbol. This latter writing system matched the constructed language I developed while the logographic system, known in the canon as "glyphs," were developed by the art department before I arrived and are a major plot point in the film. For instance, in the DVD promotion materials for *Man of Steel*, a website identified the ancient Kryptonian writing system in the following way:

> Symbols (Kryptonian Culture)
>
> Glyphs
>
> Emblems or glyphs represented a Kryptonian family dynasty, and would adorn Kryptonian homes as well as clothing. Among these was the House of El, which also represents hope in Kryptonian. (Burlingame)

While this backstory does not appear in the film specifically, commentary on the "S" meaning "hope" appears in one of Kal-El's (Superman's) lines to Lois Lane in the film. Supplementary materials to the original media production then can help to explain the logic of the world to interested fans and expand how the world, the characters, and the language are viewed.

Editors: You may be familiar with the Bechdel-Wallace test for objectively analyzing the validity of female characters in films, which was translated for race by Nikesh Shukla (Bechdel, Latif). Recently sisters Nadia Latif and Laila Latif and

Ava DuVernay developed separate sets of questions that expose structural racism in film (Latif, DuVernay). Building on the work of these thinkers, we have developed the Conlanger test for cultural artifacts with conlangs. We proposed questions like: How often do characters speak to each other in the conlang about subjects unrelated to characters from outside the group? Do you think such a test would reveal useful insights about movies like *Avatar* and their associated conlangs? If so, what questions do you think should be part of our Conlang Test? Do you think such a test would reveal useful insights about movies like *Avatar* and their associated conlangs?

Christine: Yes, absolutely! However, I think that I would not have been able to answer this question just from my experience conducting research with the Na'vi speech community since I think this question speaks more to the writer and directors of films than to the fans or even the language creators. Since my work with the Na'vi speech community, I have made languages for a variety of films. These include languages that were made to be "art" (*Man of Steel*), languages that were made to "set the scene" (*Power Rangers*), and languages that were meant to be pivotal to the film (*Alpha*). The use of conlangs in each of these films was not my decision, but what has happened to them after is absolutely related to popular culture. For *Man of Steel*, I was hired by the Art Department, who wanted to include instances of Kryptonian writing on the sets and props of the film. The language is never spoken in the film, but there is a full conlang (well, as full as conlangs for popular culture can be, as they are built in short timelines with limited vocabulary) associated with the world of the film. Kryptonian would not pass a Conlang Cultural Artifact Test if speaking was the only criterion.

Editors: If so, what questions do you think should be part of our Conlanger Test?

Christine: You had proposed the question, "How often do characters speak to each other in the conlang about subjects unrelated to characters from outside the group"? However, I think perhaps a broader question might be the following, "How often do characters speak to each other in the conlang about subjects unrelated to characters, or cultural objects, from outside the group?" since I can imagine scenarios where characters speaking a conlang are reflecting on an aspect of society that is alien to them, as well as the people who are unlike them or are alien. *Power Rangers* would likely rank highly in this version of the test since, as a language that

was made to "set the scene," the characters speak mainly to themselves in Eltarian, until Alpha 5 tells Zordon the new rangers "speak a primitive language called English" (*Power Rangers*), and then directs him to the ship's matrix and all future communication is in that language.

I think other questions that might be helpful for a conlang cultural artifact test are the following:

1. Is there a writing system for the language and is it used to communicate within the conlang community or to provide historical or cultural context? Or is it a "flavor conscript" (Schreyer "Constructed") to give the idea of another world and culture or an actual fully realized constructed language?
2. How often is the conlang spoken within the media? Is it being used to "set the scene," as *Power Rangers* does or as Na'vi does in the new *Avatar: The Way of the Water* where the "instant translation" trick occurs (Shaw), or is it used throughout the film, such as in *Alpha*?

Alpha remains fairly unique as a film that uses a conlang throughout its entirety and, as a result, it sometimes received mixed reviews due to the use of subtitles throughout (Henderson). The film wasn't marketed as a film with a conlang – in fact the trailer used English voiceover – but the genre may also have contributed to this since the film was set in the ancient past in Europe and was not a film where two alien cultures are interacting with each other. Sci-fi and fantasy remain the staples of conlang creation. These are spaces where conlangs are anticipated, if not expected, but the question remains if audiences are ready for films or television shows that are entirely subtitled (despite the benefit to Deaf audiences, amongst others). Therefore, any Conlang Cultural Artifact Test would need to take into account quantity, quality, and scope of the conlang it was evaluating.

Editors: Follow-up to Question 3, with the full list of questions provided, how might this be applied to *Avatar* and the Na'vi language? Looking at those for whom the conlang is their language: Do some of them have names?

Christine: Yes, in *Avatar* the Na'vi characters have names, including the most important one, Neytiri, who is Jake Sully's Na'vi teacher. Fun fact: the Learn Na'vi community developed a one-on-one tutor program where advanced Na'vi speakers are paired with beginners, which models a language-learning method called "Master-Apprentice" (Hinton 177) that is used extensively in endangered-language contexts.

Editors: Do any of them talk to each other in that conlang, and are we able to understand them?

Christine: Yes, we see multiple scenes where Na'vi speak to each other, but also to the newcomer, Jake.

Editors: Are some of them individuated? Do we see subjectivity for any of them?

Christine: Yes, Neytiri is definitely individuated and has her own opinions on how life should be.

Editors: Are we shown any social structures like family units?

Christine: Yes.

Editors: Are we shown their everyday lives, like cooking, sleeping, hanging out?

Christine: Yes.

Editors: Are we shown a culture for them that includes history and spiritual components?

Christine: Yes.

Editors: Do they get to tell their story in their own voice?

Christine: No, the story is still told from the outsiders' perspective.

Editors: Do they "fulfill harmful, simplistic, or down-right racist stereotypes"? (DuVernay)

Christine: Yes, the Na'vi are portrayed with many stereotypical pan-Indigenous characteristics (Ketchum et al.).

Editors: Are marginalized people included in the production team?

Christine: Yes, while James Cameron, director, and Paul Frommer, language creator, are older white men, Frommer is a member of the LGBTQIA2s+ community, which is marginalized. And the lead actor, Zoë Saldaña, who speaks Na'vi as Neytiri, is Dominican and Puerto Rican.

Editors: This list is not a taxonomy of successful representation of Other in cultural artifacts. It describes, based on our analysis of them, what makes the Tuskens seem like a people.

Christine: Following this list of questions, the Na'vi language and community would rank very highly on what makes the Na'vi speakers seem like a people as well.

Editors: Thank you very much!

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Power through Othering: How Conlangs Find Value within Narratives

PARVATHY RAJENDRAN AND ANDREW KORAH

In the *Earthsea* novels, Ursula K. Le Guin uses a worldbuilding device, centered around the idea that all things, living and non-living, have a True name in the Old Speech. The Old Speech is a narrative device that allows its speaker access to "name something for what it is," giving them power over it, and, by extension, the world itself. This specific idea of an ancient, or other, language that provides power to those fluent in it, by drawing out the essence of things, and making a claim to Truth, is a common motif in many popular, and young adult, fantasy stories from the 20th century onwards. We see a similar idea in Christopher Paolini's *Inheritance Cycle*, where magic is performed through the Ancient Language spoken by the Elves. In both these texts, the language possesses a claim to Truth, as an assured source of objectivity, because men cannot lie when they speak in that language. Fluency in these constructed ancient tongues determines the extent of magic and power accessed by the speaker.

The paradox of how fictional languages of power function in the narrative worldbuilding, and narrated hierarchies, lies in the manner of its production, and its reproduction in the reader's imagination. Beyond the confines of the narrated

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world, the reader's world and understanding is a key factor that ascribes power – and creates hierarchies – within the narrated world through the framework of fictional languages, or languages created within a fictional world. In this paper we argue that in the reader's understanding of these worlds, certain acts within the narrative, which are associated with power, lead the reader to ascribe power to a specific fictional language, making it a symbol of that power. In a way, fictional languages construct power structures within the narrated world by limiting access to it, and othering its speakers from a majority that cannot access it. The minority speakers, therefore, get cast in the role of mystical or wise creatures, who can magically control the nature of the world through this language. We also argue that the power and value ascribed to these fictional languages is not merely within the narrative world, but also in the reader's imagination, where the reading creates a network of subjective and objective positions and related hierarchies in the narrated world.

We explore three different kinds of associations that power has to fictional languages, represented by three works of fantasy fiction: *Eragon* by Christopher Paolini, *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien, and *The Earthsea Cycle* by Ursula K. Le Guin. These texts are important, not just in their diverse approaches to employing fictional languages in the secondary/narrated world of the fantasy text, but also because they can be located in a linear history of a specific kind of high fantasy that is referred to as the "Tolkienesque" (Casey 115) or "Tolkienistas" (Mendlesohn). Fantasy narratives in the 20th century, specifically what is commonly called high or epic fantasy, have largely been retellings of J.R.R. Tolkien's epic-styled *The Lord of the Rings*. The novel, published in three parts, is often referred to as a trilogy, and has (in more ways than one) led to the publishing of subsequent fantasy series following a similar plot layout and trilogy format.

Tolkien's Middle-earth narratives also provided a further, and to us, a more interesting component to this formula of fantasy writing – a multi-racial fantasy world whose primary markers are the maps that the text comes with, and a sprinkling of conlangs to demonstrate the authenticity of the different specie-races and their independent cultures. Fictional languages by themselves cannot be ascribed to 20th century fantasy – a version of it exists in every story involving fairies, or other magical creatures in older, more traditional narratives of the kind. However, Tolkien's particular way of narrating Middle-earth, with the storytellers and memory keepers within Bilbo and Frodo's narratives being the elves, directly influenced several writers of fantasy to derive a power structure where the people

who spoke some languages held more power than those who did not. This will be explored further in the section analyzing Tolkien's construction of the relations between the languages he constructed for Middle-earth.

The paper will begin with a brief look at *Eragon*, by Christopher Paolini, which serves as an example of a more contemporary example of the Tolkienesque, albeit with a very simplistic and straightforward interpretation of the role of language in worldbuilding. This will be followed by a section on how Tolkien's worldbuilding creates an intersection between race, language and power that, to a degree, replicates the social assumptions of the reader. Finally, this paper will analyze *The Earthsea Cycle*, by Ursula K. Le Guin, as a series that consciously applies the idea of the fictional language to disrupt historically assumed power structures and value systems.

An important distinction must be made between Le Guin's Old Speech and Paolini's Ancient Language for the sake of clarity of terminology. The Ancient Language was created by Paolini and his team in a way that was quite like Tolkien's constructed languages. The language has a well-developed vocabulary and set of grammatical rules that are made clear in paratextual parts of the books, such as the appendix or the author's website. David J. Peterson explains that this sort of language is the kind that "has been consciously created by one or more individuals in its fullest form […] so long as either the intent or the result of the creation process is a fully functional linguistic system" (Peterson 18). He refers to this particular type of created language as a "conlang," which is the shortened form of "constructed language" (Peterson 18). In contrast, Le Guin's Old Speech, while being an integral aspect of her fantasy worldbuilding, is never fully explained to the reader. We are not provided with a list of grammar rules or appendices by the author, and we rarely see the language being spoken or used within the narrative. Nevertheless, the Old Speech is central to Le Guin's literary vision. This falls more closely under the category of what Peterson calls a "fictional language," which he defines as one that is simply "supposed to exist in a given fictional context" (Peterson 19). We will therefore refer to Le Guin's Old Speech as a fictional language, to make clear that it is not a fully developed language that can be learnt and used by readers external to the world of Earthsea.

Barnes and van Heerden provide us with a simple understanding of what conlangs mean within fiction worldbuilding practices, "In the case of fictional languages, authors actually 'create' native speakers within the fictional world of the book or film, which makes them 'virtual' natural languages" (103). The idea of

language as natural to the constructed world is an important aspect of the three authors we look at, all of whom go to some lengths to establish a history of the world that produced the language or, in an almost self-reflexive way, suggest that a magical and powerful original language brought the constructed world into being. This second perspective hints at the idea that language is part of nature, but also seems to be nature itself.

In "Created Languages in Science Fiction," Ria Cheyne uses the very helpful story of Babel to identify some of the values that conlangs tend to hold. Cheyne interprets the attempts to rediscover "the original language of God and Man" as "a quest for a universal language and for a philosophical language" that "had not merely been a universal of communication but a language which expressed precisely the nature of things; words mirrored reality" (387). This idea of this seemingly pure, universal language, that is one with nature and could also be considered nature itself, provides us with a helpful way to describe the apparently idealistic vision of language that is used primarily by Paolini and with a bit more critical nuance by Le Guin (but not by Tolkien).

In "Childhood Readings and the Genesis of Names in the Earthsea Novels of Ursula K. Le Guin," Robinson provides some helpful nuance to Le Guin's philosophical concept of an original language:

> The wellspring of Le Guin's fantasy, which is based upon the myth of a magical Ursprache, an original language of names, is found in the recreation and re-creation of names […] the making of names involves not simply the remembrance of a past experience, but more importantly the reconstitution of a childlike frame of mind as a contemporary experience. (Robinson 110)

Here, Robinson identifies that, in Le Guin's fantasy, the original language does not carry the same connotations of the pre-Babel language of purity and union between "God and Man." The pre-Babel language, as a concept, carries with it a patriarchal (in the literal sense of the word) quest for an origin. Le Guin does not locate the original in a long-forgotten historical and mythical past. Instead, Robinson argues, Le Guin positions language within the sensuous and aesthetic realm of sound, much the same way we think of music: "As Le Guin would say, the sound is 'where it all begins and what it all comes back to'" (Robinson 95). The "originary" position that language takes is therefore within a child's first (and intensely pleasurable) experience with the play of sound and the sensation of producing sounds through one's mouth, and of that sound falling upon one's ears. Robinson demonstrates that Le Guin's concept of language is not so rule-based, the way Paolini's is. Instead, it

intentionally opposes the patriarchal tendency to order language into structure and hierarchies of value. This essay will prove particularly useful to opening up the ways in which Le Guin disrupts the relation between the reader's presumptions of the social power structures of Earthsea and its conlangs, in contrast to the way in which Tolkien's *Silmarillion* almost affirms the reader's presumptions that they bring to the text.

To further demonstrate the ways in which Le Guin disrupts the generic conventions of fantasy fiction and its linguistic concepts, Comoletti and Drout, in "How They Do Things with Words: Language, Power, Gender, and the Priestly Wizards of Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea Books," argue that Le Guin "is undertaking a feminist intervention into her secondary world" (113). The article connects the masculine relation to magic and the language of power to the practice of priesthood and celibacy, which hints at the overturning of this patriarchal power structure, when Le Guin's women characters that perform magic, such as Tenar, do not need to be celibate. Perhaps Le Guin is subtly arguing that there is an alternative relation to the world and power than that of masculine institutions that function on ritualistic (and in our world, moralistic) self-abnegation. This begs us to ask the question: if men need to separate themselves from worldliness to hold power responsibly, and, in contrast, women form deep-rooted connections to the world to draw power from it, is Le Guin critiquing the way social structures of power are ordered to keep masculine drives in check? Is she also questioning the elite position that the wizards of Roke hold as minority speakers of the language of power over the majority populace? This paper explores these questions in order to draw out the nuanced ways in which conlangs can be deployed in constructed worlds to both build up and break down the assumptions of social dynamics that readers bring to the text.

Eragon: Conlang as Unquestionably Ascribed Power

To begin with, we first look at *Eragon* (2003), the first novel in *The Inheritance Cycle*, written by Christopher Paolini. It is a Young Adult fantasy series set in the continent of Alagaesia, a large portion of which is ruled by the tyrant king, Galbatorix. The continent is populated by Urgals (Paolini's version of Tolkien's orcs), humans, dragons, elves, and dwarves, all of whom are considered sentient races or species, set apart from the remaining animal world. Paolini seems to wear his influences on his sleeve, which seem to mostly include *Star Wars*, Tolkien's

The Lord of the Rings, Le Guin's *Earthsea Cycle*, and Anne McCaffrey's *The Dragonriders of Pern*. Paolini's titular character, Eragon (which sounds much like Aragorn), loses his family, and sets off with a gruff but caring mentor, much like Luke Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi. The world has dragons and an originary language of magic, much like that of Earthsea. Paolini even went on to imitate Le Guin's naming convention, by turning his trilogy into a "cycle" once he realized he could no longer finish his story in three books. Finally, his main character rides a dragon. However, we argue that Paolini's concept of worldbuilding and conlangs has important differences from that of both Tolkien and Le Guin, despite almost entirely borrowing their concepts. He borrows Tolkien's vision of language being representative of racial or specieist differences, while also using Le Guin's idea of language being a fundamental and metaphysical aspect of the world's existence itself. The important distinction that we draw is that Paolini does not deploy the conlang to allow for critical insight into the power dynamics of his constructed world. Rather, the conlang of magic is the source of unquestionable and unquestioned power that all sentient beings, no matter what native language they speak, defer to. Those for whom their native tongue is the conlang of magic are clearly identified as both powerfully and aesthetically superior.

In *Eragon* the language of magic, also known as the "ancient language" is a fundamental element of its worldbuilding. Paolini seems to view the ancient language as being the originary force of existence itself, suggesting that the things of his world and the objects in it do not precede language. It almost seems as though the ancient language and the world are one and were formed simultaneously. This seems evocative of the biblical concept where creation is tied to the utterance of the creator: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (*ESV Bible,* John 1.1). This lays a metaphysical framework that the spoken *word* is not only a source of meaning and comprehension, but of all creation itself. Paolini's ancient language, similarly, through the exchange of energy, seems to give its speaker the ability to manipulate objects of their world, hold power over those objects, and call things into being through the utterance of the language.

The Rules of Magic. When magic is first introduced in *Eragon*, Paolini suggests that it is not simply learnt, but also emerges out of the Dragon Rider's connection to the Dragon, who are considered magical beings. "Many think the king's magical powers come from the fact that he is a wizard or sorcerer. That's not true, it is because he is a Rider" (Paolini 144). Paolini establishes a set of specific rules

according to which magic functions, almost as if it were a science. The rules are to be followed when invoking magic, which is manifested into the world solely when it is expressed through the ancient language: "if you wish to employ the power, you must utter the word or phrase of the ancient language that describes your intent. For example, if you hadn't said *brisingr* yesterday, nothing would have happened" (Paolini 145).

The magic also seems to loosely follow the logic of sword and sorcery role-playing games, where magic is exercised by exchanging your energy reserves. The first time Eragon uses magic, Paolini describes the energy expended as "a wave of exhaustion" that made him feel "strange and feeble, as if he had not eaten for days" (Paolini 134). Paolini does not lay down a hard set of rules for how much energy is required for how much magic, but he does state that physical fitness and stamina are necessary to use magic continually over periods of time, and that greater feats of magic, such as moving a large rock, require greater amounts of energy than moving a pebble. Through practice, over the course of the narrative, the titular character, Eragon, seems to develop his magical stamina, eventually performing great feats with relative ease.

The Rules of Grammar. Paolini goes on to suggest that the names of things, or nouns, in the ancient language give you power over them. To manifest or express magic into the world one must know the name of the thing you wish to express. Paolini makes it clear that the relationship to magic and the language that gives access to the magic is what determines power. When Eragon asks his mentor whether the language has its own name, Brom replies, "Yes, but no one knows it. It would be a word of incredible power, something by which you could control the entire language and those who use it" (Paolini 145). This explanation gives us a further idea of how power functions in his narrated world by relating it to truth. He relies on the notion that the ancient language somehow gives access to what seems to be a platonic realm of ideal forms, and by knowing the language, and thus also having knowledge of those forms or "essences," one gains power over the object.

> It is possible to speak the name of an object in the ancient language and summon its true form. It takes years of work and great discipline, but the reward is complete control over the object. That is why one's true name is always kept hidden, for if it were known by any with evil in their hearts they could dominate you utterly. (Paolini 463)

An act of magic is therefore an act of expending energy. However, the magical energy can only be expended when it is mediated through the ancient language.

This is because it is the names of things, the nouns in the ancient language, that seem to precede the object in some essential or idealistic sense. This originary position that language holds in this constructed world is what seems to give power to the language, allowing the speaker to have power over the objects, and subjects, of the constructed world.

Magic is also not granted to all. One must have the "innate" ability to wield it: "To work with magic, you must have a certain innate power, which is very rare among people nowadays" (Paolini 145). The races of Elves and Dragons seem to all be born with the power, because they also seem to naturally speak in the ancient language. Dragons, like in all fantasy, seem somehow magical themselves and can understand the language even when they have not grown up speaking it. The Elves are more attuned to magic because their mother-tongue is the ancient language itself. They live and breathe through it, build their homes with it, and connect to their environment through their ability to judiciously manipulate it.

The societal structure of Alagaesia, based on the access to the ancient language, seems to be organized as follows: Dragons are the most powerful sentient beings, followed by Elves who are superior to individuals with potential for magical power and belonging to other races and species, who, in turn, are more powerful than all remaining non-magical folk. Paolini does not really explain why such a power structure should exist. He doesn't give us a creation myth. But he works with the trope that the elves are considered the more beautiful/long lived/more powerful race. In *The Inheritance Cycle* it is very clear the elves are the most powerful bipedal race or species because their native tongue is also the language of magic/power. This is asserted by the idea that while no one can lie in the ancient language, elves can "twist the truth."

By making the ancient language as essential to the underlying structure of the narrated world, Paolini seems to view it as something fixed in place and ahistorical. Peterson points out that "Writing systems […] are organic systems, just like languages" (164). Pronunciations change and spellings change as society changes over time. Peterson goes on to give three primary reasons for why languages change: ease of articulation, acoustic interference, and innovation (165-6). Paolini's ancient language is quite opposed to this idea. By being the force of creation and magic itself, the ancient language, while being archaic and "ancient" has remained the same. This of course means that, for the lay folk of Alagaesia, the language is practically inaccessible, making magic and power similarly inaccessible. This idea of an ahistorical language shows a preference for permanence over the typically

ephemeral quality of language in time. Its permanence gives it a sense of authority and power, which in turn is associated with those that speak the language. Therefore, the language's fixed grammar, value, and meanings create the hierarchical structure of Paolini's world.

Tolkien, Middle-earth, and the Many Languages of a World

Tolkien's use of conlangs is markedly different from that of both Paolini and Le Guin. The language of the elves is not inherently powerful. While *The Inheritance Cycle* can be considered a derivative (in a sense) re-telling of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, it is important to examine the effects of Tolkien's storytelling on 20th century fantasy that employ both multi-racial worlds and conlangs. Tolkien's Middle-earth is an extensive thought experiment, spreading beyond the confines of *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*. First published in 1937, *The Hobbit* re-imagined the fantasy rhetoric of the next century. Specifically, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* were among the first works of fiction to be popular in America as well as Europe, with the 1965 American paperback editions bringing an unprecedented number of readers (Mendlesohn and James 50; James 72).

In the scope of this paper, our focus is primarily on how a large portion of this new readership interpreted, and consequently copied, the power structures between the races. The central premise by which we argue this specific interpretation by the reader is the years and the time gap between the publications of these three texts. *The Hobbit* was published in 1937, *The Lord of the Rings* from 1954 to 1955, and *The Silmarillion* in 1977 with almost ten years between each text, and the oldest Middle-earth story being the last. *The Silmarillion* later publication created an opportunity for readers to arrive at and consolidate the power structures that they perceived in the first two texts as inherent. Our argument, keeping in mind the positionality of the reader, is based on how Tolkien frames the power dynamics between races in Middle-earth's social structures.

Within the narrative, the stories of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are written by the two Bagginses. In two separate, consecutive and related adventure quests, the central questing hero is the unlikely hobbit, with the more powerful races playing supporting roles. The hobbits are also the narrators of the story within the world of Middle-earth, whom the readers encounter – Bilbo writes "There and Back Again," and Frodo writes *The Lord of the Rings* as an extension to Bilbo's memoir,

before passing the manuscript on to Sam Gamgee. The narrative that the reader encounters, with the exception of *The Silmarillion*, is thus heavily informed by the hobbits' understanding of the world, their biases, values and affections.

The Hobbits and the Elves. In several instances, across both texts, the Bagginses encounter elves as a kindly, helpful people, who are friends of Gandalf, the medium through which they access the world outside the Shire. To Bilbo, who finds it difficult to find acceptance among the dwarves he travels with, the easy acceptance and polite curiosity that greets him at Rivendell comes as a welcome relief. Later too, despite the sour relation between the elves of Mirkwood and the Dwarves, Bilbo finds comfort and healing among the elves. Bilbo also witnesses Gandalf, the great wizard himself, deferring to the elves, specifically Elrond, as the keeper of Middle-earth's history, almost like it were a personal memory. Frodo also finds healing and acceptance among the Elves, both in Rivendell and Lothlorien. Elrond and Galadriel actively declare their stances on what should happen in the quest of the One Ring and provide aid in a battle far beyond his understanding and the scope of his task as the ring-bearer.

The reader's privileging of the elves happens both from their primary encounter with the elves' (specifically Elrond's) narrative of Middle-earth history. In the elven version of this history, only the elves escaped the influence of Sauron's One Ring. The race of Men easily succumbed, turning the nine kings into Ring-wraiths who were twisted into a dangerous loyalty for Sauron. The Dwarves, on the other hand, were impervious to the influence of Sauron, but chose to excuse themselves from the war to destroy Sauron and the Ring. The races of Men and Dwarves delay the regeneration of Middle-earth: through their inherent weaknesses, as represented by Isildur, Boromir and Denethor's thirst for power; and by shutting themselves in, as represented by Thorin in *The Hobbit*.

The Silmarillion *and the Objective History of Middle Earth*. It is only in the final of the three texts that the specific history of Middle Earth is discussed, vis-à-vis the origins of the races and the history of the Rings of Power. In this history, presumably told from Tolkien's perspective, the only specificity is about the timeline of creation and the "waking" of the races. The narrative ends with mentioning how Aulë, and not Ilúvatar (the creator god), created the Dwarves. However, since Ilúvatar was aware of Aulë's creation, and because Aulë dedicated them to Ilúvatar's will, the Dwarves were accepted as part of the Children of Ilúvatar, unlike the creations of Melkor. However, as we see in later works of fantasy that imitate Tolkien (the Tolkienesque), the Dwarves have been repeatedly

represented as less powerful, less kind – they are at best allies, but are mostly somewhat obscure, uncouth and often angry cave-dwellers.

In contrast to Paolini's representation of language of power as permanent and ahistorical, throughout Tolkien's worldbuilding we see that he intently positions the development of his conlangs within the narrative history of Middle-earth. Being a philologist himself, the idea that language develops over time, and is not a static thing with a unified meaning, is perhaps an easily accepted notion. Tolkien therefore does not suggest that the Elven languages have power in and of themselves. Rather, it is the way the language appeals to the narrator of *The Lord of the Rings*, being Frodo the hobbit, that it becomes aestheticized. Within the narrative the language is meant to reflect the beauty of the elven race. However, in an extension to this rhetoric, where the elves are viewed as aesthetically superior, and its derivation in later tropes of fantasy narrative, such as in *The Inheritance Cycle*, conlangs spoken by the elves become languages of magic and power. Dwarvish tongues, meanwhile, are just another language – which are different from the common tongue of Men (and perhaps the reader), but a separate non-magical language that sounds gruff and as coarse as the stones and ores that dwarves have built their skills around.

The Silent Wizards of Earthsea

> …hearing the Old Speech he felt always that he was on the point of understanding, almost understanding; as if it were a language he had forgotten, not one he had never known. In speaking it the mage's voice was much clearer than when he spoke Hardic, and seemed to make a kind of silence around it, as does the softest touch on a great bell. But the dragon's voice was like a gong, both deep and shrill, or the hissing thrum of cymbals. (Le Guin, *Farthest Shore* 171-2)

> …and the way to the understanding of this speech starts with the Runes; they were written when the islands of the world were first raised up from the sea. (Le Guin, *Wizard* 27)

In *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Ursula Le Guin sets down the rules of magic/power in the world, in the guise of the cryptic instructions and training provided by the Master Namer of Roke (and almost nothing else). Unlike Paolini, and other writers of the

Tolkienesque, and to a certain extent Tolkien himself, Le Guin is conscious of, and in many ways, subverting the role of a conlang in the fantasy tradition. In Earthsea, the ability to use the Old Speech grants a mage his power, but in Le Guin's world building it also clearly marks the extent of the power they may use.

Earthsea mirrors several of the tropes that are characteristic of the 20th century fantasy following Tolkien – the young, unlikely hero, the existence of a people that are memory keepers of the past, and by extension the holders of all knowledge/power, and most people who are unable to access that power/knowledge because of their lack of knowledge of a language by which to call it. The mages of Roke, who are all men, and the few hedge witches (like Sparrowhawk's aunt) are the only wielders of this power. In the political complications that are part of this world, some of the users of magic, like the Lady of O, who speak one of the Hardic languages of Earthsea might have greater possibility of commanding that power. However, as the Master Namer reminds Sparrowhawk: "That which gives us power to work magic, sets the limit of that power" (Le Guin, *Wizard* 52).

Sparrowhawk. In *The Earthsea Cycle,* Le Guin constructs a world where the conlang is central to its existence, creation and cognizance. However, it also clearly emerges after the creation of the world. We are only given two specifications of this relation between the knowledge of Old Speech and the power of magic. First, Erreth-Akbe is a key figure in the creation myth of this world, and specifically the archipelago and its current socio-political and geographical structure. Second, Sparrowhawk, by the time we (the readers) hear the stories, has already left behind his powers and renounced his position as the Archmage, and is considered the most powerful wizard in history, with the possible exception of Erreth-Akbe himself.

However, as readers, we also only hear of these stories almost like rumors – we are never actually shown either of these mages' feats of power. Erreth-Akbe is a legend as old as the land in which Sparrowhawk's stories are set, and we only find trace references of him – the amulet the Sparrowhawk attempts to recover in *Tombs of Atuan*, and the allusions to his own power as comparable to the man in the legends. We always meet Sparrowhawk in different avatars, and rarely as the powerful, wise mage he is rumored to be. We first meet the child in Gont who is born with the power, and an impatient thirst for more, turning into an impetuous teenager who unwittingly unleashes the Shadowbeast into the world. In *Tombs of Atuan*, the older Ged is a more tempered mage, not yet Archmage, and unfortunately lost in the labyrinth of the temple of the Nameless One. He is rescued by, and simultaneously rescues the young priestess: Arha, later Tenar, to whom the

success of the quest belongs. In *The Farthest Shore*, he is the Archmage, but mostly a mentor to the young prince Arren, recognizing the boy's role in the quest to save and unite the world, and ultimately sacrificing his own powers to aid in the larger scheme of things. Finally, in *Tehanu*, Sparrowhawk is a broken man, devoid of both his power and responsibilities, looking to rebuild himself in this new role of being "ordinary," while Arren's and the girl Tehanu's strange powers herald a new making of the world.

To Le Guin's narrator, Sparrowhawk's grand feats of magic seem almost inconsequential, when compared to how parts of his story can serve as a lesson to understanding the Old Speech and how it lends and limits a magic user's powers. The best example of this is in the resolution of *A Wizard of Earthsea*. The young, and as yet untested, Sparrowhawk spends a majority of his confrontation with the Shadowbeast running from it – his fear stems from the unknowability of its nature. The Archmage Gensher reaffirms this fear, when Sparrowhawk confesses that he does not know the creature's name:

> Nor do I know. It has no name. you have great power inborn in you, and you used that power wrongly, to work a spell over which you had no control, not knowing how that spell affects the balance of light and dark. Life and death, good and evil… you summoned a spirit from the dead, but with it came one of the Powers of unlife. Uncalled it came from a place where there are no names. Evil, it wills to work evil through you. The power you had to call it gives it power over you: you are connected. It is the shadow of your arrogance, the shadow of your ignorance, the shadow you cast. Has a shadow a name?" (Le Guin, *Wizard* 46)

Delivered as a chastising of Sparrowhawk's arrogance and impetuousness, this response also allows for a foreshadowing of the ultimate defeat of the Shadowbeast, and even further, of the crux of Sparrowhawk's abilities and powers as a mage. When Sparrowhawk defeats the creature, he does so by calling the creature by his own true name – Ged: "and in the same moment the shadow spoke without lips or tongue, saying the same word: 'Ged.' And the two voices were one voice" (Le Guin, *Wizard* 121). In one act, Sparrowhawk names, and by the naming, limits the power of the unknowable, unnamed shadow to his own. Once it has been known, its power to harm him, or the world itself, is ended. Therefore, to Le Guin, it seems that the act of naming is also an act of knowing or coming to understand. Le Guin privileges the act of self-discovery and self-understanding over that of the grand,

heroic narrative of typical fantasy stories. And the language of power seems primarily in service of that process.

In *Tombs of Atuan*, the central conflict is not in Sparrowhawk himself. He is searching for one object, but only gains it by accident, when he gives Arha her birth name. Tenar is not the Priestess' true name, it is merely the name she had before she became Arha, or The Eaten One, in the service of the Nameless One. Sparrowhawk is trapped in the labyrinth that is part of the temple dedicated to this nameless entity. But more than that, he is trapped in his ignorance of the labyrinth's nature itself. Thus, it falls on Arha – a girl, whose self, whose true name and knowability has been taken from her – to rescue him. She alone possesses the knowledge of the labyrinth, knowing its paths and doors and safe spaces. She alone can navigate to the heart of it and redeem the treasure – the Ring of Erreth Akbe. And it is Tenar who arguably brings the temple down with her knowledge – a power Sparrowhawk could not have possessed, even if he held the full Ring with the Runes rumored to be the original runes of the world's making itself. Sparrowhawk's powers, and abilities, is in how he can return to Arha her identity as Tenar, one that was hidden, but not erased, from her. In *The Farthest Shore*, it is only when the dragon Orm Embar reveals the knowledge of the Ring that Sparrowhawk is able to learn its power, and of the truth that it is Arren who must wield its true strength.

The Name of the Thing. The primary theme in the Earthsea stories is how the ability to know the name of a thing, in its general sense, and its specific, individual context is where true power of the world lies (Le Guin, *Wizard* 50-52). If the unnamed shadow was the obvious nemesis in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, the other three novels repeat this theme of power of knowledge. The Old Speech – or the language of Making – itself is never spoken, except a few words or the true names of people or dragons. Le Guin's rhetoric is to suggest and imply the existence and power of this language, and not demonstrate it as such. This is possibly why the great feats of Ged's magic are not directly given to us in the narrative.

In Earthsea, true power is in the ability to know the limit of one's knowledge, not in being keepers of it – in an almost opposite power structure to how conlangs of magic/power have been presented in the texts examined in the previous section. Cob's pursuit of immortality is likewise doomed by his not knowing the extent of his, and the spell's power – much like the young Sparrowhawk's mistake. Where knowing more of the conlang of power increases the speaker's control of the language, and by extension their magic/power, in *The Earthsea Cycle* this knowledge only makes the speaker more aware of the limits of their power, thus

silencing them. The most memorable example of this is in Ogion, who drives Sparrowhawk desperate by his long silences, but as each novel progresses, the reader also becomes aware of how little Sparrowhawk speaks or acts, even within the quest fantasy format. While Sparrowhawk is presented as the obvious protagonist, there is more done and said by the other characters. Sparrowhawk's actions are little, and usually limited to making a particular knowledge available.

The dragons are the only exception to this, as they are native speakers of this language. They are born in the knowledge of the language and speak it as their common tongue. This gives them a tremendous amount of power, allowing them to manipulate the language, and the limited human speakers of it to their will. However, as the language of Making, they are also limited by it – they can twist it to mean something else to a less knowledgeable speaker but cannot speak something untrue. Le Guin's worldbuilding is clear – the knowledge of a thing does not mean infinite power, instead it is a marker of the finiteness of this power.

Conclusion

In our reading of Tolkien we showed that the perspective held by the diegetic narrative voice in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, that of the hobbits themselves, held the elves in awe. That narrative's subjective hierarchy was made more objective in *The Silmarillion*, when we see that the elves were among the first inhabitants of Middle-earth to awaken. Their relative proximity to the origin of Middle-earth, their immortality and their gathered knowledge of the history of the world gives them a great deal of power. The languages of the elves do not, in themselves, have power, being simply products of the separation of the elves into two groups. However, its delicate lettering and its association with this rich history seem to hold an aura and a sense of beauty. Readers of Tolkien seem to similarly hold "elvish" in higher regard, having their own significant scholarly attention (The Elvish Linguistic Fellowship, a subsidiary organization of the Mythopoeic Society, is one such example). The other languages were both less developed by Tolkien and also paid less attention to by the larger public.

In contrast to Tolkien's languages, the ancient languages of Le Guin and Paolini are not simply products of history and culture. Rather, they are a force of creation that brings reality into being. The ancient language perfectly represents the real because it is the real. In the constructed worlds of Earthsea and Alagaesia, language is bound to the reality of those constructed worlds as the source of their truth.

However, a further distinction can be made between Le Guin and Paolini who associate power to that language. Paolini employs his ancient language as an unquestionable source of power that is permanent and unchanging. The closeness to that language, as shown by the elves and dragons, are reflected in how his society's hierarchies are formed. Similarly to Tolkien's elves, Paolini's elves are aesthetically pristine, long lived and physically superior. Their appearance and strength are drawn directly from their fluency in the ancient language, which they use as their mother tongue.

Le Guin disrupts these assumptions of ancient languages by intentionally subverting several tropes of fantasy fiction. *A Wizard of Earthsea'*s plot of good versus evil is retold as a story of self-discovery: Ged matures from a boy into a man by learning to be careful and considerate about his immense power. In *Tombs of Atuan*, Arha (later Tenar) saves Ged just as much as he saves her. We also see that Ged generally refuses to use magic unless absolutely necessary, and instead partakes in the labor of living like a normal person. It seems that his connection to the language and its power has taught him a value for the everyday rather than great feats of magic. Through the character of Tenar, Le Guin also breaks open the masculine institution of Roke, the guardians of magic and the Old Speech. The institution maintains celibacy and monkhood as the way men connect to magic. To take part in the power of the Old Speech they are asked to withdraw from the social world. Ged himself acknowledges that Tenar seems to have far greater power than even him. However, Tenar rejects the need to give up her life to seek out power and control and remains connected to that Old Speech without having to be celibate. Le Guin's values therefore clearly differ from that of Paolini's. For her knowledge of the Old Speech does not grant power, but rather a sensitivity towards the needs of the earth and a feeling of interconnectedness with nature and human nature and its social structures. Le Guin makes explicit her conceptualizing of the Old Speech as an originary force of nature in the following quote:

> The sound of the language is where it all begins and what it all comes back to. The basic elements of language are physical: the noise words make and the rhythm of their relationships. This is just as true of written prose as it is of poetry, though the sound effects of prose are usually subtle and always irregular. Most children enjoy the sound of language for its own sake. They wallow in repetitions and luscious word-sounds and the crunch and slither of onomatopoeia; they fall in love with musical or impressive words and use them in all the wrong places. (Le Guin, *Steering*, 19)

Here, it is evident that Le Guin's idea of the Old Speech is not held by a patriarchal order or masculine force of creation. The fundamental underlying metaphysics of Le Guin's secondary world represents a moment of childlike joy at the pleasure of the experience of sound and a force of creative energy. That creative energy Le Guin associates with femininity is embodied by Tenar, whose everyday life is itself a creative force. While the social structure of Roke ensures that primarily men retain power as the minority speakers of the Old Speech, Le Guin dismantles that structure by placing "the sound of language" in the center, as opposed to power. In doing so, she suggests that a feminine connection to nature, that recognizes its physicality and materiality and is adaptive, malleable and accepting of the ephemeral, is her source of values, as opposed to an abstracted philosophico-religious (and often patriarchal and masculine) conception of permanent and unquestionable truth.

Le Guin's narrative and her world-building reflect this position. She intentionally de-emphasizes Ged's grand feats of magic and focuses on the more important tale of the relationships between characters, their journeys of growth and the values they pass on to the next generation. Tolkien's conlangs were masterful acts of speculative labor that imagined entire socio-cultural histories behind languages. Paolini's Ancient Language was simply a placeholder for power itself and his society's structure seemed to flow out from it such that those closer to it were more privileged. Le Guin, however, makes it clear that for her it is not sufficient to simply have access to power, but to use it responsibly and carefully. While the social institutions of Earthsea do reflect some hints of a typical patriarchal structure, such as that of Roke, Le Guin allows her story to flow beyond the confines of a typical fantasy power struggle between good and evil, making it a more unique and subtle exploration of social structures in fantasy worldbuilding.

Among the now vast catalog of popular fantasy fiction, Le Guin's *Earthsea Cycle* stands out by intentionally disrupting the tropes of fantasy fiction. Instead, it is a fantastical vision of Le Guin's idea of everyday life and politics, infused with her feminist values and ethical concern towards ecology. This ambiguity of meaning in language and the recognition of power as a fleeting thing that Le Guin explores allows for more artistic depth and encourages a deeper engagement with the imagination than something that is fixed in its meaning and its use. Perhaps this perspective was fundamental to Le Guin's approach to worldly matters and politics, i.e. accepting that while we often feel the need for fixed meanings or easy resolutions (which fantasy often caters to) sometimes harder, but more rewarding,

work is needed to explore the ambiguities of everyday life, be it gender relations or the publishing industry in capitalism. While the conlangs of Tolkien and Paolini yield to the desire for fixed meanings, Le Guin's fictional language welcomes and celebrates ambiguity and disruptions of societal norms.

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The Linguistic Shifts in Tolkien's Elvish Languages from a Socio-political Lens

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As it is well known, Tolkien was a brilliant philologist and dedicated a big part of his life to what he called *glossopoeia* (complementing the concept of *mythopoeia*) by creating a variety of languages, a family in fact, including the variations of Elvish idioms. Gilson and Wynne say that "Tolkien also described the Elven languages themselves in terms of several versions of a "Tree of Tongues" drafted to accompany the *Lhammas* and *Lammasethen*, works describing the development of the languages within the history of Middle-earth" (187). It is therefore reasonable to assume that these languages not only evolved during the author's life, who continuously developed them, but that they also matured and transformed through the narratological aspects of his works. In fact, it may be argued that Tolkien used the narrative framework of his writings to explore the evolution of linguistics; as Ugolnik notes, "the invention of Elvish pre-dates the trilogy; in a true sense Tolkien created a world to act as a stage for a language" (18). This article will hence take into account the Elvish languages and explore how they changed based on the socio-political circumstances of the fictional characters who spoke them. The work will assume that Tolkien moulded the Elvish languages according not only to the

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linguistic and phonological phenomena of the Primary World that he understood perfectly, but as well as taking into account the motives and events within the Elvish chronicles; ultimately, Tolkien used a metaliterary process where both language and fiction interacted and intertwined.

To emphasize the impact of the narratological elements on the linguistic features, it is possible to compare Tolkien's technique of using unnamed intradiegetic narrators with the figures of the "wyrdwrīteras," what could be called chroniclers or historians in Old English. Through this comparison, Gallant affirms that "the history of the Elves is one that is both *morally* ideological and *politically* ideological as the wyrdwrīteras exposit the theme of Northern courage in their tales" (26).

The following paragraph will be useful to offer a brief and condensed representation of the family of Elvish tongues, their variations and their origin, as well as to give a general understanding of the dedication that Tolkien put into his works:

> Sindarin and Quenya in *The Lord of the Rings*, as indicated by such texts as "Quendi and Eldar" and *The Silmarillion*, are, like all the other Elvish tongues, originated in Primitive Quendian, from which is derived Common Eldarin. From the Common Eldarin arose Vanyarin, Ñoldorin, and Telerin. Sindarin is an offshoot of Telerin (Common Telerin), the language of the Teleri, who started the Great Journey to Valinor together with the Vanyar and the Ñoldor. While the Vanyar and the Ñoldor reached the destination and developed Quenya in Valinor, part of the Teleri remained in Middle-earth. Those among the Teleri who went to Valinor developed Telerin (proper), whereas those who remained in Beleriand were the Sindar, whose language was Sindarin, and the Nandor (the Green-elves), from whose language evolved Silvan Elvish. (Hemmi 164)

This article will hence consider *The Silmarillion* and the *Histories of the Middle-earth* (from now on *HoMe* or simply *History*) as the central source material. It is also important to emphasize that both these works were published posthumously, the first one in 1977 and the second one between 1983 and 1996; this was accomplished by his son, Christopher Tolkien, who organized and edited all the fragments that his father had left unpublished. As Hiley explains, "[*The Silmarillion*] is a system of stories whose greatest effect stems from their interrelation, that they are separate tales but nonetheless can only fully be understood when read as a whole" (843). It is for this reason that Tolkien believed

The Silmarillion to be indispensable for the comprehension of *The Lord of the Rings*. Similarly, David Peterson comments that "[Tolkien] understood that language itself is inseparable from the culture that produces it and he felt that if the languages he was creating had no place to breathe, they wouldn't have any kind of vitality" (10). It is exactly this intricacy of created myth and culture that this article aims to explore; it is quintessentially a Secondary world where the constructed language acts as a bonding agent for the events that transpire.

One of the aims of this article is to understand how the socio-political dimensions of the Secondary world change many aspects of its language. Echoes of the evolution of languages of the Primary world can be noticed with this study; as it will be explained, Tolkien was well aware of the historical and political dynamics that led to linguistic shifts – as he made them an intrinsic part within his own Secondary world. As an example, to explain the intricacies and dynamics of power, Michel Foucault explains in an interview how power is a "more-or-less organised, hierarchical, co-ordinated cluster of relations" (198); this description equally permeates the Secondary world that Tolkien created. It is however important to contextualize one important aspect: although there is much room for speculation on how the writer was influenced to create the *Legendarium*, and what were his historical circumstances, critics should be attentive as to not perceive his works with a modern non-contextualised lens. While there are several current debates regarding Tolkien's work, especially correlated with the depiction of the orcs and other hierarchical aspects within his world, this article will not focus on those nuances. It will instead give ample space to the lore of the Elvis tongue and its evolution and will rather focus on an intertextual analysis of the chronicles to analyse the conlangs that Tolkien crafted. The term conlang, although an anachronism when applied to Tolkien, will be hence used for simplicity.

It is particularly the Elves that have the most dynamic changes in their language, and through them Tolkien also explores spiritual and dilemmas and anxieties. As Fimi notes, "they are an 'experiment' in sub-creation, an attempt to construct a Secondary World in which dying means different things for different beings. The Elves are central because they provide a viewpoint from which deep human questions are explored through a Secondary World" (10). Various theological aspects will intertwine with the world building itself as it will be evident from the chronicles themselves. The work will hence examine the Elvish languages according to their evolution within the confinements of the Secondary world. Rather than outward process, where characteristics from the Secondary world are

critically cross-referenced with a Primary world lens, the process will be inward, hence understanding the criteria that were used to create the Secondary world. Although it is impossible to think of the political reality of the Elves in a vacuum, it will be assumed nevertheless that Tolkien's intent was merely to give his stories the equal sense of vitality that David Peterson inferred. This line of reasoning is also supported by Lewis, acknowledging how the socio-political dimension constitutes a point of authenticity within the narrative:

> So the political slant to events is what gives *The Silmarillion* a realism far removed from mere contrivance. The incidences of narrative bias throughout the text towards certain characters and against others seem to suggest that they were placed there on purpose by the author, rather than a natural development, reinforcing in my belief the enormous skill of the author by which the work gains such credibility and realism for the reader. (164)

The article hence recognises that there are different degrees in which the socio-political dimension of a text may be analysed and represented, however it is a choice to limit the observations and confine them only within the stories – or histories – of the Secondary world as they give ample room for speculation.

Lastly, given the vastness of the considered topic and the available study materials, this article will provide an explanation of the background of Elvish lore and then focus mostly on one particular of these tribes, the Ñoldor. This decision was made not only because the Ñoldor are pivotal in the social dynamics of the Elvish tribes, but also because their agency implies drastic political shifts as well, and these in turn have a series of repercussions on their language as it will be emphasized through the examples provided. Furthermore, "the political rhetoric and sententiae of the Ñoldorin wyrdwrīteras embedded in the text show how the *Silmarillion* (and by extension the Elvish history continuing in *The Lord of the Rings*) develop a sense of depth and authenticity that we find in Primary World histories and the medieval exemplum" (Gallant 27).

When Chronicles, Music, and Linguistics Meet

The first chapter of the *Silmarillion*, "Ainulindalë: The Music of the Ainur," introduces the Eru Ilúvatar, a Creator-God that generated the Ainur, or Holy Ones, angelic and supreme beings akin to gods. Musicality and sound are a cornerstone in Tolkien's world building: not only did Ilúvatar create the world through music,

but he also taught the Ainur through song. As it will be explained further on, there subsists a distinct correlation between this attention to music and the evolution of Tolkien's conlangs and sense of linguistic aesthetics. As Chance emphasizes upon considering *The Silmarillion*,

> It is no mistake that this work begins with the words "There was Eru, the One," and concludes with the words "story and song." Because these tales celebrate the power of creation and goodness through the image of song, music, and its triumph over destruction and evil as represented by broken and inharmonious song, this very "Book of Lost Tales" might be viewed as itself a praise of creation – and creativity. (189)

Subsequently, Melkor, one of the greatest Ainur, attempts to increase his power and glory by altering his part in the music the Ainur sang before Ilúvatar; this narratological element is an echo of the Judeo-Christian story of Creation and the fall from Eden. This initial attempted shift of power dynamics however also leads to discord amongst the Ainur themselves until Ilúvatar intervene. By putting an end to the Music, he shows them a vision of the world and its unfolding history: "Behold your music – for through it was the world made" (*Silmarillion* 6). The images in fact portray the Children of Ilúvatar and many of the Ainur, feeling love for this progeny, decide to descend upon the world and prepare it for their arrival. Those who descend are called Valar and their helpers, lesser deities nevertheless, are named Maiar. Once their preparations are completed, they leave Middle-earth and go to Aman and establishing their home in Valinor, also referred to as the Blessed Realm. There Yavanna, one of the Valar, creates the two trees of Valinor: Telperion (dark green and silver) and Laurelin (light green and gold). It is at this point that the narrative style and portrayal of a mythical past starts to transition to the style of a chronicle, an account of events that is marked by the passage of time; the Years of the Trees, as Tolkien calls them, will hence give a dimension of historical credibility to his fictional characters, settings, and events. The Valar will await the children of Ilúvatar and this progeny will be composed of Elves (or Quendi), firstborn and immortal, and Men, also called Atani.

A Migration and a Shift in Languages

As reported in the *History*, the first one to encounter the Elves is Oromë, a Valar linked to hunting and exploration. He is the first to wander Middle-earth and thus discover Ilúvatar's progeny:

> Thus it was that Oromë came upon the Quendi by chance in his wandering, while they dwelt yet silent upon the star-lit mere, Kuiviénen, Water of Awakening, in the East of Middle-earth. For a while he abode with them and aided them in the making of language […] (*HoMe* – Book 10, Part 3, 160)

In this resoundingly archaic style, Tolkien describes the Elves being born – or rather waking up – on the banks of Lake Cuiviénen; it is not by chance that he describes the waters as those of Awakening. Most of the details that Tolkien employs are in fact literary mechanisms, imitating to an extent the style of religious or mythological texts, through which he creates the fictional mythos of his world while also keeping the tone of a distant reality.

Oromë is the one who helps the Elves develop a way of verbal communication, the Eldarin, at first only in its oral form, as is the case with many other embryonic languages. Tolkien's knowledge of linguistics makes him start from the very beginning, by stating that the tongue was only spoken and that writing had not been invented yet, gives a feeling of step-by-step linguistic and cultural evolution. Oromë then invites the Elves to follow him to the Blessed Realm of the Valar and this marks an important event in their chronicles. In Tolkien's words,

> [the Valar] feared for the Quendi in the dangerous world amid the deceits of the starlit dusk; and they were filled moreover with the love of the beauty of the Elves and desired their fellowship. At the last, therefore, the Valar summoned the Quendi to Valinor. [...] But the Elves were at first unwilling to hearken to the summons [...] and they were filled with dread. Therefore Oromë was sent again to them and he chose from among them ambassadors who should go to Valinor and speak for their people. [...] Then Oromë brought them back to Cuiviénen, and they spoke before their people, and counselled them to heed the summons of the Valar and remove into the West (*Silmarillion*, 49-50)

While most Elves decided to follow Oromë, setting in motion what is referred to as the Great Migration, not all of them actually arrive in Valinor. After this exodus, there are three main linguistic variants: Telerin, Sindarin and Quenya. Telerin is the one most similar to the original Proto Quenya as the Elves that speak it, the Teleri, choose to remain on the island Tol Eressea until the end of time. Given that it is impossible for others to arrive at said island, it is also impossible for Telerin to receive other linguistic nuances or variations. The second tribe of Elves, the Sindar, end up not reaching the Blessed Realm; they instead occupy the territories of

Beleriand and develop Sindarin. The last variation of the proto-language is Quenya; it is spoken by the Vanya and the Ñoldo, the only tribes that eventually reach the Blessed Realm.

Because of the socio-political motives that alter Quenya, it is this particular linguistic variation that will be analysed for the purpose of this article. Tolkien modelled the evolution of Quenya based on the history of the Primary World: he employed examples taking into account the history of Latin and the development of the other romance languages.

The first Elves to arrive in Valinor speak what is referred to as Proto Quenya; they arrive in 1133 and this lasts until 1179 when Rumil, an elf, developes the graphemes to write said language. This marks an important transition in which the language becomes what is referred to as Old or Classical Quenya, a variation used between 1179 and 1200/1250. Classical Quenya, much like Latin in the Primary World during the Middle Ages, was less used because a more common form, Middle Quenya, starts to take its place being used more frequently. One of these more noticeable changes was the shift from Þ to s, as Christopher Tolkien suggests:

> The change Þ > s must therefore have been a conscious and deliberate change agreed to and accepted by a majority of the Ñoldor, however initiated, after the separation of their dwellings from the Vanyar. It must have occurred after the birth of Míriel, but (probably) before the birth of Fëanor. The special connexion of these two persons with the change and its later history needs some consideration. The change was a general one, based primarily on phonetic "taste" and theory, but it had yet to become universal. (*HoMe, The Peoples of Middle-earth*, 332)

Fëanor takes a central role in the political stage and development of the life of the Elves. From the tribe of the Ñoldor, he is the son of King Finwë and Míriel.[1] While the transition to the s sound is common amongst the Ñoldor, it is rebuked by Fëanor because his mother taught him that using the Þ sound is the proper way to speak. Furthermore, Fëanor hates his father for marrying anew after Míriel's death. The political frictions between King Finwë and Fëanor take a linguistic form: the Elves that support Fëanor maintain the original Þ, whereas the others shift to the s sound. The choice to use one rather than the other unavoidably implied a political statement.

[1] Fëanor's birth leaves his mother so devastated in spirit that she decides to die; this is a first in the history of the Elves, immortal beings until then. Given her decision, King Finwë also decides to marry once again, another unique event until that moment.

A further consideration on phonetics can be found in Anthony Ugolnik who analyses the nature of Tolkien's linguistic aesthetics; within his article, he demonstrated how these are pivotal in determining the laws of the conlang of the Secondary Word. Ugolnik concentrates on examples in both Quenya and in the Black Speech[2] of Sauron, not only because they represent antithetical examples, but also because they are bound to moral absolutes that are indicative of Tolkien's linguistic aesthetics. In examining one of Galadriel's songs, he therefore explains the phonetic elements that associate Quenya to music and musicality:

> The first feature of Quenya which becomes immediately evident is the preponderance of liquids (I, r) and nasals (m, n). Every disyllabic word in our sample contains at least one liquid or nasal sound, and most contain more. The coupling of consonants invariably includes a liquid or a nasal. The r, according to Tolkien's pronunciational [sic] guide, was consistently trilled, and the I was palatalized (III, 488). Thus if we read, or preferably chant, this selection from Galadriel's song, we will note that the tongue, though it may drop back to form the back vowels, must return forward with staccato-like frequency to form the recurring aeveolar [sic] (/, r) and aelveolar nasal (n). In joined consonants these aelveolars give way to the aelveolar stops d and t, keeping the tongue forward. Vaguely reminiscent of Celtic and modern Finnish, Quenya possesses a strong rhythmic flow and a tendency to voiced con sonants [sic]. (Ugolnik 25)

Through these phonetic considerations, given how vocalized consonants blend easily into the vowels that follow them, it is easy to understand why Quenya would be more easily and ideally suited for songs and chants. If Ilúvatar created the world through song, as seen previously, then it also stands to reason for a language that stemmed from the Elves who reached Valinor to also have akin musical qualities.

The Fëanor Case

Fëanor is also an important linguist for the Elves: he creates the tengwar script, a new writing system that represents a linguistic innovation and marks the passage

[2] Black Speech, similar to Tolkien's conflicted position on the genesis of the orc (see Fimi 154-155), constitutes another point that has been largely under scrutiny and that this article will however not consider. It will simply assume rather that within this context it refers to a dichotomy between the forces of good and evil in a mythological or theological sense, rather than a question of superiority and inferiority.

towards Modern Quenya. As previously explained, Tolkien uses the style of a chronicled history not only to show the lore of the Elves, but also to emphasize the evolution of their language based on a social and cultural context. The initial shifts are in fact based on necessity, communication and finally migration. It is only with the conflict between Fëanor and King Finwë that it is possible to notice how the political dimensions start to interact with the linguistic ones.

Another crucial point in the history of the Elves comes with the creation of the Silmarils, three jewels crafted by Fëanor himself by capturing the light of the Two Trees of Valinor. It will be at this point that the rebellious Valar Melkor[3] makes his return, destroying the Two Trees and stealing the Silmarils. This event has dire repercussions on all the Elf communities and even greater consequences because of Fëanor's reaction. In 1495 of the Year of the Trees, Fëanor and his seven sons pronounce an Oath that they will not rest until the three Silmarils are back in their hands, and to make war on any who dare halt them. As read in *History*, the vow states:

> Be he foe or friend, be he foul or clean,
> brood of Morgoth or bright Vala,
> Elda or Maia or Aftercomer,
> Man yet unborn upon Middle-earth,
> neither law, nor love, nor league of swords,
> dread nor danger, not Doom itself,
> shall defend him from Fëanor, and Fëanor's kin,
> whoso hideth or hoardeth, or in hand taketh,
> finding keepeth or afar casteth
> a Silmaril. This swear we all:
> death we will deal him ere Day's ending,
> woe unto world's end! Our word hear thou,
> Eru Allfather! To the everlasting
> Darkness doom us if our deed faileth.
> On the holy mountain hear in witness
> and our vow remember, Manwë and Varda! (*The Annals of Aman* 112)

This historical moment for the Elves is a representation not of brotherhood or peace, but a true declaration of war and division between the various tribes; it symbolizes a point of rupture in which a society that previously coexisted is torn apart. It is also

[3] Fëanor names him Morgoth, Dark Enemy of the World.

a theme that will be encompassed in other aspects of Tolkien's production: in *The Fellowship of the Ring,* for example, which portrays events that unfold much later from a chronological standpoint, there is a clear admonition not to swear an oath. Elrond, an Elf who remembers the painful past and what Fëanor's Oath entails, says "yet no oath or bond is laid on you to go further than you will. For you do not yet know the strength of your hearts, and you cannot foresee what each may meet upon the road." While this statement seems less important to a casual reader of the *Trilogy,* it is through the parts of lore addressed within the *Silmarillion* and the *History of Middle-earth* that it becomes evident how Tolkien intertwines all the different narratological elements. As Gallant affirms,

> The wisdom of Elrond may be apparent simply because he is of the Eldar, but it is also imbued with the cultural and moral authority of the Fingolfians. As a Ñoldo of the First Age, Elrond is certainly aware of the power and devastating effect of oaths. Of course Gimli, although of the 'Free Peoples of Middle-earth,' is an outsider to the Eldar-Mannish culture. While Gimli speaks of oaths as binding sources of strength and loyalty, Elrond speaks from the authoritative narratives that illustrate examples of tragedy due to binding oaths. (40)

Fëanor's oath in fact leads to a chain of dreadful events for the Elves; with his seven sons he leads the charge against Melkor, heading towards Middle-earth and indeed stops at nothing to reach his goal. The Kingslaying at Alqualondë is in fact the first case of an Elf slayed by another Elf; since the Teleri of Alqualondë, the Swan-haven, do not give Fëanor the ships he requests in his pursuit, the Ñoldor takes them by force (*Silmarillion*, chapter 9). Fëanor then proceeded to burn down the swan-ships once he reaches Losgar as to impede other Elves from chasing and stopping him and presumably even to obstruct his own Ñoldor from turning back. Fëanor's actions are so crude for the Elf tribes that did not know war until that moment that they make the other Elves mark him as an outcast, never to make his return to Valinor. As Lewis points out, "the Silmarillion is essentially an elvish viewpoint of the world and its history, and of the kindred of the elves it is essentially Noldorin but distinctly anti-Fëanorian" (160). Fëanor's agency changes not only the behaviour and culture of the Elves, but also influences their decisions as they are forced to pick a side over the other; one of the outcomes, as it will be explained, even leads some of the Elves to self-isolation.

Throughout the rest of Middle-earth there are several repercussions as well: Thingol, ruler of Doriath, one of the Elven kingdoms that forms in Beleriand,

decides accordingly to prohibit the use of Quenya precisely because of Fëanor's atrocities. In other words, Quenya is correlated with the one who developes its alphabet and the tribe of Ñoldor. Given the lifespan of Elves, immortal beings at their core, this stigmatization of Quenya is much more impactful because of the concept of time.[4]

The arrival of the Ñoldor in Middle-earth and their exile in the territory of Beleriand also implies linguistic exchanges between Middle Quenya, the language they speak, and Sindarin, the language used by the Sindar Elves that does not migrate towards the Blessed Realm. The Ñoldor are inferior in number and this signifies an initial difficulty in communication between the two tribes; a slow merger between these two factions leads to different linguistic variations. While Sindarin remains the more colloquial language used in Middle-earth, it eventually does add some elements from Ñoldorin; on the other hand, the Quenya spoken by the Ñoldorin maintains a status of a more refined language. This process is also parallel to the one Tolkien was aware of in the Primary World, as Goering suggests,

> The situation of Sindarin as a living, colloquial language in Middle-Earth alongside learned Quenya therefore bears considerable resemblance to the circumstances of the vernacular languages of Europe (including, of course, Welsh) alongside Medieval Latin in the Middle Ages. (69)

For Tolkien this distinction was clear and indicates that whereas Sindarin is subjected to a wider degree of changes, Quenya remains an "archaic language of lore" (Letter 144). The linguistic shifts are however not present in the case of the Sindarin spoken in Dorianth and Gondolin; this is due to the previously mentioned prohibition as well as to the fact that these territories are geographically inaccessible.

Examples of Linguistic Shifts. The *Parma Eldalamberon* is a journal edited by Christopher Gilson with the support of Christopher Tolkien and the permission of the Tolkien Estate. It is devoted to the study of Tolkien's conlangs and analyses the fragments, both published and unpublished, of his writings from a linguistic point of view. Volume 21 of this journal published Tolkien's 1931 treaty on Quenya grammar and nouns. In "Common Eldarin: Noun Structure," Tolkien explains how the philosophy and practice of Elvish name-giving is distinguished between Essekarme (name-making) and Essekilme (name-choosing). In Eldarin, children

[4] The prohibition is lifted only after the destruction of the Ring and the defeat of Sauron at the end of the Third Era, after almost ten thousand years.

are given names devised by the parents and this is the name by which they are usually known to others; however, when the children learn to speak (at about seven years[5] amongst the Ñoldor who are considered the swiftest at word-mastery) they are also aware of their own sound predilections (lamatyave) and phonetic characters. This predilection is the Essekilme, or name-choosing, as explained in the following paragraph:

> The Iamatyave was held, especially by the Noldor, to be a characteristic of the person as interesting as others (such as colour, height, and bodily aptitudes and peculiarities), and far more important than most, on a par with the most fundamental mental talents and aptitudes. This lamatyave the child was supposed to express now in the Chosen Name. In later times, when there was a great store of names in existence (which children eagerly learned and savoured), the Chosen Name might well be one merely selected from known names, originally for the most part the products of bygone Essekarme. But it was still so chosen because of its sound-pattern. In elder times, and at all later times most usually, the "Chosen Name" was actually freshly devised, with (or often without) previous significance, as a pattern or sound-sequence that gave aesthetic pleasure, special personal pleasure according to the chooser's lamatyave, when contemplating this pattern (non-significant, or emptied of previous significance) in relation to himself. (84)

As such, for the Elves, names have a certain importance and weight. For the purpose of this article, two particular cases shall be considered and analysed to further explain the phonetic and phonologic shifts: that of Thingol and that of Maedhros.

Thingol, one of the kings of the Teleri, has already been mentioned as being king of Dorianth. The Quenya name he is known by in Middle-earth is Elwë Singollo. Elwë is composed of the initial element *él* (star) and the suffix *-wë*, common in ancient names (*HoMe, Peoples of Middle-earth* 340), whereas Singollo (first appearance in *HoMe*, *Morgoth's Ring* 82) is the combination of *sinda/sindë* (grey) and *collo* (cloak). Singollo also appears in its longer forms, Sindicollo and Sindacollo (*Silmarillion* Appendix). His name in Sindarin becomes Elu Thingol with the short final vowels disappearing and the [w] grapheme shifting to a [u]: Elwe>Elw>Elu. His epithet, Greymantle (*Silmarillion* 56) or Greycloak (*HoMe, The War of the Jewels* 410), remains as Thingol.

[5] The Eldar can "talk" within the first year, but control over the structure of the language and its aesthetics is reached later on.

Another interesting case that may be considered for the purpose of this analysis is that of Maedhros, the eldest son of Fëanor; named by his father Nelyafinwë (literally, Finwë the Third) and by his mother Maitimo, he is also known for his lamatyave, Russandol. While Maitimo seems to be a compound of *maitë* (shapely) and the agental suffix *–mo*, translated to "Well-shaped One" (*HoMe*, *Peoples of Middle-earth* 353, 366), Russandol combined *russa* (red-haired) and the derivative of the root *–ndol* (head) and literally translates to "Copper-top." Russandol accompanies Fëanor through the above-mentioned events that drastically shape the Elvish political stage and arrives in Middle-earth. Although he speaks Quenya, to communicate with the other Elves he is forced to change his own epithet into Sindarin; he does so by a type of translation and union of his original names, *Maitimo>Maed* (well-shaped) in Sindarin and Russandol>*ross* (red-haired). As such, in Sindarin he is known as Maedhros, or more properly spelled Maedros (*HoMe, Peoples of Middle-earth* 352).

Conclusions

As Elizabeth Kirk underlines upon analysing the various linguistic aspects of *Lord of the Rings*,

> Tolkien has created an entire world in its spatial and chronological dimensions, peopling it with languages which have, in a necessarily stylized and simplified version, all the basic features of language, from writing systems and sound changes through diction and syntax to style. By playing them against one another, he has created a "model" (in the scientific sense of the term) for the relationship of language to action, to values and to civilization. (10)

If this reasoning is valid for the *Trilogy*, then by extension it should also be applied and understood on a more ample framework. Upon considering Tolkien's *Legendarium*, it is important to remember that the *Trilogy*, although admittedly his most renowned work, represents but a fraction of the whole. *The Lord of the Rings* should be regarded therefore more as a point of arrival for Tolkien's conlangs, one where a multitude of events have already formed and determined the linguistic dynamics and moulded the languages of Middle-earth. These shifts however are present and shown by Tolkien in his various works; his *Legendarium* behaves as an organic ensemble that comprises not only the *Silmarillion*, the *History* and the Trilogy, but also many other fragments, such as lectures, letters and appendixes.

The sheer magnitude of Tolkien's works create a Secondary World where the events, as well as the languages that govern them, become vivid and intrinsically interconnected – in many ways akin to the Primary one. Because of his profound understanding of linguistics, both from a grammatical as well as an anthropological and social point of view, Tolkien understood how to apply said knowledge to the conlangs of his own imagined lore. As Gallant says, "With one foot in the Primary World and one foot in the Secondary World, we may treat the history of the Elves as a fictional historiography" (29); it is only by appreciating the complexities of the socio-political agencies that mould the evolution of a language in any given moment that one can better understand Tolkien's approach to his own fictitious creations. As it has been demonstrated, several events have drastically changed and determined the evolution of Tolkien's languages; most notably these are the Elvish Migration, as well as the theft of the Silmarils on behalf of Melkor and the subsequent reaction of Fëanor. It is also paramount to recognise the importance of the timespan of these proceedings: while Elves are immortals, the less than five hundred years since Rumil first invents the Elvish graphemes until the exile of the Ñoldor is but a minor fraction in the lifespan of an elf. For reference, it takes the Elves nearly fifty thousand years from the moment they wake up on the banks of Cuiviénen to arrive to Valinor and less than four hundred years later Melkor steals the Silmarils. Astutely Tolkien understood the importance of time for a language to form and change and by setting all these transformations within a short period of time actually emphasizes the importance of the events not only within the Elvish lore, but also the impact they had on his entire world building.

By taking inspiration from the historical events of the Primary world, such as how an oral tongue used for communications transitions into a written form or how a previously united civilization may fall apart – for political or social reasons – and with it also its language may become fragmented, Tolkien recreated said dynamics in his Secondary World. This process in turn gives the readers a feeling of complexity and profoundness. As Peterson says, "This is precisely how natural languages evolve in our world, and would naturally be appropriate for a fictional setting that has an alternate history with any kind of time depth similar to ours on Earth" (10). It is exactly this sense of depth that this article tried to explain through the various intertextual elements. Except for several examples from the *Trilogy*, this analysis has however mostly taken into account the events of the first era, whereas Tolkien's conlangs evolved through the span of all four eras of Arda. Additional studies might further explain and emphasize the intricacies and

dynamics between the socio-politic dimensions and the linguistic ones, especially considering several other more recent debates considering Tolkien's works. Specific examples might include the shifts from the coexistence of the Sindarin and Adunaic tongues on the island of Numenor, to the total prohibition of the Elvish language during the second era. The distancing process of Numenor from the Valar is in fact a progressive transition that starts with the thirteenth sovereign, Tar-Ciryatan, and culminates with the twentieth one, Ar-Adunakhor; he is the first ruler to claim the throne with an Adunaic name and also the one to ultimately forbid the Elvish language from the island. This detail is also important when considering Tolkien's aesthetics of linguistics, musicality and the light of the Valar; the Adunaic tongue, as opposed to Elvish one, is in fact more consonantal and harsh-sounding.

Ultimately, it is by understanding how socio-political circumstances can utterly change the usage of a language, influence it and mould it accordingly, that Tolkien was able to write the chronicles of the Elves. As Nagy remarks, "these are not simply *stories* but *histories*" (247, emphasis in original) precisely because of the way Tolkien added that profound dimension which, although fictional, has a strong historical and anthropological anchoring point that he understood masterfully and employed accordingly.

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Shaka, When the Walls Fell: Conlangs, Metaphors and (Mis)Communication

CRAIG A. MEYER

> [T]he fact that any alien race communicates with another is quite remarkable.
> - Counselor Deanna Troi ("Ensigns of Command" 27:17)

Constructed languages (conlangs) are a way for fans and audiences to more fully immerse themselves in a story. Conlangs provide for that itch of mystery and intrigue that allow us to engage with our internal puzzle solver. As we struggle to figure out words and phrases, we are becoming part of the story – we put ourselves into character's places and consider what and how we might interact with this new language. Further, conlangs encourage us to think about language and what we *mean* when we say something. They also make us ponder how everything we encounter has a name and how every name has a story. Perhaps no television episode in history exemplifies this investigative itch more than the *Star Trek: The Next Generation*'s (TNG, 1987-1994) season five episode, "Darmok."

The opening scene provides early context for what follows: The *Enterprise* is dispatched to meet an "enigmatic race" known as the Children of Tama or Tamarians ("Darmok" 0:13). The crew, led by Captain Picard, are tasked with establishing diplomatic relations with them. During the first scenes, audiences find out that the Tamarians are sending out a mathematical signal toward Federation space and the Federation takes this to mean that the Tamarians want to establish some form of communication. Seven previous encounters with the Tamarians have proven to be unsuccessful, and Commander Data, the *Enterprise*'s Operations officer, also an android, reports that these encounters "went without incident" but the Tamarians have been called "incomprehensible" ("Darmok" 0:45). While the

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crew appears to be cautious, Picard believes the *Enterprise* crew's "patience [and] imagination" will allow them to have another successful mission ("Darmok" 1:24).

In this article, I focus on how to better understand communication across cultures and how the use of myth, metaphors, and stories impact those interactions. To do so, I utilize the *TNG* episode "Darmok" and how the Tamarian language functions like a conlang. For this discussion, there are two main focal points. First, I work to better understand cultural communication through myth and metaphor as well as the context needed to comprehend them. Through that discussion, I recognize, as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson note, "human *thought processes* are largely metaphorical" (15). I expand on this understanding to describe some common metaphors, including those within the *Star Trek* universe, and how they can be interpreted (e.g. "Scotty, beam me up"). By focusing on the metaphors presented in "Darmok," we are better able to understand the complexities of intercultural communication. Throughout this piece, I pull from "Darmok" to demonstrate how the *Star Trek* franchise uses the concept of aliens to give us insight about ourselves and our relation to other human cultures. I also explore how conlangs are an important way to take on another perspective, which allows us to lean toward shared understanding, understand power dynamics, and clearer communication with other cultures. While I am cautious to argue that the Tamarian "language" is a fully robust conlang, I do think it is an elementary version and close enough for my purposes to explore various aspects of conlangs in general, which I do throughout this article. As I conclude, I highlight the earlier discussion of context and perspective and consider them through other *Trek* episodes to provide additional insight. Finally, that itch can be scratched by more fully engaging with conlangs as we learn to better understand not only these fictional languages, cultures, and peoples but also ourselves.

Myths and Metaphors

When the initial communication channel with the Tamarians is opened, Captain Dathon of the Tamarian ship says, "Rai and Jiri at Lungha. Rai of Lowani. Lowani under two moons. Jiri of Ubaya. Ubaya of crossed roads at Lungha. Lungha, her sky grey. Rai and Jiri at Lungha" ("Darmok" 1:39). Picard and the *Enterprise* crew are befuddled and look at each other hoping one of them understands this cryptic message. Data points out that Dathon seems to be using proper names of people or things, but no one on the *Enterprise* knows who or what they are or what they mean.

Data's right in his guess. The Tamarians are referencing people and places from their mythical history. The Tamarians have a method of communication that is nothing like any other species the audience has seen on *Star Trek*: they communicate through myth and metaphor. As we ponder Dathon's cryptic message, Roland Barthes reminds us, "myth is a system of communication […] it is a message" (107). While it might be a message, it is not getting through to the *Enterprise* crew. Moreover, it is based on a myth the *Enterprise* crew do not know; yet, Claude Levi-Strauss writes, "a myth always refers to events alleged to have taken place long ago. But what gives the myth an operational value is that the specific pattern described is timeless; it explains the present and the past as well as the future" (209). More specifically, myths convey stories through patterns that we can understand and those patterns cross culture and time. By considering Dathon's odd phrases, one can parse two people from two places meeting at another place, and Levi-Strauss suggests myths like this can give insight regardless of when they are conveyed. Levi-Strauss continues, "the mythical value of the myth is preserved even through the worst translation" (210). For the *Enterprise* crew, however, Dathon's message is literally lost in translation. "Whatever our ignorance of the language and the culture of the people where it originated," Levi-Strauss writes, "a myth is still felt as a myth by any reader anywhere in the world. Its substance does not lie in its style, its original music, or its syntax, but in the story which it tells" (210). While the Tamarian patterns might be comprehensible, the context, and the story embedded within the syntax, grammar, or even tone is not. The *Enterprise* crew make the connections to the Tamarian mythology, but there is still connective tissue missing. This context – the story which it tells – is the problem for the *Enterprise* crew and the mystery for the audience: they don't know the story.

The *Star Trek* franchise is full of stories that have become metaphors, such as the oft misquoted, "Beam me up, Scotty." *Trek* fans likely know many others too. Metaphors are one of the ways we convey meaning and streamline communication. Here are some common examples and a few I have made up to show how complex, even how context specific they can be:

Johnny on the spot.
Calgon, take me away.
Bills beat Lions in Buffalo.
Armstrong on the moon.
Challenger during takeoff.
Locutus at Wolf 359.

Shackleton in the Antarctic.

Burke in his parlor.

Readers may recognize some of the above examples or at least be able to understand them or get a sense of the intended significance. More importantly, they may understand what they mean with enough specificity that no further discussion is needed. For example, the well-known advertisement campaign "Calgon, take me away" showed a person engulfed in high-pressure scenarios (e.g. a yelling boss, gridlock traffic, a crying baby). Then upon saying, "Calgon, take me away," they suddenly appear in a luxurious, steaming bubble bath with soft, relaxing music playing in the background. The Calgon example is similar to the "beam me up" example. Both suggest, broadly speaking, that one wants to leave a situation, but it can take on more meanings based on the context it is used. For example, either could mean one's tired and wants to rest. For the "Scotty, beam me up" example, it is interesting because it is been reported to have never actually been spoken on *Star Trek: The Original Series* (TOS). Yet, the meaning behind it crosses cultures and languages and reaches to those that may have never seen an episode. And if one happens to be an American football fan, "Bills beat Lions in Buffalo" makes perfect sense. But if one is not a fan or has no knowledge of the two teams, one might be thoroughly confused about some bills beating a pack of lions in a buffalo. The meaning of metaphors can be misinterpreted by people unfamiliar with them. Thus, context and historical knowledge becomes paramount to understanding them. Utilizing the above examples, Armstrong on the moon is pretty obvious to most readers, but does "Locutus at Wolf 359" mean anything to non-*Star Trek* fans? The point here is that these examples require specific knowledge about the people, the places, what happened at those places, and when those people were there. The story, and all that it means, is carried via the metaphor.

In fact, the origin of *Star Trek* is based on a metaphor: Gene Roddenberry, the creator of *Star Trek,* originally sold it as a western in space. At the time, when westerns, like *Wagon Train* (1957-1962, 1962-1965), ruled the airwaves, this seemed like a reasonable idea. Although there is certainly a swashbuckling and frontier aspect to TOS, several episodes throughout the many series were metaphorical. Further, many of the popular culture or political references in *Star Trek* are metaphorical because the episodes themselves are a metaphor, perhaps, for what some see humanity becoming in the future.

Conlangs operate in much the same way as metaphors. We encounter them and might understand some elements based on our life experience, our understanding

of storytelling, or the clues provided by the language's delivery. These little tidbits are just enough to get us curious and work to figure more out about these new words, phrases, and stories. As humans, one way we pass on knowledge is through our stories and myths. Those stories and myths influence and guide us in future interactions. Thomas Richards asserts, "we are immersed in the system of myths we use to explain the world" (*Meaning* 143). Yet, these explanations are not always understood because, as Barthes writes, "myth hides nothing: its function is to distort, not to make disappear" (120). Because myth distorts, it forces us to interpret, and we interpret from our own perspective. As such, conlangs, myths, and stories can be culturally understood through a common perspective. That perspective might be as basic as being human. Context, too, provides insight into language as it generates and enhances meaning. Having some backstory of an event helps us understand what is happening, even what is expected. For example, throughout the "Darmok" episode, many examples needing some experience or more context are required to understand the flow, direction, and meaning. At one point, Commander Riker says, "Riker to La Forge" ("Darmok" 22:41). Without context, what does that mean? There is no verb, no clear action. It is only with experience with human behavior, and perhaps some experience with TNG, does one understand what is meant; Riker is communicating with La Forge and asking him to respond, if he can. La Forge, after hearing the phrase by Riker, responds, "La Forge here," which again, without context, is just as confusing as "Riker to La Forge" ("Darmok" 22:43). La Forge is not there with Riker, he's obviously in another location, but letting Riker know that he's ready for Riker's next message. Essentially, these interactions are metaphorical because they require some previous knowledge or context. Metaphors are phrases that signify or represent something else. Further, metaphors are interpreted by perspective and understanding. But, L. David Ritchie writes, "The question 'what is a metaphor?' is not easy to answer" (3). Riker is not to La Forge nor is La Forge here. But the way we understand their phrases is that Riker is calling out to La Forge and La Forge is acknowledging the calling of his name (over the communication device). To help explain, philosopher Max Black writes, "metaphor may require attention to the *particular circumstances* of its utterance" (29). In other words, context and experience becomes important to understand the message. The understanding of metaphors is, in many ways, just like translating a language or a conlang. Simply put, translation is based on contextual clues and consistency of patterns, so metaphors become another perspective for us to utilize to better understand conlangs.

Back aboard the *Enterprise*, after a few more lines of perplexing phrases of people, places, and things unfamiliar to the crew and viewers, Dathon posits the idea of "Darmok." His first officer appears first to not understand the rationale of Darmok and then clearly disagrees with that course of action, even though both understand the meaning. Yet once again, the *Enterprise* crew and audience are left in limbo with what Darmok means. The conversation gets louder until finally Dathon, with a firm command voice, says, "The river Temarc! In winter" ("Darmok" 2:57). And with that, the discussion is over; whatever *Darmok* means becomes the course of action. At this point, some viewers begin to connect the freezing of a river to stopping its flow, effectively stopping the flow of discussion between the captain and first officer. Regardless of the actual meaning, the metaphor of *Darmok* carries with it implicit and contextual meaning that signifies how the Tamarians will proceed.

A metaphor's meaning provides many opportunities to ponder possibilities. Black argues, "the purpose of metaphor is to entertain and divert" (34). Certainly, the episode "Darmok" was designed to entertain, and one could make a case for diversion (i.e., isn't entertainment a form of diversion?). The director of the episode, Winrich Kolbe, says, "Storywise, it was one hell of a story. It was almost flawless" (qtd. in Gross and Altman 228). But even Kolbe was perplexed by the dialogue, he continues, "can you imagine not speaking Russian and, in your case, having to write an article in Russian?" (qtd. in Gross and Altman 228). While Kolbe helps connect the idea of translation and conlangs with comprehension and context, Katrina G. Boyd refers to the Tamarian language as a "narratively metaphoric language" (112). Boyd points out that the way the Tamarians are speaking is a conlang, and while being driven by narratives and metaphors, one needs particular insight to comprehend it. Although I have noted I'm not convinced Tamarian is a conlang, I do believe one can reach that conclusion, especially if one believes a conlang to be created for a specific purpose. Additionally, Tamarian does convey meaning through a specific narrative, which helps it lean in the direction of conlangs. To better understand the Tamarians and their discourse, let us return to Lakoff and Johnson: "Metaphors […] are conceptual in nature. They are among our principal vehicles for understanding. And they play a central role in the construction of social and political reality" (164). But it is not that simple.

Literary critic William Empson recognizes that metaphors "correspond to what the speakers themselves feel to be a rich or suggestive or persuasive use of a word" (333). Black, in a footnote discussion with Empson, recognizes "the opposite

danger […] of making metaphors too important by definition, and so narrowing our view of the subject excessively" (45). Black's insight allows us to point out some problems within "Darmok." First, if viewers fail to make some connections to the "Darmok" metaphors, they will not like the episode. More specifically, if they cannot begin to parse the Tamarian conlang, they won't get that itch to figure out more and become more immersed. While this has become only a minor problem for the episode, the second presents a larger concern; the Tamarians have made metaphors so important and so narrow that their usage appears to limit the Tamarian culture or at least their ability to communicate to others who may not know the story or context of their cultural metaphors. As such, it seems then that Tamarian discourse can be better understood through symbolic convergence theory (SCT).

Originator of the theory, Ernest G. Bormann explains, "An important part of the symbolic convergence theory is the way it explains how individuals come to share enough symbolic ground to take part in logical negotiation processes, problem-solving procedures, and decision making" (90). Essentially, SCT gives us more connective tissue to understand the Tamarians: their group cohesion is based on the sharing and retelling of their myths and historical narratives. The more cohesive the group, such as on a confined ship in space, the more a group might create common discourse or even shorthand, which we see with the Riker to La Forge example earlier. So, the Tamarians may have deep connections to each other and communicate through their symbolic and metaphor-driven background and language, and we can even posit the same theory to explain some *Trek* phrases and metaphors (e.g. "Beam me up"). But Picard and his crew are still outsiders and do not understand the Tamarian phrases.

Eighth Time's the Charm

An interesting aspect of the early exchanges between the two crews is that no one on the *Enterprise* questions if the Universal Translator (UT) is working properly.[1] The UT is a "device that senses and compares the brain wave patterns of intelligent life-forms, then uses the patterns it recognizes to provide a basis for translation"

[1] The UT often acts as a useful plot device for *Trek* episodes. It tends to not work when it is imperative it does or, such as in this case, it works but it doesn't help. While the UT appears to be working fine in the "Darmok" episode, we cannot determine if imperfections are creeping in or not. For example, "some one" versus "someone" might add to the lack of clarity that makes cross-cultural exchanges challenging.

(Erdman and Block 23). In essence, the UT makes communication with alien species easy, just like modern translation apps for cell phones. With the UT, the Tamarian language appears to be translated without issues, but the *Enterprise* crew still cannot understand it. There are missing pieces, missing stories, and missing context. To help explain, science and history writer, Mark E. Lasbury reasons, "The more culture plays into a language, the less useful a culturally neutral UT will be" (193). Tamarians have based their entire language on their culture, and since the UT only translates words, and not context or meaning, the *Enterprise* crew's lack of experience with Tamarian culture makes communication almost impossible.

Recognizing that the conversation is not working and rather than continue to struggle through linguistic difficulty using traditional means, Dathon decides actions speak louder than words and "Darmok" is put into action. He takes his first officer's dagger and is transported with Picard to the planet El-Adrel below. On the planet's surface, Picard and Dathon continue their communication struggles. Dathon tosses the second dagger to Picard, which Picard interprets as an invitation to fight, and Picard refuses to engage in what he believes is a combat situation. Unable to reach any understanding, the two make separate camps for the night.

As a chilly night falls, Picard fails to create a fire to keep warm and is visibly cold, and he comments that he might "freeze to death" ("Darmok" 10:19). Dathon again says some of the already stated Tamarian phrases. In response, Picard attempts to mimic the metaphorical style and says, "Picard of the Federation. Of the starship *Enterprise*. Of the planet Earth" ("Darmok" 10:36). Not understanding, Dathon turns away to consult his gear in what seems to be some type of ceremony or ritual.[2] After a few moments, Dathon stands up and tosses Picard a burning log from his fire. As he does, he says, "Temba, his arms wide," with a calm almost parental tone ("Darmok" 13:00). As Picard pieces together the context of accepting the burning log, he talks through the meaning of Temba:

> PICARD: Temba? What does that mean? Fire? Does Temba mean fire?
>
> DATHON: Temba. His arms wide.
>
> PICARD: Temba is a person? His arms wide. Because he's holding them apart in, in generosity. In giving. In taking. ("Darmok" 13:02)

Picard recognizes Temba is a person performing an action and extrapolates "arms wide" as an offering. In this case, the offering of the fiery log. While the item being

[2] In an email, David Patterson, the linguist, notes that Joe Menosky, the writer of the "Darmok" episode, explains this scene as Dathon consulting what are essentially oracles for some guidance.

offered is unimportant, it is the act of offering that the phrase refers to. This understanding and translation of the Tamarian conlang appears to be consistent throughout the episode and is one of the easier connections to make for viewers. At this point, the episode is pulling the audience along, with Picard's dialogue working through each phrase to comprehend its meaning for himself and the audience. While some phrases are left to interpretation, a point I return to later, others, such as "Temba, his arms wide," are clear.

In the morning, Dathon is nowhere to be found and Picard wakes up and decides to investigate Dathon's camp in hopes of learning something useful. Suddenly, Dathon yells "Darmok!" and runs up to Picard while holding a dagger ("Darmok" 21:14). Picard, surprised, begins to apologize but is cut off by Dathon again offering him the dagger and frantically saying. "Temba, his arms wide" ("Darmok" 21:23). Picard, about to refuse, is interrupted by a pile of rocks falling and a creature's monstrous sound off in the distance. Recognizing he's not in danger from Dathon, Picard accepts the dagger as the pair seem to mutually understand each other as allies against an unseen beast that is getting closer.

Back on the *Enterprise,* Commander Data and Counselor Troi have been working to understand the Tamarian language and share their thoughts with the rest of the bridge crew in the following exchange:

> DATA: The Tamarian ego structure does not seem to allow what we normally think of as self-identity. Their ability to abstract is highly unusual. They seem to communicate through narrative imagery by reference to the individuals and places which appear in their mytho-historical accounts.
>
> TROI: It is as if I were to say to you, Juliet on her balcony.
>
> CRUSHER: An image of romance.
>
> TROI: Exactly. Imagery is everything to the Tamarians. It embodies their emotional states, their very thought processes. It's how they communicate, and it is how they think.
>
> RIKER: If we know how they think, shouldn't we be able to get something across to them?
>
> DATA: No, sir. The situation is analogous to understanding the grammar of a language but none of the vocabulary.
>
> CRUSHER: If I didn't know who Juliet was or what she was doing on that balcony, the image alone wouldn't have any meaning.

> TROI: That's correct. For instance, we know that Darmok was a great hero, a hunter, and that Tanagra was an island, but that's it. Without the details, there's no understanding. ("Darmok" 29:25)

This exchange allows Counselor Troi and Commander Data to raise an interesting and problematic point. Data mentions that, "it is necessary for us to learn the narrative from which the Tamarians draw their imagery" ("Darmok" 30:31). While Richards was analyzing the episode and the presence of myth within the Tamarian language, he points out that, "'Darmok' makes a case for the mythic content of language itself" (*Meaning* 144). This might help make a case for Tamarian being a conlang too, because if the mythic content helps establish a language, then Tamarian must, therefore, be a constructed language. He continues, "Tamarian myths are embedded in the Tamarian language" and it is this embedding that makes understanding and comprehension so difficult, unless one knows the mythos (Richards *Meaning* 144). With this, Data is suggesting that unless a fuller understanding of Tamarian culture, and by extension those metaphors, is provided to the *Enterprise* crew, there will only be pieces of understanding that, more importantly, have significant gaps.

In the *Star Trek* universe, the Tamarian language is unique. With other *Trek* conlangs (e.g., Klingon), it was simply a matter of creating words and giving them meaning.[3] Because Tamarian communication is based on their cultural and mythical understanding, their stories, even experiences of specific people in specific places doing specific things, the entire culture would have to be created full of history, heroes, and villains. Peter A. Jansen and Jordan Boyd-Graber agree: "The more fundamental challenge of extending Tamarian is that every sentence must be connected to an underlying mythology" (37). In this sense, the mythology was designed for one episode, so it might not be a complete conlang (but perhaps, a pseudo conlang), because to make it a complete conlang the entire Tamarian culture would need to be created. Since the Tamarians are not a large part of *Trek,* unlike Klingons, there has been little push to create a full culture and by extension a full language.

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[3] Klingon language was first spoken (i.e., made up) in *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. For *Star Trek: The Search for Spock*, the third film, it was fully created as a language by linguist Marc Okrand ("Development"). In the TV series, then, originally, Klingon was just words and meaning; when it had syntax and context, it became a conlang.

Metaphorical Barriers

When one watches the "Darmok" episode, one almost cannot help creating their own understanding and translation of each of the metaphors and trying to decipher this (pseudo) conlang. The interesting aspect, however, is that each interpretation is just a little different. For example, Richards writes,

> "The river Temarc" means the crossing of a boundary. "When the walls fell" means a sudden catastrophic change. "In winter" means a time of sadness. "His arms open" means a willingness to talk. (*Star Trek* 129)

But other viewers have suggested other interpretations. The science fiction author, Christopher L. Bennett, thinks the river Temarc means, "Be still or Be silent. 'Literally freeze'." Bryce Hedstrom suggests it means, "That's enough. Be quiet. Stop. No more. Don't go there." Even Memory-Alpha, the well-known fan site of all that is *Star Trek*, has another view: "to not be swayed from a decision; often used as an imperative" ("Tamarian"). With just about every narrative metaphor from the episode, similar differences can be seen. These diverse interpretations or translations emphasize the confusing aspects of language, which are probably only highlighted with conlangs in the early stages of publicity. The larger point being made is that the perception of the context is the most important aspect of understanding. As viewers of the episode, we can watch events unfold on the *Enterprise* and down on the planet. Neither of those two parties has the view or perspective the audience does. Even when we as viewers have all the exact same information, we have different interpretations of that same information.

Still after Picard's breakthrough with "Temba," there remain several instances of unclear meanings of Tamarian metaphors. Again, one might wonder why all the Tamarian phrases in the episode are not understood the same by everyone. To help further illustrate these unclear interpretations, Dathon and Picard share a moment after a battle with the creature, and Dathon is near death. As Dathon struggles and is clearly in pain, he says "Zinda. His face black, his eyes red" ("Darmok" 34:19). But back on the *Enterprise*, the conflict has increased and the Enterprise crew decides to attack the Tamarian ship in such a way that will allow them to transport Picard up to the ship. When hailing frequencies are opened and after the Tamarians and *Enterprise* have exchanged phaser fire, the Tamarian first officer says "Zinda. His face black, his eyes red" ("Darmok" 41:05). Contextually, these scenes are different. Dathon is in severe pain when he says it; the Tamarian first officer says

it after being fired upon and is visibly angry. But what does the phrase convey? Some sources suggest pain or anger, but neither of those seem to fit both scenes. The phrase can't mean pain *and* anger since the Tamarian first officer is not in pain when he says it, and likewise, it doesn't seem to mean anger since Dathon is in pain when he says it. After watching both scenes several times, I conclude it means frustration with the situation. Dathon is unable to do anything about his injuries and the Tamarian officer does not understand why they are exchanging fire; both lead to frustration. Regardless of what interpretation is correct, without additional examples of its usage, one cannot be certain. Even better would be witnessing the initial event that generated the phrase, but that would be colored by our perspective and experience. This type of analysis is part of the attractiveness of conlangs too; the audience imparts meaning to it and deepens the connection.

Throughout "Darmok," viewers are tasked with trying to figure out Tamarian culture with limited experience and clues. Linguist Roger M. Keesing provides some warning as we attempt to interpret other cultures. While he referenced the work of ethnographers, we can borrow the kernel of his idea and apply it to "Darmok" and the many readings and interpretations of Tamarian language and metaphors. Keesing explains two main concerns as we encounter an unknown culture. First, "by rendering the fragmentary coherent," we may, essentially, not get it quite right (Keesing 202). If we consider Picard here, he has only a fragment of Tamarian language and culture, and he's still fumbling along. Perhaps more importantly, if we consider the reality that Picard would have spent much more time with Dathon and perhaps had other off-screen encounters with him, those viewers that have imparted their own explanation or definitions to the metaphors would likely have an incomplete understanding. Even though Picard does not clearly define any of the metaphors, he seems to understand them enough to use them in what appears to be appropriate context. But he (and we) could still not have the full flavor of the metaphor, just enough to possibly be comprehensible to native speakers.

Further, Keesing warns against a more concerning aspect of this learning and explanation: we "may be wrong" (202). Several times during the episode, the phrase "Shaka, when the walls fell" is said, and the context seems to mean giving up or essentially saying, "you don't understand." However, what if "Shaka, when the walls fell" means "you're an idiot?" In reviewing the times that phrase is used, it could work. It is not a perfect match for every situation it is used, but it does fit. As a reference point, as in "the river Temarc" noted earlier, different interpretations

seem to cross several possibilities. So, if the interpretation is wrong, we humans are creating a foundation that is faulty and could be doing more damage. To help understand the complexity of interpretation, George Lakoff and Zoltan Kovecses point out, "the study of the language as a whole gives us no guide to individual variation. We have no idea how close any individual comes to the model we have uncovered, and we have no idea how people differ from one another" (220). In other words, how metaphor is understood or translated does not necessarily mean I or anyone else understands it the same way. Keesing's warning about being wrong becomes more important with "Darmok," because maybe only these Tamarians are somewhat comprehensible and all the other ones, as Data pointed out, are "incomprehensible" ("Darmok" 0:52).

Throughout "Darmok," the *Enterprise* crew continually refers to the ways that the Tamarians use language as either "citing example," and as Picard surmises, "by metaphor!" or by citing elements of their own mythology and history to convey ideas ("Darmok" 25:45). As the story moves forward, the inability for the two crews to communicate becomes the single factor that identifies the Tamarians as alien. Though when it comes to their use of language and metaphor, the Tamarians are not unlike humans. What is important to note about our metaphors is that each one is as significant to *us* as "Shaka when the walls fell" is to the Tamarians. The position, therefore, that the Tamarians' use of imagery and metaphor to convey ideas makes them alien or unique is problematic and succeeds only in showing us that we (humans) are more like the Tamarians than we may be willing to admit.

The Tamarians, as aliens, are presented as a somewhat common and somewhat unfamiliar construct used to make audiences look at humanity and our various cultures differently. The presence and use of mythology as a building block of human communication, culture, and history have been well established. For example, Richards asserts, "we are immersed in the system of myths we use to explain the world" (*Meaning* 143). At the same time, Richards suggests that "stories do not successfully communicate meaning between cultures […] Mythologies rarely coexist" (*Meaning* 145). "Darmok" serves as a humanized version of *Gilgamesh*. In fact, Picard tells Dathon a version of *Gilgamesh* moments before his death, which is strikingly similar to their experience on El-Adrel. Picard, knowingly or unknowingly, imports "our" mythos onto the Tamarian mythic story of Darmok and Jalad, which essentially negates this particular Tamarian myth and supplants it with the version told by Picard to Dathon. Another more likely option is that a new metaphor is created. This is what we see when Picard returns to the *Enterprise* and

saves the day, the now-Captain of the Tamarian ship says, “Picard and Dathon at El-Adrel” (“Darmok” 42:03). As a result, it is possible this replaces or displaces the Darmok and Jalad myth, or at least what we have learned about it.

To recognize another way that the story of “Darmok” reflects our own history, we can look at the way that language is acquired in children. As children, we hear words and see the actions at the same time. For example, if Mario asks Kenya to hand them the television remote, then Kenya picks up the television remote and passes it to Mario, the child sees this interaction. For children observing this exchange, they will most likely begin to put together the action “hand” in relation to the object “remote control.” Additionally, if the asking adult includes a “please” or the other adult’s name, more information provides insight into the exchange. The child can begin to put the language pieces together and generate an elementary understanding. With repetition of similar exchanges, meaning and context are reinforced each time, just like recognizing patterns for translation. However, there are certainly opportunities for conflicting information. For example, a child is likely learning about their body parts at the same time they are learning about cooperating with others. Therefore, the distinction between a hand (the body part), lending someone a hand, and the action of handing an object to someone, suggested in the example above, could create confusion.

Now consider what “Darmok” shows the audience about language acquisition. Picard is learning a new language, so in some ways, he’s like a child. Steven Pinker, in his well-known book *The Stuff of Thought*, discusses language acquisition. Picard is watching Dathon demonstrate the metaphors, and Picard, as Pinker explains how we learn language, picks up “from watching what’s going on” (34). While Picard is certainly more experienced than a typical child, he is still constructing an understanding of this new language by putting the pieces together. More precisely, as Dathon says, “Shaka, when the walls fell,” Picard sees the tone and expression of the words and, thus, imparts a meaning (“Darmok” 23:57). As noted earlier, everyone watching the episode is imparting a meaning, and those meanings do not always match up. In “Darmok,” a similar learning experience is demonstrated. As the *Enterprise* crew figures out the potential meanings of the proper names and locations the Tamarians spoke of, Picard learns much in the same way as the child, by experience.

Further, Picard picks up on the pattern that Dathon uses to create the meaning and establish a context of the phrases. Dathon’s body language and expressed frustrations indicate to Picard whether he’s catching onto the meaning, and as such,

the reactions act as a reward or punishment. As Dathon reacts with positive reinforcement, Picard connects the phrase with an appropriate meaning. Picard first does this with "Temba, his arms wide." Obviously, regardless of its literal meaning, this particular phrase suggests a course of action and a specific meaning, similar to Dathon's statement of *Darmok* earlier. And with that meaning comes some cultural power. Psychologist Brian E. Levitt also acknowledges, "We each have our own unique meanings words point to for us" (100). He continues, "We tend to believe that our words can carry understanding to others. What makes this so tricky is that words exist externally and *seem* static and unchanging" (Levitt, emphasis added, 100). In other words, we expect others to understand the meaning of what we are saying, but how words are defined and used is constantly changing. Another example most of us have experienced is texting with someone and they misunderstand our meaning. We might be laughing uncontrollably and they are stoic, not understanding the joke. Levitt explains, Picard and Dathon "listen through the filter of their own meanings, which they ascribe to the words they hear being spoken by the other" (101). Each person is framing an understanding based solely on their own experience and is not making much effort, at least initially, to understand the other. More precisely, as Levitt points out, "Picard and Dathon are speaking two entirely different languages with a shared vocabulary" (102). While Picard and Dathon remain fixated on their own respective worldviews that they are right and in a superior position, no real communication occurs. Each assumes the other should understand because they are being so clear, but that clarity is subjective and based on positionality.

Only when Picard begins to shift to a position of wanting to understand (and not just repeating phrases) does he make a connection, as noted with the Temba scene. Dathon does not seem to make that same link, even near death he seems to take the story of *Gilgamesh* as almost comical. After Dathon passes away, the monster reappears and Picard is on his own. This unwillingness to change perspectives also created a standoff between the two crews. At this point, the *Enterprise* has attempted and failed to transport Picard and has concluded the only way to save Picard now is to attack the Tamarians. Without warning, the *Enterprise* crew opens fire and the Tamarians respond with their own phaser fire. Neither opted to open hailing frequencies to communicate one more time to resolve the conflict. The unprovoked attack, however, creates a short amount of time to save Picard and transport him to the *Enterprise*. It seems clear the Tamarians appear content to destroy the *Enterprise*, and it seems they will as Security Chief Worf says, "Our

shields have failed" and Data reports, "we cannot survive another hit" ("Darmok" 40:53). Suddenly, Picard strides onto the bridge and orders Worf to hail the Tamarians and he sternly says to the Tamarian First Officer, "Temarc! The river Temarc in winter" ("Darmok" 41:09). Picard utilizes his new knowledge of the Tamarian language to end the battle. Recognizing the authority of Picard and his understanding of the metaphor, the Tamarians immediately stop. Picard is the only character, Tamarian or Federation, that seems to have genuinely made headway to understand the other.

Conclusion

The beginning of this article explored the use of metaphor as an aspect of language (natural or constructed) and used "Darmok" to make specific points about metaphors (even perhaps metametaphor), their meanings and interpretations, and how they can muck things up. Through that discussion, I have shown how metaphors are based on one's perspective and known context, while touching on how SCT creates a stronger group cohesion through shared vocabulary and experiences. Moreover, the Tamarians show us more about humanity, our language, and metaphors than might have been expected from a single sci-fi episode, almost like a mirror that forces us to look back upon ourselves. And yet, there is much more left to learn. Because "Darmok" is not the only *Star Trek* episode in which language becomes a primary barrier for crew members or storylines, two other examples are worth mentioning.

In the *Star Trek: Enterprise* (2001-2005) episode "Dawn," Chief Engineer Tripp Tucker is attacked and crashes on a planet with a large temperature shift between night and day. His attacker, too, is forced to crash land. As luck would have it, the UT is not available to assist Tripp and a few physical confrontations ensue before the suffocating heat of the day and a lack of options force the two to cooperate even though they have only managed minimal communication. Even with elementary language exchanges, they can work together to get out of the survival situation. One compelling factor is that neither Tripp nor Zho'Kaan is stronger than or able to defeat the other, and it is only when they cooperate does the storyline move forward. Another distinction between "Darmok" and "Dawn" is that the non-humans act differently. In "Dawn," Zho'Kaan, the one who attacks Tripp and forces him to crash land, learns Tripp's name and a few other words, as does Tripp of Zho'Kaan's language. While in "Darmok," Captain Dathon and his

crew make no attempt whatsoever to learn Federation Standard; they simply repeat the same phrases expecting a new result or sudden understanding.[4]

This distinction is the difference and importance between translation and understanding the translation. In "Dawn," it is only a translation issue and they work out an understanding, because they seem to be working based on the same syntactical structures, perhaps even metaphorical understandings. In "Darmok," the issue is understanding of the entire construction of the Tamarian culture and by extension that of the Federation. One way we can gain insight into ourselves and other perspectives is through conlangs. Creating a language forces an audience to wear another mask for even a short period of time and helps us better understand ourselves. As noted earlier, myths essentially are constructions of experiences and our interpretations become our metaphors. At the end of the episode, Picard is in his ready room and reading Homer, what he considers to be some "root metaphors of our own culture" ("Darmok" 43:30). After all the back and forth between the two crews and captains on the planet, there remains only limited progress at communication or understanding. Picard is the only Federation person that seems to have any measure of comprehension of the Tamarian language. We can only assume he transferred that knowledge to a Captain's log, but we have no evidence of it, and instead, Picard decides to read Homer to better understand himself and his place in the universe. In effect, Picard is engaging in what Richards believes, "the further human beings voyage out into the universe, the more they need to remind themselves of the stories telling them who they are" (*Star Trek* 131). Perhaps this introspection is what Picard was doing as he retold *Gilgamesh* before being caught up in Homer. Nevertheless, by returning to "our" mythos, we learn about our past and how we arrived at where we are, and perhaps learn where we have yet to go.

Of course, conlangs are created for us by us, but in many ways the opening epigraph by Troi signifies what we have left to learn about the other peoples on our planet. With the ongoing conflicts, wars, racism, sexism, ableism, and so on, having the ability to empathize with another group or culture will prove useful if we ever hope to see ourselves contacting other cultures on other planets. If we posit that the Tamarian language was created and constructed to better interrogate how we understand language, even other cultures, we come to realize the importance of it.

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[4] Peterson suggests that the Tamarians are speaking in formal discourse to the *Enterprise* crew and "plain" discourse is reserved for children.

To more deeply understand conlangs, Anca Chiorean writes, "Fictional languages are not the results of an evolution, as is the case of the natural languages, but they are the results of the intellectual efforts to produce a completely original text, in an isolated moment in history and serving a certain purpose" (121). Since "Darmok" aired, the Tamarian language continues to capture the hearts of many groups of people and brought some into the *Trek* universe. Moreover, Tamarian phrases are still being used to describe events that seem to fit the interpreted, translated, or assumed context. This one episode's conlang, if we accept it as that, proves how we long to create meaning and connect it to our experiences. I'm not the only one to establish this connection: Mattia Thibault[5] explains, "fiction-born conlangs can have an importance and an influence that sometimes go beyond the boundaries of their fictional worlds" (102). Further, the fact that the episode is still being discussed thirty years later is a testament to that influence. Nevertheless, perhaps Tamarian was just for an episode and we shouldn't get too far ahead of ourselves and import deeper meaning: J. Koenig believes "sometimes languages can be invented for their own sake, purely as an intellectual endeavor" (qtd. in Chiorean 131). So, unless a fuller creation of detailing of Tamarian culture, and by extension metaphors, is crafted by the *Star Trek* universe, there will only remain remnants of the metaphorical phrases we currently have, because they must be interconnected. With other *Star Trek* conlangs except for Klingon, it was simply a matter of creating words and giving them meaning. For Tamarians because their entire means of communication is based on their cultural and linguistic understanding, the entire Tamarian culture would have to be created full of history, heroes, and villains. But there is something beyond the mere exercise of creating Tamarian that keeps resurfacing – it has a deeper meaning. And as Peterson points out, Tamarian language "says something about their culture."

One of the most intriguing aspects of the "Darmok" episode is that Picard now is part of Tamarian culture that will be conveyed to other Tamarians. At the end of "Darmok," the Tamarian first officer, now captain, says "Picard and Dathon at El-Adrel," which may effectively displace "Darmok and Jalad at Tanagra." ("Darmok" 42:03) Each message evolves across time, Barthes explains, and some myths fall out of favor as "others take their place and attain the status of myth" (108). In the Tamarian mythos, "Picard" may now replace "Darmok" as a metaphor for what

[5] Assistant professor in the interestingly named department of Translation in Creative Industries.

happens when two groups meet each other and form some kind of understanding. What is even more intriguing is that Tamarians who hear "Picard and Dathon at El-Adrel" will have no context to understand the metaphor! So how will the Tamarians that were not witness to the events understand what the new metaphor means?[6]

Regardless, this interaction between the Tamarians and the *Enterprise* crew creates a new metaphor within the Tamarian conlang, but one that does not seem to align with the "mytho-historical" past that Tamarian culture is based on. Picard nor Dathon are mythic figures (at least not that we know of); yet, both are now part of the supposed mytho-historic Tamarian record. Moreover, the meaning of "Picard and Dathon at El-Adrel" seems ambiguous. Does it mean failed communication? Or failure but partial success? Or two groups marginally finding a way to communicate? Or meeting a new hopefully friend, but at least not an enemy? Again, we are left to figure out meaning based on our understanding of the encounter, which is subjective and based on each of our unique perspectives. After Picard has resolved the conflict and the ships are on their merry way, Riker asks, "New friends, Captain?" ("Darmok" 42:47). After a beat, Picard responds, "I can't say, Number One. But at least they're not new enemies" ("Darmok" 42:49). This wrinkle becomes another issue for this episode, for Tamarian culture, and the resulting conlang; for those who were not present for the event, how is the context conveyed in such a way that the metaphor and what it means is understood? To be more pointed, other Tamarians will be in the same position as Picard and his crew when they first encountered the Tamarians and tried to communicate with the cultural metaphors that included people, places, and events. This conundrum provides that itch to be scratched and allows us to more fully engage with the storyline and the conlang, because we generate meanings based on what we already understand as well as what we are curious about, which enhances its entertainment value and long-term appeal.

Beyond the complex questions around "Darmok" and its status as a conlang is that this curiosity is the heart of understanding conlangs. Perhaps one of the endearing aspects of the episode and all it created is the depth of the story. The story between Dathon and Picard, the story between the first officers (and crews), the story of Gilgamesh all weave together to create a singular story that needs all three to be understood through the new metaphor of "Picard and Dathon at El-

[6] For the curious audience, Peterson reports that Menosky, the episode's writer, explained that Dathon was recording the tale of "Picard and Dathon at El Adrel" in his notebook, which would have allowed him to pass on the story.

Adrel." Essentially, as hinted at earlier, a metametaphor can now be understood through the complexity of this episode. As humans, we communicate through story. Our histories are passed on by stories, even by metaphors just like the Tamarians. While we might toss in a few more details or context if someone misses something, the passing on of stories becomes how we progress. The first person to reproduce fire probably passed on the knowledge with something like I did this and this and got fire! Then, the story might conclude with, "I also burned my hand." Even though that fire might be gone, one only needs to see another fire to know that it can burn them. Thus, stories become lessons, and the story of Picard and Dathon provides a story for future communication between the Federation and the Tamarians. This is the heart of *Star Trek*; Richards writes,

> Story is the one inescapable reality of *Star Trek*. The crew can be trapped by them, and sometimes liberated by them. But it is when stories shade into myth that they begin to reveal some of the most basic of human experiences. Foremost among these is the experience of language in one of its earliest forms, the form of storytelling. (*Meaning* 148)

And we use stories to communicate across and within cultures; we build understanding.

To finalize this point, in the TNG episode, "Loud as a Whisper," the mediator Riva points out that communication begins with finding something, "no matter how small, that was common to both groups." In the case of the "Dawn," it is the willingness to survive. For "Darmok," it is that both Tamarians and humans share myths and stories, which are then partially conveyed by metaphors. Riva is mediating between two warring groups that share a common language and lack any meaningful diplomatic relations but want the fighting to end. He concludes that they should learn a new language to communicate with him and, by extension, then, "they'll be learning how to communicate with each other" ("Loud as a Whisper" 42:06). This statement by Riva demonstrates what Naeem Inayatullah points out: "Tamarians understand that common experiences provide the context essential to shared meanings" (68). For the Federation and Tamarians, or any different culture, there must be a mutual willingness to communicate and that begins with sharing experiences.

Regardless of the common element between any two cultures, finding that commonality becomes the critical factor in communication. Through such a collaboration, both parties learn more about each other's differences. The end analysis of "Darmok" is that by being able to understand our differences, and only

then, are we able to progress as humans or empathize with different cultures. Only when we understand the other's story can we more fully understand the meaning of our own. As such, conlangs provide a keyhole for us to peer through to see Riva teaching two warring groups how to communicate in a language neither knew coming into the discussion. To be more pointed, we must learn to communicate when neither has an advantage and when we are all equal.

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“They Are Coming”: Klingon Subjectivity and Critique of the Federation in *Star Trek: Discovery*

MATTHEW BARTON, KYOKO KISHIMOTO, ED M. SADRAI, MICHAEL DANDO, AND SHARON COGDILL[i]

(Translation: They are coming)

> T’Kuvma: [in Klingon] They are coming. Atom by atom…they will coil around us. And take all that we are... There is one way to confront this threat. By reuniting the twenty-four warring houses of our own empire. We have forgotten the unforgettable. The last to unify our tribes. – Kahless – Together under one creed, remain Klingon. […] That is why we light our beacon this day. To assemble our people. To lock arms against those whose fatal greeting is... [in English] “We come in peace.” (ellipsis points *sic*; “The Vulcan Hello” S1E1, 00:00:16-00:01:27)

In this fascinating cold open for the entire *Star Trek: Discovery* series, before the credits begin running, T’Kuvma speaks in Klingon and switches for the last phrase – “We come in peace” – into English. While T’Kuvma makes this speech, the camera circles around him until we are looking over his shoulder. Thus, the series begins not only in the Klingon language (the Klingon conlang[1]) but with what T’Kuvma sees – with what Laura Mulvey might call the Klingon gaze rather than the perspective of Starfleet, the heroes, models, and protagonists of the franchise (Mulvey 19). This bold framing positions the audience either as insiders or outsiders, depending on whether they know the Klingon language, one of the most popular and successful conlangs in all of popular culture. Its use here decenters

[1] A conlang (or con-lang) is a constructed language, to suggest J.R.R. Tolkein’s description of Elvish and the other languages he “constructed” (Tolkien 218).

standard American English[2] and its speakers. Framing "We come in peace" as fatal also sets the stage for *Discovery*'s interrogation and revision of Federation ideologies, already going much further than *Deep Space Nine* (1993-1999) did into self-critical territory. It is, in short, an opening offering to situate us with Klingons, seeing from their vantage point, and against the assimilation and colonization by Starfleet, which is maintained by the United Federation of Planets.

Constructed languages add realism and depth to fictional worlds, in large part by giving the characters from those worlds an existence outside the moments dramatized in the series' episodes. Long gone are the days when grunts and bleeps were sufficient to represent the languages of new civilizations. Science fiction and fantasy production companies now regularly hire linguists to write the conlangs needed for new works. According to David J. Peterson, creator of Dothraki and about 50 other conlangs, "In order to meet the heightened expectations of audiences everywhere, we have to raise the bar for languages created for any purpose. After all, if we don't, we'll hear about it" (7). According to Peterson, even people who are not language experts are able to detect inconsistencies and implausibilities in fictional languages. In the nonfictional world, language planning is resource development (Kaplan & Baldauf 4); by constructing a language for Klingons, Marc Okrand was developing the Klingon-species resource into a larger and more important part of the story and the franchise. Because of the assumption that people who speak languages that the audience cannot understand are not speaking gibberish, conlangs can affect people's attitudes, especially about social-justice issues, perhaps engendering greater respect for real linguistic diversity (Schreyer 2). Language is intimately related to personal and group identity, so audiences assume that a character speaking a conlang has a personal identity as well as a sense of belonging to a socially and culturally distinct group.

Discovery has been both castigated and hailed as the "wokest" *Star Trek* yet: "they might as well call it *Star Trek: The Woke Generation*" (Pollack). More progressive critics of *Discovery* are naturally attracted to the series' engagement with race, gender, sexuality, and family, as well as its steady critiques of Federation hegemony. However, the show's radical revisions to Klingon culture, its people,

[2] While linguists regard a "standard" variety of a language as a dialect like any other, "standard English" reflects socio-political centrality and dominance. The *Star Trek* franchise accommodates its audience by having most of its characters use this dialect. Federation Standard is actually a dialect of English that includes "standard American English" as well as a few prestigious English accents like that of Picard (Patrick Stewart). That is, characters who do not use "Federation Standard" are characters being othered.

and its language – specifically the use of the Klingon conlang – deserve special attention. Despite a two-steps-forward, one-step-back kind of progress in the series, the depiction of Klingons has changed in meaningful ways for people concerned about social justice on and beyond the screen. And while it is important to analyze the ways power works in popular-culture artifacts like *Discovery*, we must go beyond a power analysis for its own sake – our attention must go beyond the artifact into the progressive restructuring of power in our society. Critiquing the problems of society is the first step. But we also need to imagine what society could look like and most importantly to think about the ways to get there.

Star Trek Multiculturalism vs Real Antiracism

Popular culture can help us focus on and analyze power – especially a series like *Star Trek: Discovery* (2017-present), where power differentials are revealed by race, gender, sexuality, "girlness," and "alienness." The inequities based on these social positions define organizational structures and relationships. *Discovery's* representations of these characteristics critique racism, sexism, colonialism, and hegemony in our current world, and they envision a just society, showing their viewers what social justice might look like. A key contribution of science fiction like *Star Trek* is that it creates space for depictions and discussions of alienness with subjectivity, rather than from a perspective that others and objectifies the "alien" species. In *Discovery* a strong emphasis on the Klingon language points to the diversity and power differentials within Klingon culture as well as their resistance to Federation ideology. The show also incorporates some critiques of Federation hegemony from characters inside and outside Starfleet, including an extended story arc about the "Mirror Universe," where Federation and Klingon values are (supposedly) reversed. Taken together, these criticisms allow us to orient "to the world that prioritizes self-improvement and living to do right by others" (Whiteout 67), even if it means confronting some ugly truths.

Star Trek has always had as its mission to imagine a world beyond the limitations of human rights in our current world, to go beyond mere escapism. Even in its earliest incarnation in the 1960s, *Star Trek* had a utopian vision of a diverse crew working happily together, including contemporary enemies of the United States: in the middle of the Cold War, for example, Russian Pavel Chekov is on the bridge. Creator Gene Roddenberry shows that in the future the racism, sexism, and international strife of the 1960s magically ceases to exist. As Roddenberry puts it,

"*Star Trek* was an attempt to say that humanity will reach maturity and wisdom on the day that it begins not just to tolerate, but take a special delight in differences in ideas and differences in life forms" (Roddenberry). For him, *Star Trek*'s ideology was "light-years ahead of [current] petty governments and their visionless leaders" (Roddenberry).

Despite these laudable efforts, as many have pointed out, the results have been at best naive and at worst counterproductive – actually reinforcing the hateful and dominating forces Roddenberry suggests *Star Trek* was intended to fight. In his history of "race normativity" in the *Star Trek* franchise, Allen Kwan nails *Star Trek*'s tendency toward a multicultural rather than antiracist vision when he says, of *Enterprise*, as well as "several previous episodes in the *Star Trek* franchise," that the way characters talk about 20th-century racism "promote[s] a message of racial tolerance" and

> emphasizes the homogeneous nature of humanity in *Enterprise*'s projected future, a future that suggests that minoritized groups have adopted the norms of a privileged majority, seemingly believing that racism should be footnoted in history. […] Unfortunately, the means by which this message is delivered simply perpetuate the racism that the producers are trying to eliminate. (Kwan 69)

The type of multiculturalism celebrated by Roddenberry ignores the power differentials between dominant and subordinate groups.[3] Emphasizing the problems of capitalism and post-racialism, Hassler-Forest writes, "What appears superficially as a post-racial, post-capitalist worldview amounts in fact to a displacement of racism from ethnicity onto forms of cultural difference" (377).

Starfleet and its benevolent inclusivity is portrayed as a *fait accompli*, ignoring the way power structures maintain inequality and glossing over the difficult process of creating an equitable society. In her analysis of *Star Trek*, Davidson addresses "Hegemony, specifically a hegemony of western liberal ideas (democracy, self-determination, individualism, free-market capitalism) [that] provides a continual

[3] The dominant group is the group that has more and the subordinate group is the one that has less access to power and resources. In the *Star Trek* universe, the dominant group is Starfleet, and subordinate groups are species that do not belong in Starfleet or the Federation. In the real world, the United States is the dominant group and within the US, the dominant group is white Americans and the subordinate groups are people of color, women, LGBTQ folks, etc.

sub-textual theme" throughout the franchise (9).[4] The ideological limitations of *Trek* are painfully evident in *The Original Series' (TOS)* Klingons, who are monolithic, generic villains racialized to be dark with Fu Manchu-like eyebrows and mustaches. Their makeup was designed for actors of color (e.g., Negro #1 and Mexican #1) but still used in the series on white actors for Blackface (Nazzaro 59).

Both the Klingon conlang and Klingons themselves have evolved since early *Trek* series and films. The Klingon Conlang began as gibberish created by James Doohan, who played Montgomery Scott in the original series. Doohan's goal "was to make a language that would not sound like any on Earth," and taped himself performing a few lines that were transcribed and used by actors in the first feature film (Adams 112). Later, linguist Marc Okrand was consulted and eventually developed Klingon into a full conlang for the film *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* (dir. Lenoard Nimoy, 1984), again with the goal of making it sound "alien" to English speakers. Before he began work Klingon sounded "strange, otherworldly and noisy" and "choppy, grunty" and lacked a grammar and vocabulary. He was left to his own devices in developing the language, his only instructions were that it needed to sound "guttural" (Okrand "Meet"). The conlang got a major boost when Okrand published *The Klingon Dictionary* in 1985, which he followed up with audio courses and supplementary material about Klingon culture.[5] Though the Klingon language was meant to sound unusual to American ears, Adams notes that "phonological or grammatical features of some Native American languages or Southeast Asian languages – the languages with which Okrand was most familiar – worked their way into Klingon, but, for the most part, not by design" (118).

Along with the language, Klingons' appearance was redesigned significantly in the films, which had larger budgets to lavish on such refinements. In *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (dir. Robert Wise, 1979), the Klingons are shown for the first time with ridged foreheads, banded armor, and flashy, bladed weaponry. Later movies and series made more subtle modifications to their appearance. Using a "makeup approach" in *Star Trek into Darkness* (dir. J. J. Abrams, 2013), rather than thick

[4] Between the plots in which the *Enterprise* is literally trapped (e.g., by a tractor beam) and the plots that end with the ship soaring away or going into warp drive and disappearing, having finished its mission, the story arc of nearly every episode and series of *Star Trek* is the freeing of the *Enterprise* (or *Defiant*, *Voyager*, or other ships).

[5] In the wake of the success of the first season of *Discovery*, Felix Malmenbeck led the development in Duolingo of the Klingon curriculum, added in 2019, after Esperanto and High Valyrian were already established (Krishna).

prosthetics, afforded actors a wider range of facial expressions for conveying more emotional responses, allowing Klingons to seem more sympathetic (Nazzaro 63). The earlier Klingons – othered and depicted as brutish and usually villainous – serve mostly as a foil to Federation virtues. We see them through the gaze of Starfleet and the Federation, as enemies, "Others," or hybrid and token[6] characters like Worf and B'Elanna Torres.

No doubt partly in response to apt critiques like Davidson's (of "a hegemony of western liberal ideas") as well as changes in the society we live in, the producers of *Discovery* self-consciously wished to offer a more sophisticated and sensitive take on contemporary social-justice issues, including the way the show deals with alien cultures. *Discovery*'s characters challenge the binary constructions and expand the range of possibilities of gender, sexuality, and race – human races rather than extraterrestrial species – in Starfleet and the Federation. *Star Trek* has always had bi-species and bi-cultural characters like Spock (and later Deanna Troi and Torres), who are hybrid in the sense that they represent a mixing of species and cultures but are not hybrid in the sense of having a "double consciousness," as W.E.B. Du Bois puts it (1989, 3ff.). They are accepted because they are part human and have assimilated into Starfleet – their full selves would threaten the organization's hegemony. *Discovery* disrupts this color-blind multiculturalism with characters who do not merely inflect but reject assimilation. Most notably, *Discovery* brings new kinds of characters into *Star Trek* and puts them at the center of the story. For example, protagonist Michael Burnham is a human raised by Vulcans; she is played by Sonequa Martin-Green, a Black woman. Also extremely important, Phillipa Georgiou (portrayed by Michelle Yeoh, a Chinese-Malaysian actor) is a warrior and one of Michael's three mother figures. Besides race, *Discovery* addresses other crucial elements of social position like gender and sexuality. Characters who challenge traditional female roles and broaden *Star Trek*'s spectrum of acceptable female conduct include Commander Jett Reno,

[6] Conceptually, hybridity has a long history (W.E.B. Du Bois, Bhabha, Hall, Gilroy, Spivak, Smith) and has been used in oppressive as well as progressive ways (Hutnyk, Young). Rather than using it to flatten the differences between people or cultural objects, especially the differences in power, we prefer to see hybridity, as Lisa Lowe does, as a means of "disrupt[ing] the current hegemonic relationship between 'dominant' and 'minority' positions" (28). Typically, she says, "difference" and "sameness" (31) are "exclusively structured by a binary opposition," like cultural hybridity and identity (essentialized "ethnic 'essence'") (33). Tokenism is a form of racism in which a select few are accepted by the dominant group to keep others in line and maintain the status quo; its function is "to show that colorblindness, gender-neutrality, and economic opportunities are available to all" (Collins 15).

Cadet (later Ensign) Sylvia Tilly, Admiral Katrina Cornwell, and Lieutenant Commander Airiam, a cyborg whose memories of her fiancé and relationships with the crew humanize her. Dr. Hugh Culber, Lt. Commander Paul Stamets, Commander Saru, and Captain Pike expand acceptable notions of masculinities, and Culber, Stamets, and Reno normalize non-cis-het sexuality, as does Adira Tal, a non-binary young Starfleet officer joined with a Trill.

However progressive the other changes in Starfleet are in this series, the real revolution *Discovery* offers is in Klingon subjectivity, especially through the strategic use of the Klingon conlang and conscript (the orthographical version of a conlang). According to *Discovery* co-creator Alex Kurtzman, "To use a word that may seem ironic, [the producers'] approach was to *humanize* the Klingons, meaning we [the audience] know a lot about them. In a moment when we are living in a world where ideologies are so polarized and polarizing, what I did not want to do was just make them the bad guys" (emphasis ours; qtd. in Miller). In a review of *Discovery* for *BuzzFeed News*, Adam Vary writes, "*Discovery*'s Klingons are deliberately more complex, reconceived as aesthetes with stunningly ornate armor, a complex political system, and a unifying leader, T'Kuvma (Chris Obi), driven by a philosophy that is outwardly xenophobic, and yet inwardly broad-minded." In this same article, Vary quotes *Discovery*'s showrunner Aaron Harberts as saying, "You start to understand that [Klingons] themselves have their own issues of unity [and] discrimination. […] It was important for us that we didn't view them as the enemy as much as a group that we are in conflict with – because we don't know enough about each other" (Vary). The "issues of unity [and] discrimination" among Klingons have far-reaching consequences in the plot of the series. The extensive use of the conlang is one of the ways Klingons are "humanized" in this series. Including the very prominent cold open for the series itself, the first two seasons of *Discovery* feature 27 scenes with Klingons speaking to each other in Klingon, sometimes at length – and not always about Starfleet – for the importance of which see, for example, the Bechdel or Bechdel-Wallace test (Gross).[7]

Building on its creation and expansion in earlier times and used extensively in *Discovery*, the Klingon conlang recognizes and legitimizes the Klingons. The *Star Trek* universe is now explorable through an alien language. Suddenly, those who speak it – the Others – are, as Kurtzman says, "humanized," struggling to survive,

[7] For a development of the Bechdel-Wallace test to account for race and otherness in the context of science fiction and fantasy, see our "Conlanger Test" in the "Introduction" to this issue.

just like every other being, human or not. We see the Klingon world through their own language; we hear them speak it, even if we have to understand it in subtitles. The effect, essentially, is that we begin to see a previously monolithically represented group as a far more complex people composed of beings who have individual identities and who also belong to a collective that has distinct values. With a fully-fledged conlang spoken extensively and repeatedly in every episode, we observe the disruption of a "United" Federation narrative and the presentation of a far more complex Klingon people than has been available to the audience before.

Conlangs in a work foreground the way a multilingual world can be threatening, particularly to a mainstream constructed by hegemonic socio-politico-economic powers. In world-building contexts, multilingualism is a threat to the "unity" that these powers claim in abstract constructs such as "national unity" or, in the case of *Star Trek*, the unity represented by the United Federation of Planets. In a simplistically conceived "united" or monolithic world, we all pretend to speak the same language, with the same accent.[8] This same thinking applies to the Klingons, a point Okrand depends on in his book on Klingon culture: "Introductory works on Klingon usually ignore the diversity within the Klingon Empire. This oversight is not surprising, since even the most well-informed members of the Federation often think of Klingons as a rather homogeneous group" (Okrand 3). The expansion of the use of Klingon in *Discovery* builds the Klingon world and recognizes the diversity of its people. For example, the series opening introduces a new Klingon word (and concept): *qangtlhIn*, meaning ideology, principles, or creed ("The Vulcan Hello" S1E1, 00:00:56-00:01:00). The phrase *wa' qangtlhIn wIpab, tlhIngan maH taHjaj* ("Together under one creed, remain Klingon") draws back the curtain on a world previously almost entirely closed to fans peering into the galaxies using the Federation gaze. We no longer see Klingons only as violent warriors. We find out that they are rational beings, and their ideology of "remaining Klingon" looks different now – rather than expressing loyalty to the Klingon Empire, it expresses resistance to Starfleet assimilation and hegemony.

[8] However, Roddenberry did include characters with accents (Chekov and Scotty) as major characters and crew members. Their accents mark them as other but highlight the inclusiveness of *Enterprise*. At the same time, the audience could conveniently listen to English without making the effort to understand Russian or Scots Gaelic. Nevertheless, the Klingons are depicted as monolithic despite this awareness of cultural diversity in the real world.

According to Okrand, "The first step toward understanding the people of another culture is learning their language" (2). The dominant group customarily does not have to learn the languages of subordinate groups. Asking the audience to hear and read Klingon requires the mainstream American audience to accommodate the subordinate group. This insight is best articulated by Gloria Anzaldúa: "[A]s long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate" (Anzaldúa 59). Incorporating a conlang in a fictional work helps to center the language of the subordinate groups – challenging hegemony. Having Klingon characters speak English when it makes no logical sense accommodates the audience at the expense of Klingon subjectivity. Hearing and seeing the language of the subordinate group is important; when producers dub or indicate in the captions that what is spoken is a "foreign language," they are accommodating viewers in the dominant group.

The uncomfortable switch the audience must make when reading the subtitles[9] rather than hearing English reveals the unequal power relations and accommodations that subordinate groups have to always make for the dominant group. The producers of *Discovery* were willing to ask the audiences to read subtitles, however, so that passages of dialogue could be written in Klingon and acted without the logical lapse of having Klingons talk to each other in English. As Kurtzman says about *Discovery*, *Trek* fans have been learning and speaking the Klingon conlang "for over 50 years. People are married in Klingon. They speak Klingon to each other. Which means we can't get it wrong. [...] We're going to write long scenes in Klingon, and we're going to ask the audience to read the subtitles" (Kurtzman qtd in Miller). Going so far as to ask the audience to read subtitles points out how important the extensive passages of Klingon dialogue are in *Discovery*: it suggests that Klingons have a valid and even central perspective and its effect is to remind the audience again and again that Klingons have subject

[9] The Trajan or Trajan-like typeface used for the Klingon subtitles (translations of the Klingon dialogue into English) suggests, at least in its original use in film posters, a Hollywood tradition of sweeping historical films about the Roman empire (Peters). Untranslated Klingon is represented textually in a conscript. The producers understand that some fans know Klingon well enough that they can in fact read a transliteration of Klingon, and outside the US providers offer it as one of the options for subtitles (Hamilton, Stolworthy); this transliteration renders the Klingon pronunciation of words in the Latin-based alphabet. The Trajan subtitles are easy to distinguish from the typefaces typically offered for closed captioning, which are Helvetica or Helvetica-like – modernist, corporate, and psychologically unobtrusive (Hustwit).

positions. Presenting the Other in their own language is exactly how subjectivity gets represented.[10]

Besides the cold open in "The Vulcan Hello " (S1E1), a vividly interesting use of the conlang occurs when L'Rell's voice says – in Klingon – "Previously on *Star Trek: Discovery*" ("Point of Light" S2E3). Clearly, this introduction into the recap means that, at least for *Star Trek: Discovery*, the frame is part of the picture. To put this framing into Klingon normalizes Klingon, making it so natural, so seamless, that this narration is easy to miss. Klingon subjectivity extends to the introductory narration, suggesting that the primary audience includes Klingons, or those sympathetic to them. This episode, "Point of Light" (S2E3), extends our understanding of Klingon subjectivity into the domain of L'Rell, a female, a mother, and chancellor of the united Klingon Empire.

Most of the time, we hear the Klingons speaking Klingon to each other, but in the instances in which the Klingons speak English, they do so rhetorically.[11] In "Point of Light" (S2E3, 00:08:19-00:08:29), the Klingons switch to English when a disgruntled Klingon shows his disapproval of Ash's presence and role in L'Rell's administration: "Will you make this human our new fleet captain, too, Chancellor? Perhaps we should speak in the[ir] standard tongue, too." From then on the dialogue is in English.[12]

In another instance, the Klingon subject position is preserved by a deft use of the conlang and subtitles (similar to the way the film *The Hunt for Red October*

[10] If they were heard speaking only English, they would seem more objectified, as though their language is unimportant and by extension they, as a people, are unimportant. In destroying a culture, one of the first steps a dominating group takes is to ban their language.

[11] In the single instance in this series in which the audience hears Klingon but does not understand it, the characters who hear it are Michael and her parents just before her father Mike is killed and Gabrielle dons the "Red Angel" suit and travels 950 years into the future, hoping to have gone back one hour ("Perpetual Infinity" S2E1). In this case, Klingon is not translated because the characters don't understand it, so neither do we. In every other instance in the series in which Klingons speak their language we understand them – they are not opaque to us, a notable departure from earlier series in the franchise.

[12] The actor says "*the* standard tongue," which would imply he is referring to (Modern) Standard Klingon, but this could be a difference between the actor's performance and the script. The closed caption and episode transcript says, "*their* standard tongue," implying English – which makes more sense in this context.

[dir. John McTiernan, 1990] handles the shift from Russian to English[13]). In "Point of Light" (S2E3), the audience hears L'Rell as Chancellor address members of the Klingon High Council, initially in Klingon and then in English. The subtitles change from the translation of Klingon to the Klingon conscript just as actor Mary Chieffo switches from Klingon to English intra-sententially; that is, the Klingon conscript signals that L'Rell is continuing in Klingon even though the actor is speaking in English. The difference is in the rhetorical and political choice made by the producers of *Discovery*: to use Klingon conscript for the subtitles when the actors speak English in this scene. Using the Klingon conscript for the transition from speaking Klingon to speaking English helps maintain the Klingon subject position.

Klingon Subjectivity

In *Discovery* Klingons make the *Star Trek* universe more diverse because their subject position makes us take characters seriously who are opposed to the Federation with its supposed inclusivity.[14] The entire narrative arc of Klingon resistance is almost completely presented from the perspective of Klingons. Even when other species are present, Klingon points of view determine what we see and how we feel about it. When Klingons differ from each other, these round Klingon characters offer a wide range of perspectives. The Klingon High Council may consist entirely of Klingons, but the Klingons themselves are diverse, and not monolithic, in several ways, including skin tones, insider and outsider status (especially in the character Voq), leadership styles, and more. Unlike previous incarnations of *Star Trek* with their monolithic Klingons, this series represents significantly different types of Klingons and Klingon leaders – T'Kuvma fights for unification in order to resist Starfleet, L'Rell works to continue that goal; Kol-Sha and others are not interested in unification and try to take away the leadership position from L'Rell; Mirror Voq unifies various species and heads the resistance

[13] The producer mentioned he didn't want to imitate *The Hunt for Red October* (Miller) in which a few sentences in Russian (in *The Hunt for Red October*) are followed by a permanent switch on a word shared by both Russian and English to language that centers the audience's convenience for the rest of the film.

[14] This inclusivity is challenged by another Klingon, Aztbur (daughter of Klingon Chancellor Gorkon) in the film *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country:* "Human rights – the very name is racist. The Federation is no more than a homosapiens-only club" (Jaffe).

against the Terran Empire; and Ash/Voq uses his hybridity to help the Klingons as well as Starfleet.

T'Kuvma's role in the series is to unify a fractured Klingon Empire, whose twenty-four houses on the Klingon High Council have been at war with each other for many generations and have therefore been unable to resist the encroachments of Starfleet and the Federation. As we see in the very first seconds of this series, T'Kuvma, a self-appointed messiah of the Klingons, invokes Kahless and calls the Klingon High Council together to meet to oppose the Federation with war. From his point of view, the Federation is imperialist; their claim that they "come in peace" is false; if left unopposed Starfleet will assimilate the Klingon culture, depriving them of their rituals, customs, and language – which is exactly what the human Terrans in the mirror universe do. T'Kuvma values the traditions of the Klingons, especially the veneration of Kahless and preserving "Klingon purity," which to him is resisting assimilation by Starfleet.

Voq is T'Kuvma's childhood friend, an outcast "son-of-none" – because of his "translucent white" skin ("Will You Take My Hand?" S1E15) – who is accepted by T'Kuvma to be the second torchbearer. Immediately after the scene in which Michael grieves for the death of her mentor Philippa Georgiou, who has been slain by T'Kuvma, Voq is shown leaning closely over T'Kuvma's face as he dies. The parallel invokes sympathy toward not just Georgiou but also T'Kuvma, who says to Voq, in Klingon, of course, "I recognize you as one who has lived his life on the outside and yearns to be part of something bigger than himself. Some may see the color of your skin as nature's mistake. I call it a mirror ... [sic] for I see myself in you" ("The Vulcan Hello" S1E1, 00:00:16-00:01:27). This poignant moment is an important one for the construction of the Klingon subject position because it adds a new depth of personal history. Voq and T'Kuvma talk about their childhood as a flashback shows T'Kuvma standing up to some Klingon bullies beating Voq. When other Klingons ostracize Voq, T'Kuvma includes him for his difference and even sees potential for Voq to use that outsider perspective for "something bigger." T'Kuvma sees himself in Voq as in a mirror, as an opposite self he identifies with. In the mirror universe, Voq literally takes on the role of leader – uniting not just the Klingon houses but all the other species at war with the Terrans.

We see many events in the series from Voq's perspective, who also represents one of the important forms of Klingon diversity. Voq agrees to have his mind and physicality implanted into Starfleet officer Ash Tyler to infiltrate Starfleet, discover the secret of the spore drive, and take revenge on Michael for killing T'Kuvma.

Mo'Kai, L'Rell's mother's house, conducts this species reassignment surgery, *choH'a'*. L'Rell attempts to activate Voq and his Klingon memory when Ash comes to see her on the *Discovery*, but the process goes awry – is incomplete – leaving Ash and Voq both inhabiting Ash's body and alternating in his consciousness, a new kind of hybridity for *Star Trek*.[15] What prevents Voq from being able to take over completely is Ash's love for Michael, the target of Voq's revenge; Ash tells Michael, "you are my tether" ("The Wolf Inside" S1E11, 00:34:37-00:34:38). His body is human, but Ash/Voq still has Voq's memories as well as his own. His body carries the subjectivity of both Voq and Ash. Ash is treated as an outsider by both Klingons and members of Starfleet, but he becomes the bridge between the two worlds by using his hybrid experience and "outsider within" status (Collins, 2009). Klingon subjectivity is foregrounded by centering Voq's and Ash's gazes and perspectives as well as the events they witness and take part in.

Besides the diversities of skin tone, status as insider and outsider, and hybridity, the Klingons also look more diverse because of L'Rell's part in the series. We see her strategically advancing herself politically as the conditions that would let her work more from the background change, eventually causing her to take the chancellorship. The character L'Rell is also associated with other kinds of Klingon diversity: she and Voq have a son, whose character arc the series follows; her relationship with Voq connects her with one whose family rejected him because his skin was too light and then with the human/Klingon hybrid Ash/Voq. In "Point of Light" (S2E3), the same scene in which she switches from Klingon to English intrasententially, with Klingon subtitles, L'Rell stands in front of representatives of the twenty-four Klingon houses and speaks as the Klingon Chancellor. She says that "the human" (Ash) has betrayed her, throwing what appears to be his decapitated head into the fire and symbolically severing her ties with him or anything to do with him. Holding what she wants them to believe is the baby's head, she says, "I, too, have sacrificed. I will bear a child but once. Now...you are my children, as I raise this family to greatness! Do not refer to me as Chancellor, for I deserve a fiercer title. From this point forth, you may call me...Mother" (ellipsis points *sic*; "Point of Light" S2E3, 00:45:07-00:45:42). That is, the Klingon empire is her family, and as head of that family, she is their mother. L'Rell uses her sacrifices, makes Kol-Sha into a martyr, and defines herself as leader to unify the

[15] A very interesting analysis of Voq/Ash's hybridity could be done using the framework of strategic multiplicity developed by Kishimoto et al. (2021).

families. Klingon motherhood and womanhood are presented as strengths, as positive: her claim is that they make her more fit to be leader – deserving of "a fiercer title" than Chancellor.

Diversity in Klingons is important for the construction of Klingons' subject positions. Building a more complex culture and presenting them as not monolithic "humanizes" them. That is, the ways in which Klingon culture and characterization are developed in *Discovery* are structural, as are the many instances of parallel characters and scenes. The parallel scenes help the audience develop emotional connections with the Klingons and people who have other truths and perspectives. Parallel plot, character, and thematic elements are perhaps the central structuring mechanism of this entire series. In the case of Klingon subjectivity, the parallels suggest that the Klingons have full selves. The almost constant use of parallels in the series undermines the familiar binarities: as L'Rell says, "two truths are possible" ("Through the Valley of Shadows" S2E12, 00:23:29-00:23:32). L'Rell can be both chancellor and mother; Voq/Ash are both Klingon and human; Spock is both Vulcan and human. These characters can be seen as hybrid in the sense that they represent another example of Du Bois' double consciousness. They face an internal conflict as they wrestle with the dominant group's attempts to assimilate their identities, feeling they are "being torn asunder" (Du Bois 3). However, rather than deny their dualities or hybridity, or choose one identity over the other, these hybrid characters learn to accept their doubleness. While the series establishes the Federation and the Klingon Empire as parallels, Klingons have less power: the fact that the worlds are parallel does not mean that their inhabitants are equal.

The parallels in the mirror universe also disrupt the othering process. In the mirror universe, the Terran Empire – with its imperialistic, xenophobic, and racist values – seems to be the complete opposite of Starfleet. However, from the Klingon perspective, Starfleet looks very much like the Terrans in the mirror universe. Starfleet thinks they are living in harmony with all the different species, but from the Klingon perspective they are not and can learn from Mirror Voq. The other non-Terran species share this perspective and with the Klingons create an alliance to resist the Terrans. Authentically wanting to understand, Michael asks Mirror Voq how they can overcome their differences and come together. Seeing the world with Klingon subjectivity leads to a critique of the Federation, showing the audience what it looks from the outside.

Discovery is not the first time a Mirror Universe appears in *Trek* – the first one is back in *The Original Series* – but earlier uses do not lead to a critique of the way

Starfleet wields its power. In *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-1994), for example, the mirror universe is dystopian, validating Starfleet values. Hassler-Forest writes, "Offering a dystopian imaginary instead of the franchise's usual utopianism, the episode's alternate timeline strengthens the sense of inevitability and lack of viable alternatives to its post-historical present – while simultaneously highlighting the narrowness of the line dividing the 'good' future from the 'bad' one" (379). We see a more nuanced treatment in *Discovery*'s mirror universe: rather than present the two possibilities as a binary of one versus another or good versus evil, *Discovery* offers a spectrum of alternatives that situates Starfleet in a universe that has reasons for seeing it less sympathetically.

Critique of Federation/Starfleet Values

Discovery steadily critiques the Federation and Starfleet, the proverbial "good guys" of the franchise.[16] Not only does it portray Klingons in a more nuanced and sympathetic fashion, we also get several astute criticisms from characters outside and inside Starfleet. For example, when Captain Gabriel Lorca denies that Starfleet started the war with the Klingons, Harry Mudd says, "Of course you did. The moment you decided to boldly go where no one had gone before. What happens when you bump into someone who didn't want you in their yard?" ("Choose Your Pain" S1E5, 00:19:17-00:19:26). The humor of this self-referential quip, of course, invokes the original *Star Trek*'s title sequence and seems intended as a commentary on the earlier incarnations.

We also see criticism of Starfleet in the antics during "An Obol for Charon" (S2E4), in which the Universal Translator (UT) malfunctions and outputs the crew's speech in a variety of random human and non-human languages. In fact, the first mistranslated language spoken comes out of Michael Burham's mouth, in Klingon. This scene demonstrates how dependent even the best and brightest members of Starfleet are on the UT for language; without it, they are helpless to understand.[17] Among the bridge officers, only Saru can restore order – because he

[16] Indeed, this shift is evident in the name of the ship. Rather than *Enterprise*, which has connotations of capitalism and business (see fn. 4, above), *Discovery* could mean making discoveries or, more importantly, being discovered by others – one of the themes of this series.

[17] The Starfleet crew is like much of the American audience (about 82%), who speak only English (U.S. Census Bureau). (These kinds of statistics – especially from the U.S. Census – are all made

has learned 94 languages. He asks, "Am I the only one who bothered to learn a foreign language?," exasperated about how dependent the other members of the *Discovery* bridge are on the ship-based UT ("An Obol for Charon" S2E4, 00:12:21-00:12:23).

Perhaps learning languages is not prioritized in the Starfleet Academy because of the existence of the UT, but, putting the contrivance of the UT aside, belonging to the dominant group would absolve many Starfleet officers from the need to learn other languages. Just as those in dominant groups tend to be fluent in only their language, those in the subordinate groups must also learn the dominant language, which often results in the erosion of their own language and identity. They rightly see the dominant group's monolingualism as domination. Thus, the facility that Kelpien Saru has with languages is not just a matter of talent and doing the right thing: as a refugee, he has never felt completely at home in Starfleet; he is still marginalized and othered. He says, "Well, to my shame…hiding is my nature. I have learned multiple languages, yet never shared my own, fearful of revealing my own…alienness" (ellipsis points *sic*; "An Obol for Charon" S2E4, 00:24:05-00:24:24). Saru's subject position is that of an outsider in Starfleet, revealed here in the context of the languages he speaks.

The following dialogue between Michael and Kol reveals the importance of the Klingon language to Klingon identity:

> Michael: General Kol, I wish to talk.
>
> Kol: Who is that? You speak Klingon? Show yourself.
>
> Michael: This device is a universal translator. An example of human ingenuity.
>
> Kol: All I see is another attempt by humanity to rob us of our identity. ("Into the Forest I Go" S1E9, 00:25:41-00:26:10)

Kol correctly sees the UT as another attempt at assimilation or erasing Klingon identity by Starfleet. The Klingons do not have a UT, either because they have not invented it yet (one does show up in a cruder form in *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country* [dir. Nicholas Meyer, 1991]) or they do not need one. The fact that they are speaking English to each other means that the Klingons already know how to speak English without the aid of the UT.[18] Klingons are aware of the

problematic by the fact that the information is self-reported and we have not defined *speaking* or, in fact, *English*.)

[18] Because of the way language contact works in the real world, the fact that Klingons as a group appear to speak English suggests societal bilingualism exists, signaling long-term contact

threat that Starfleet poses and have studied their language and culture: T'Kuvma makes his awareness of their threat explicit when he says, "Members of the Federation. What you call your most remote borders, I call too close to Klingon territory" ("Battle at the Binary Stars" S1E2, 00:23:34-00:23:47). In the series' cold open, T'Kuvma utters the Starfleet slogan "We come in peace" in English without any of Michael Burnham's earnest faith in Starfleet. Like subordinate groups having to know the language and culture of the dominant group for survival everywhere, the Klingons have learned English. Typically, however, members of the privileged dominant group (in this case Starfleet) expect the subordinate group to accommodate and translate; not having learned the language of the Klingons, they rely on the Universal Translator – just as in the real world, the dominant group pays or coerces others to translate for them.

Further critique of the Federation is revealed when Michael and Ash visit the mirror universe and confront Mirror Voq, who is the leader of the resistance ("The Wolf Inside"). Michael is shocked to see so many different cultures gathered at the table working together and asks Mirror Voq how they were able to achieve this unity and "compromise and embrace each other":

> Mirror Voq: The light of Kahless guides me in all things.
>
> Michael: But the light of Kahless demands that you honor the ways of your race. Yet here you are, speaking in a foreign language, placing your faith in the cultural customs of others.
>
> Mirror Voq: I am here. I have survived only on the shoulders of my comrades. The humans seek Klingon extinction. They have denied us our rituals, our language. That is why I fight. (S1E11, 00:27:03-00:27:43)

Unlike T'Kuvma in the prime[19] universe (who seeks Klingon "purity" in the face of a threat from the Federation), in the mirror universe, Mirror Voq has united not only the Klingons themselves, but also Andorians, Vulcans, and Tellarites as endangered cultures against their common enemy, the Terran Empire, which tries to enforce human purity and domination. In Michael's words, the Terran Empire is "a fascistic, human-only organization": "They're an oppressive, racist, xenophobic

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between the two cultures. Once again, a deeper history of the Klingon people is subtly suggested, supporting a sense of their complexity and subjectivity outside of the presence or idea of Starfleet.

[19] "Prime" as in the *primary* or original universe is how the characters use the term in this series; in other Star Trek series, it is used more typically, to mean the alternate universe. We will use the term the way *Star Trek: Discovery* does for this paper.

culture that dominates all known space. […] The Terran culture appears to be predicated upon an unconditional hatred and rejection of anything and everything 'other'" ("Despite Yourself" S1E10, 00:20:09-00:20:59). Rather than working together – on the shoulders of comrades – Terrans exploit others. To them, for example, Kelpiens are not only slaves, they are also a source of food. Terrans have forced Klingons to lose their language: when Voq/Ash speaks Klingon, Mirror Voq is surprised and says, "how do you speak the forgotten tongue?" ("The Wolf Inside" S1E11, 00:28:22-00:28:25). Klingons are concerned about this very erasure in the prime universe as well.

At first it may be tempting to equate the Klingon Empire in the primary universe with the Terran Empire in the mirror universe, but a closer look reveals the parallel between the Terran Empire and Starfleet, which also perpetuates its hegemony by assimilating or annihilating other species. Michael describes the mirror-world Terrans as hating anything other, but their imperialism, fascism, and racism are really just exaggerated forms of the characteristics we see in the primary universe Starfleet. Starfleet aspires to have the cooperative, respectful, and self-aware behavior we see in the mirror resistance group but has yet to figure out how – as we can see in its tense relationship with the Klingons. Michael's series-long struggle to define what exactly in Starfleet she is loyal to is resolved in the mirror universe, but by Klingons.

In previous *Star Trek* series, Starfleet was represented as progressive, as if it had achieved social justice and equity. A work in progress, Starfleet in *Discovery* has not achieved perfection. By making Klingon subjectivity central and having characters both within and without critique Starfleet, the series levels the moral status – but not the power difference – of Starfleet and the Klingons without idealizing or demonizing them. Far from perfect, Starfleet in *Discovery*'s primary universe is very much like it has always been.[20] It is totalizing, imperialistic and aggressive – traits made worse by the secret intelligence organization Section 31 – and yet not the overtly fascist organization the Terrans are. It is as if the Terrans represent a warning to primary-universe Starfleet: this is what it could become. To do right by others, the Federation must, as Mirror Voq says, get its own houses in order before it can "begin to invite others in" ("The Wolf Inside" S1E11, 0:28:03-00:28:04), much less invading other people's backyards.

[20] How Starfleet has been to us is how it will be in the fictional universe, because the events in *Discovery* take place just before the events in *TOS*.

Discovery and the Real World

Social change requires more than a critical analysis of a work in the popular culture. What is necessary is to step outside the theoretical and into the world, outside of the intellectual and into action. Part of the difficulty of stepping from analysis and critique to action is imagining what socially just processes and what a socially just world would look like. *Star Trek: Discovery* imagines a world in which difference is not assimilated or annihilated but accepted and made use of, including in leadership. A world in which we turn to the subjectivity of the members of subordinate groups to see ourselves, to reverse the gaze and reveal the unequal power relations. A world in which the languages spoken by others mark them as valid and important, even if those others seem to be a threat. A world in which hierarchical structures are replaced with structures that do not invoke hegemony and domination. A world in which, to point to the theme in the series of the dangers of AI, nobody uses technology to replace the learning of languages.

Audre Lorde's "*For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.* They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" is one of the most important assertions ever made about how we can arrive at social justice and equity, but the sentences immediately before it are equally important (27). In the terms used by Mirror Voq to describe the process by which he came to peace, getting our house in order means, as Lorde says, making "common cause with those others identified as outside the structures to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths" (26-7). We must, as L'Rell and Mirror Voq learn, dismantle the house and build a new one. For the Klingons in the primary universe, getting their house in order means uniting all the warring houses – who have been warring, presumably, because they have been run under the old Klingon model we see in earlier series. Part of that process is the uniting of the houses under one Mother and the establishment of Klingons as a unified family that is inclusive, healing, and willing to sacrifice for the good of the whole. One version of the end of the process of getting the houses in order is L'Rell's. The other is the Mirror Voq's, an inclusive organization – making common cause with others outside Klingon structures.

The optimism inherent in *Star Trek: Discovery* leads us to hope that Starfleet will have learned from the encounters with Klingons that they are not brutish and

brutal, but thoughtful and principled – however different – and forced into a position of defending themselves against Starfleet expansionism. Taking the *Discovery* into the future is a clever way for the writers and producers to justify why *Star Trek* series written and produced after TOS do not know about the spore drive or the larger perspective on the universe preserved by the Sphere data. Most significant for us, however, is that when Burham and the crew of the *Discovery* leave the 10-years-before-TOS time to take the ship's knowledge from the Sphere data into the future, they take their hard-won knowledge of Klingon subjectivity with them.

The analysis of *Discovery* reveals power differentials and oppression behind languages, assimilation, and multiculturalism and helps us understand these issues in our real world. Science fiction has always experimented with the possibilities of imagining futures that are better and worse than the contemporary world. *Discovery* can enable the step to the real world and to action by showing not only what a socially just world might look like but also some of what it might sound like: less monolingual to be sure. It invites audiences to engage ideas they might normally be afraid of and to talk about ideas they might be afraid to talk about. The Klingon gaze – the gaze of "others identified as outside [our] structures" – gives us the starting point for the journey of becoming socially just in our world and the means "to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish" (Lorde 26). Both for members of subordinate groups and especially for members of the dominant group, self-reflecting and challenging their internalized racism and internalized racial superiority are essential. They must work to dismantle the master's house – dismantle the structural racism and hegemony so subordinate groups do not have to face domination, colonization, assimilation, and threat in the words and actions of the dominant group. When they really have gotten their house in order, then maybe those in the dominant group can really say "We come in peace" without dishonesty or naive earnestness – and perhaps in the Klingon language.

In the series the phrase parallel to "we come in peace" is "they are coming," which sounds very different when spoken by a Klingon than when spoken by Starfleet. They are the very first words in the series, and they are spoken by T'Kuvma in Klingon. In the series and spoken by Starfleet, "they are coming" means the Klingons are coming and they are a threat; said this way, "they are coming" echoes anti-immigrant sentiment and policies. Said by T'Kuvma, "they are coming" cements Klingon subjectivity, showing us what it looks like to be seen as invaders but to face erasure and assimilation at the hands of Starfleet

imperialism. T'Kuvma's resistance to that erasure and assimilation is to protect Klingon culture, identity, and subjectivity, to, as their slogan has it, "Remain Klingon!"

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Opinion: Tolkien and Race (The Primary-source Accounts) and the Adaptations

JOHN PAUL WALTER, KYOKO KISHIMOTO, MATTHEW BARTON, AND SHARON COGDILL[i]

When *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power* was released in 2022, a furor among some of the fans echoed a similar furor among some *Star Wars* fans when the 2017 *Last Jedi* introduced Kelly Marie Tran as Rose Tico. Besides pointing to the systemic racism endemic in American culture, *The Rings of Power* controversy also brought to the surface a complex issue that has long festered in Tolkien studies: Tolkien's ideas about race and his enmeshment in the 19th-century British project of empire building. While race is very important in reading both Tolkien and the adaptations of his work, in this special issue of *Popular Culture Studies Journal* we are interested in and focused on language, particularly conlangs. But because Tolkien's conlangs are spoken by the different "races" in his fiction, the one inevitably invokes the other, and a characteristic of conlangs is that they can disrupt how power works in fiction and reveal how power works in the "real world."

Race

Born in 1891 in South Africa, where his father had been stationed as manager of a bank (Carter 18-22), Tolkien lived almost his entire life in England and was a man of his time, both subject to and beneficiary of the racialized structures in his society, as are we all. Evidence from both his fiction and personal correspondence show that he thought about race and did not think darker skin unilaterally meant inferiority. On the other hand, the ancient literary symbolic structure associating darkness with evil and light with good – which underlies his fiction – has effects in a racialized world, regardless of origins and intentions. Also, as an inheritor of the British Victorian world and as a philologist, he would have been aware of the complexity of the lexical item "race," beginning according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* in the early-modern era, as "a house, family, kindred," "An ethnic group […] a tribe, nation, or people" and "The offspring or posterity of a person; a set of children or descendants" (race). In works of fantasy and science fiction, also, race

signifies different species. Generalizing about race in Tolkien's works is made even more complex in part because of the sheer number of years he spent writing about Middle-earth, which gave his ideas a chance to evolve over a long time. Adding to the complexity is that he writes about a big area: he is writing an imagined pre-history of our world, of Eurasia, the Greater Middle East, and North Africa. (We can culturally locate the Hobbits' shire with England as it is embedded in Europe.) Finally, not only did his own ideas develop but so did the world around him, making it complex to talk about race in particular because of what changed in the U.K. as well as Europe over those many years.

Like Ursula Le Guin later, in his fiction Tolkien mentions without emphasis the varying skin colors of his characters. In the first section of the Prologue to *The Lord of the Rings*, for example, Tolkien writes of Hobbits,

> Before the crossing of the mountains the Hobbits had already become divided into three somewhat different breeds: Harfoots, Stoors, and Fallohides. The Harfoots were browner of skin, smaller, and shorter, and they were beardless and bootless; their hands and feet were neat and nimble, and they preferred highlands and hillsides. The Stoors were broader, heavier in build; their feet and hands were larger, and they preferred flat lands and riversides. The Fallowhides were fairer of skin and also hair, and they were taller and slimmer than the others; they were lovers of trees and woodlands. (2)

Here we find Tolkien explicitly noting differences in skin color among the Hobbits, who have intermarried over the years, and stating clearly that the largest group of Hobbits, the Harfoots, are brown rather than white. And he goes further when he contrasts the darker skin of Samwise Gamgee (Sam) and Frodo Baggins in *The Lord of the Rings*. In "The Stairs of Cirith Ungol" chapter of *The Two Towers*, Tolkien contrasts Frodo's "white forehead" and Sam's "brown hand" (714). Tolkien repeats the description of Sam's skin color in "The Tower of Cirith Ungol" chapter in *The Return of the King*, describing it as "his faithful brown hobbit-hand that had done such deeds" (915). These descriptions of skin color do not seem to suggest inferiority, as Sam is presented as such a positive character, though he is working class and belongs to a lower class than Frodo does.

Other groups in Tolkien's fiction are racialized as well: most notably Orcs, but the Rohirrim, the Dúnedain, the Bree-landers, the Easterlings, and the Haradrim (also sometimes called Southerners, but generally what we would think as coming from the near East and Northern Africa) are identified as belonging to different

races and ethnicities. In a letter to Forrest J. Ackerman concerning Morton Zimmerman's 1958 proposed screenplay of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien takes issue with the Orcs' feathers and beaks in the script, then describes how they are presented in the books, in the process using grossly dehumanizing language:

> The Orcs are definitely stated to be corruptions of the "human" form seen in Elves and Men. They are (or were) squat, broad, flat-nosed, sallow-skinned, with wide mouths and slant eyes: in fact degraded and repulsive versions of the (to Europeans) least lovely Mongol-types. (Tolkien *Letters* 274)

In Tolkien's works, languages evolve over time, and so do beings. Orcs *were* "squat, broad, flat-nosed, sallow-skinned, with wide mouths and slant eyes," but now some are not. The mechanism for this obviously racist presentation of Orcs is the Victorian "representative type" so important to 19th-century notions of race (and phrenology). Tolkien shows awareness that what looks unlovely depends on the gaze, in this case a European's.

Orcs are a corruption or perversion of Elves and humans. They were made by the fallen figures of Morgoth, Sauron, and Saruman, who being evil, cannot create but only corrupt. The versions of the language that Orcs speak is also a corruption: Tolkien says that Orcs "perverted" other languages to make their own (*Lord* 1130). As Tom Shippey argues in *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, this idea of Orkish is consistent with the idea of the nature of evil we find in Tolkien's work, which Shippey traces through Milton back to Boethius. In Tolkien's theology, evil is "an absence of good" that ultimately serves the divine plan (130-1). As Shippey points out, Frodo reiterates this belief in "The Tower of Cirith Ungol" when he states that evil cannot make "real new things on its own" (Tolkien *Lord* 912). Tolkien links, then, race, language and morality.

In the Boethian conception of good and evil, evil does not create, it corrupts what was created. However, Tolkien does not present Orcs as only and entirely evil. In his discussion of evil in Tolkien's work, Shippey looks at a couple of the passages we have from the Orcish point of view. As Shippey explains in *Author of the Century*, in the last chapter of *The Two Towers*, when the Orcs find Frodo's body wrapped in Shelob's webbing, which was left by Sam when he flees as the Orcs approach, the Minas Morgul Orc leader Gorbag and the Cirith Ungol Orc leader Shagrat discuss what they find. Gorbag expresses disdain at the idea that a fallen comrade would be left behind: "The big fellow with the sharp sword [Sam] doesn't seem to have thought him [Frodo] worth much anyhow – just left him lying:

regular elvish trick" (131-2). As Shippey argues, Gorbag has contempt for the idea of abandoning a fallen companion, a feeling we would see as evidence of good .

While Tolkien shows us Gorbag and others of Sauron's minions in what we might call shades of evil, *orkish* means "harm" and Orc-work is destructive, harming the land, as in the Fangorn and the Shire. In keeping with the Boethian understanding of evil as the human consequence of abandoning the good, in a 25 May 1944 letter to his son Christopher, Tolkien explains that real wars are not conflicts between good and evil people, but that both sides have "a motley alliance" of good and evil people serving their nation:

> Yes, I think the orcs as real a creation as anything in "realistic" fiction: your vigorous words well describe the tribe; only in real life they are on both sides, of course. For "romance" has grown out of "allegory," and its wars are still derived from the "inner war" of allegory in which good is on one side and various modes of badness on the other. In real (exterior) life men are on both sides: which means a motley alliance of orcs, beasts, demons, plain naturally honest men, and angels. (Tolkien *Letters* 82)

In the greater discussion of the Orc Gorbag, Shippey argues that in Gorbag we see Tolkien presenting evil as not some all-or-nothing caricature but as a way of being that can include values like honor and respect for one's companions. And as Shippey notes, Tolkien himself was conflicted over the "theological status" of orcs (*Road* 158, 370, n. 14). (It is consistent with Tolkien's Victorian heritage that he would represent good and evil as visible on the bodies of his characters.)

Summarizing C.S. Lewis's argument in *Mere Christianity*, Shippey explains that evil often does not see itself as evil but, instead, as good: "even evil-doers are liable to excuse themselves in terms of what is good: breakers of promises insist that they do so because circumstances have changed, murderers claim that they were provoked, atrocities are excused as retaliation for earlier atrocities, and so on" (131). In his role in *The Lord of the Rings* and our understanding of evil as Tolkien presents it, Gorbag "quite clearly and deliberately dramatize[s]" the "Boethian view: evil is just an absence, the shadow of the good" (Shippey 133).

As with evil, Tolkien addresses race outside his fiction as well. In a letter dated 18 April 1944, Tolkien tells his son Christopher, who was stationed at this time in South Africa, about racial prejudice and "colour" in the "local conditions" there. Tolkien writes,

> As for what you say or hint of "local" conditions: I knew of them. I don't think they have much changed (even for the worse). I used to hear them

> discussed by my mother; and have ever since taken a special interest in that part of the world. The treatment of colour nearly always horrifies anyone going out from Britain, & not only in South Africa. Unfort. not many retain that generous sentiment for long. (Tolkien *Letters* 73)

In this letter we see classic mid-20th-century liberal ideas about the treatment of people. Tolkien is aware of the devastating impact of racism in South Africa and other nonwhite places in the empire and he's aware that people who get outside of Britain see that horror at first and then become inured to it. His ideas about race show that he sees the personal but not the systemic: he suggests Britons were not racist because they were "nearly always horrifi[ed]" when they left the U.K. for places in the empire. This liberal focus on the individual and psychological is typical of the thinking of his time and is still quite common in ours.

In fact, "the Battle of Bamber Bridge," an incident that took place the year before he wrote his letter, offers an example of why Tolkien thinks Britons are not racist until they leave. The battle refers to a series of racial conflicts between white and Black U.S. troops in the Lancashire village of Bamber Bridge. As Britain did not have *de jure* racial segregation at this time, American Black troops were admitted as Americans in the local pubs, a practice the U.S. commanders tried to stop. On 24-25 June 1943, the first attempt to stop this segregation failed when the arrest of Private Nunn was protested by locals, British servicewomen from the Auxiliary Territorial Service, and at least one British soldier (Mirante). Later that night, violence broke out a few times, resulting in the death of one Black American soldier, Private William Crossland of the 1511th, the shooting of several Black soldiers, and the beating of two MPs (Mirante).

Language and Conlangs

Technically Tolkien "constructed" (Tolkien "Secret" 216) fourteen conlangs, or parts of conlangs, for the peoples in his fiction (Noel 6). In Appendix F of *The Lord of the Rings*, speaking as the chronicler of the history of Middle-earth, Tolkien divides the "languages and peoples of the third age" by race and the languages they speak (*Lord* 1127). Among them are Elvish, Westron, Orkish, Khuzdul (or Dwarvish), Rohirric (for the people of Rohan), and Black Speech. Elves speak Sindarin and Quenya; the Elves of Mirkwood and Lórien spoke Sylvan Elvish. Both of the Elvishes are more fully developed than any of the other conlangs. Westron

is the name of a region but, by the time of the novels, it is also the name of the Common Speech, spoken by some humans and by Hobbits.

Orcs speak one of the many "barbarous dialects" of Orkish, of which Tolkien writes, "It is said that they had no language of their own, but took what they could of other tongues and perverted it to their own liking; yet they made only brutal jargons, scarcely sufficient for their own needs, unless it were for curses and abuse" (*Lord* 1130). Another conlang in Tolkien's novels is "Black Speech," a language created by Sauron that the Nazgûls and some Orcs can speak. (The *Black* is part of the symbol system in his works that associates darkness with evil and light with good.) Middle-earth is multilingual, with all kinds of creatures speaking and sometimes writing. Besides all these peoples, trees (we have part of one word in Entish) and some animals can speak, like the giant eagles, the thrush that Bilbo encounters on the Lonely Mountain, otters, and even spiders (if we count Shelob as a true spider instead of a supernatural being.)[1]

Much has been said about these conlangs, and some of it in them. Fans have learned Quenya for decades, translating works into it, writing in it, and expanding the vocabulary (Neo-Quenya). It is not surprising that, because Orkish exists and thus Orcs have a conlang, there will be moments in which we see them as nuanced, having values and, like Gorbag, a subject position.

The fact that these are all fictional races, beings, and languages does not matter. The constructed languages, like symbol systems, are not neutral – racialization also controls the perception of the superiority and aesthetic pleasure (of, for example, Elvish) or inferiority and ugliness (of Orkish) of languages. This perception is brought to the works by creators, readers and viewers, and fans. We learn about how racialization of language works in the world when we focus on the effects of calling something "Black Speech" or "corrupted" or "perverted."

That is, we must study the effect, because the cause – whether of ancient origins or rookie and fallacious assumptions about authorial intent – is unknowable and thus irrelevant.

Return to Adaptations

[1] The first conlang Tolkien learned — taught to him by his cousins — was "Animalic," a "nursery language" "made up from names of animals, birds and fish" (Fimi and Higgins 13).

Besides the thousands of pages in *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Silmarillion* and other material that Tolkien never published, we now have film and video adaptations with new stories based on his work – including *The Rings of Power* – as well as fifty years of games. Although racist fans complained about the changes these newer productions brought to the Tolkien universe, it is not clear that Tolkien himself would have found them objectionable. Until *The Rings of Power*, all of Tolkien' s main characters in all of the adaptations have been white, which has reinforced assumptions that Tolkien's peoples are always white. For example, except for the way Orcs are represented, all the speaking characters in the cast of Peter Jackson's influential *Lord of the Rings* trilogy are white. (Gothmog, the albino Orc, might seem like an exception, but we recognize that he suffers from mutations.) Along with the three *Hobbit* films, Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* put Tolkien back in the mainstream of popular culture. B ased as the Orcs are on Tolkien's own description of them in the letter to Ackerman, the charges against Jackson for the way Orcs are racialized seem just and fair to us.

But those are the Orcs and the adaptations. The descriptions of the varying skin colors among Hobbits that Tolkien writes are clear and unambiguous. In *The Rings of Power* Elves speak either Quenya or Sindarin, Dwarves speak Khuzdul, some humans speak Adûnaic, and Orcs speak Orkish as well as in their war chant use a word from Black Speech. Some fans reacted negatively to the Black Elves, and some reacted negatively to the subtitles, which they were required to read if they were not fluent in these conlangs, as almost nobody is. For some fans, hearing characters speak Elvish is exactly what they want, but for some, the decentering of their own language and identity is very challenging. The "Race of Man Avatar Update" for *The Lord of the Rings Online* game was met with these now-familiar complaints. Released in April 2023, this update explicitly added some diversity to the non-avatar characters as well as face, hair, and body options that are more inclusive for avatars, so that more players can feel that they are represented ("Update").

What these furors reveal is how invested some fans are in the whiteness of their favorite characters in *The Rings of Power* and the Tolkien universe (and *The Last Jedi*). The complaints that met the update for the *Lord of the Rings Online* game reveal a generalized objection to diversity independent of the specific situation because a skin color option has been available for avatars from very early on. As with all of these, the furor that erupted over the diversifying of the cast of *The Rings of Power* reveals more about the racial ideologies of our times than the ideologies

in Tolkien's work, and it reveals even more about the fans who seem to have felt betrayed by it.

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Life Is Narrative: Narratives as Behavioral Models for Adults Suffering from Grief

CASSIOPEIA FLETCHER

From whichever culture they originate, community rituals can help those in the midst of grief find closure. They offer a sense of structure and can create moments of focus or control for those who are not yet able to metabolize their grief (Kübler-Ross and Kessler). However, as such rituals become less and less "mythical" in nature (Campbell), they turn into yet another duty to fill, which can sap any useful contribution the ritual may have otherwise made toward metabolizing grief (Kübler-Ross and Kessler). Because of this demythologizing, the rituals themselves are not necessarily ways of experiencing grief as much as they are socially acceptable ways of expressing grief to one's family and friends. This can create unrealistic expectations of grief and grieving both for those who have lost and those who know someone who has lost, especially in societies where "being strong" in the face of trial is the social norm (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "On Grief" 101-105).

Because many of these grieving rituals are religious in nature, society has set them aside and instead adopted more secular views on grief and grieving. This supplanting of established rituals, however, can leave many who have not yet been touched by grief – either personally or vicariously – to flounder when faced with such a sudden and unfamiliar emotion. Modern grief rituals, particularly in the case of fractured romance, is often soothed by fiction – typically in the form of drama or romantic comedy films. While mocked as a cliché, this socially acceptable model could easily be expanded beyond tissue-flicks and broken hearts to create a new foundation for grieving rituals and behavioral modeling at large.

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This article looks at five creative narratives – *The Illness Lesson* (Beams), *Beloved* (Morrison), *The Kissing Bug* (Hernandez), *The Sound and the Fury* (Faulkner), and *Parable of the Sower* (Butler) – and how their portrayals of the five stages of grief, as described by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross and, later, David Kessler, can create positive behavioral changes related to grief and grieving in readers through the impact of Narrative transportation theory (NTT). The narratives chosen for this article present stark examples of how grief can create a lasting impact on the lives of both the person suffering and those for whom they care.

Literature Review

Stories are the blueprints for life. They create and maintain sociocultural perimeters for acceptable behaviors through various mediums and can provide behavioral models for consumers who may not have access to other behavioral support models, such as family, friends, or mentors (Baezconde-Garbanati et al.; Brown; Singhal and Rogers). Additionally, narratives can delve deeply into behaviors that are commonly considered social taboos or dangerous to an individual's physical or mental health to introduce warning signs for those who may not realize they are struggling (Baezconde-Garbanati et al.; Brown; Singhal and Rogers). In cases where the reader is deeply immersed in a narrative, permanent behavioral and ideological changes can occur (Baezconde-Garbanati et al.; Cho et al.; Dahlstrom; Nabi and Green). This phenomenon has become known as narrative transportation.

Narrative Transportation Theory. Narrative transportation theory (NTT) was created to explain why people enjoy narratives and how enjoyment of narratives can affect consumers long-term. Green, Brock, and Kaufman suggest that the more deeply transported a person becomes, the more likely they are to be permanently changed by the ideas and behaviors experienced through the narrative (Baezconde-Garbanati et al.; Cho et al.; Dahlstrom; Nabi and Green). Because of this pattern of change through narrative, many authors, screenwriters, and playwrights, as well as advertisement professionals, have intentionally and increasingly inserted educational content into their narratives (Brown; Singhal and Rogers). However, even unintentional applications of NTT can be effective, often more so, as intentional NTT use may come off as contrived (Green and Brock).

One of most interesting aspects of NTT is just how difficult it can be to purposely utilize it (Green and Brock). The reason for this is that transportation into any type of narrative is a subjective experience. What one may believe to be the

greatest book ever written may not do anything for their best friend, lover, or neighbor. Because of this, entertainment often becomes the focus of a narrative with any educational benefits being secondary and often subtle enough for laymen to overlook (Singhal and Rogers). For example, in their 2016 study, Lindebaum and Gabriel looked at the structure and effects of diverse types of anger using the play Twelve Angry Men as an emotion-study lens. In particular, the authors were interested in the concept of moral anger and how it can benefit others by having a focused, equalizing, and even diffusive effect on other types of anger, such as personal or societal anger.

While some scholars consider anger a destructive and unrestrainable emotion, the authors seek to use the narrative elements of this play – which illustrates various types of and responses to anger from towering rage and intimidation to the quiet, simmering need to address and correct injustice – to establish moral anger as a construction process for societal harmony (Lindebaum and Gabriel). In other words, Lindebaum and Gabriel indicated that Twelve Angry Men shows that, while anger can be destructive, it is sometimes needed to break down dangerous or unnecessary walls to reveal the greater structure behind or even to destroy a structure entirely to make way for a new one. In this way, moral anger can break down the unhealthy societal walls behind which lie worse emotions and responses that could, potentially, "poison the well" of society.

Most would not view this play as an educational tool; it is a means of entertainment. The message, however, lingers because, as declared by Marchall McLuhan, "The medium is the message" (Littlejohn et al.,132). According to Green, "Stories that evoke strong emotions are more likely to affect behavior, and are also more likely to be passed on to others" (47). Narratives depicting grief and loss are well-suited to the behavior-changing aspect of NTT, particularly because they are so prevalent across media types from films to novels to stage plays, both modern and ancient. If done properly, grief narratives can shine a light on unrecognized or unrealized emotions by creating a link with the consumer.

Understanding the Cycle of Grief. First introduced in *On Death and Dying*, the five stages of Kübler-Ross's Cycle of Grief have become a permanent fixture in modern society. In addition to providing guidance and perspective within the psychological (Tavakoli) and medical fields (Baddeley and Singer; Lyckholm; Sisk and Baker; Sweeney). The Cycle of Grief consists of five distinct stages through which, according to Kübler-Ross, the terminally ill regularly pass as they struggle to come to terms with their impending death. Later, Kübler-Ross and Kessler

expanded the research laid down in On Death and Dying to apply the five stages to those suffering from grief as the result of a deceased – or dying – loved one.

While not the only theory on grief management, the Kübler-Ross Cycle of Grief is probably the best-known theory to help sufferers overcome personal trauma induced by loss (i.e. grief) (Byock; Shriver). One reason why some theorists and psychology professionals dislike this theory is that it appears to place grief into a neat package without empirical evidence to support Kübler-Ross's claims (Back; Corr; Strobe et al.); e.g., each person goes through each stage in order within a set amount of time and, upon reaching Acceptance, can move on with their life as if the loss never happened. Because everyone grieves differently, the stages may manifest out of order or, in some cases, not at all. This could lead some to believe they are grieving "incorrectly" (Avis et al. 8; see also Back) exacerbating an already stressful and emotional experience. According to Kübler-ross and Kessler ("On Grief"), however,

> [The stages] were never meant to help tuck messy emotions into neat packages. They are responses to loss that many people have, but there is not a typical response to loss, as there is no typical loss…They are tools to help us frame and identify what we may be feeling. But they are not stops on some linear timeline in grief. (7)

Still, as illustrated by Back, the medical world Kübler-Ross inhabited when she wrote On Death and Dying is not the same medical world of the "metamodern" era (36), and the popularity of the Cycle of Grief model has largely fallen out of favor in the medical world as a result. Strobe, Schut, and Boerner caution healthcare professionals against emphasizing Kübler-Ross and Kessler's depictions of the Cycle of Grief. For too many, grief, loss, and Kübler-Ross have become synonymous, and her stages of grief are taken as gospel truths (Lyckholm). That said, appreciation for the revolutionary impact of Kübler-Ross's doctor-patient interactions remains (Back; Lyckholm; Sisk and Baker).

Anthony Back, in his article discussing the modern applications of On Death and Dying, said, "To me, what endures is the quality of attention that Kübler-Ross gave to the patients she interviewed…I wish she had written more about how she developed those capacities within herself" (36-37). Outside the medical field, however, the theoretical adaptation of the Cycle of Grief has expanded rather than diminished. Kübler-Ross's five stages have been used, both straight and satirically, to assist leaders with organizational transitions (Friedrich and Wüstenhagen), acceptance of new technologies (McAlearney et al.; Tarnoff et al.), the change in

required residency hours for aspiring surgeons (Barone and Ivy), and foster-child adoption (Jones). Outside the world of scholarship, Kübler-Ross's five stages have found a lasting home in modern culture. For this reason, a more meta-theoretical approach to the cycle of grief is utilized in this article when referencing grief narratives.

Prosocial Narratives. Grief narratives are not a new phenomenon. The active use of narrative as a grieving tool, however, is still being explored. Some, such as literary critic Andrew Riemer (Brennan), feel that literature – specifically memoir – is not an acceptable medium for exposing and working through one's grief while Bernadette Brennan takes the opposite view when discussing the cathartic effects of grief memoir writing on Virginia Lloyd and Maggie MacKellar. Susannah Sheffer details her experiences helping a teenage boy work through his grief by facilitating his efforts to write a fictional grief narrative about a teenaged boy named Andrew. According to Sheffer, "This was so moving…Jeremy was learning through writing Andrew's discovery of [grief management]" (20). Along the same lines of accidental catharsis, Rachel Robertson and Helena Kadmos discuss how their collaborative grief memoir "was not intended as therapeutic, but it did in fact help us understand and accept the mourning process" (224). Not everyone, however, is a writer, and for those who may not feel comfortable, or capable, of expressing their grief through either memoir or fiction, established grief narratives may make up the difference.

Following the massive prosocial success of Simplemente Maria (1969-1970), a Peruvian telenovela, Miguel Sabido developed a reusable strategy for creating popular television shows (telenovelas and soap operas, specifically) capable of disseminating prosocial information. This strategy was used by Sabido to create three popular telenovelas in Mexico before being taken worldwide. Countries that have made use of Sabido's strategy include India (Brown; Singhal and Rogers), Japan (Brown et al.), the United States (Singhal and Rogers), and Nepal (Strong and Brown), as well as various African nations (Brown; Singhal and Rogers), among many others (Brown). While the information presented in these radio and television soap operas dealt more with common societal issues, such as the dowry system in India or Aids in Tanzania (Singhal and Rogers), the strategy Sabido developed is just as applicable to grief narratives.

While there are several aspects to Sabido's entertainment education (EE) strategy, the one most relevant to this article is the creation of characters as prosocial behavioral models. The most successful EE projects – in addition to being

transporting entertainment – include three types of behavior models: positive role models, negative role models, and transitional role models (Singhal and Rogers). Positive role models have already adopted the prosocial behavior suggested through the narrative while negative role models resist or are unaware of the prosocial behavior and so behave, to their detriment, in an antisocial manner. Transitional role models are the linchpin for the adoption of prosocial behavior as they show the personal and societal benefits of rejecting antisocial behavior (such as unprotected sex) in favor of prosocial behavior (protecting oneself from aids).

Using these same tactics, positive, negative, and transitional grief models may allow those suffering from grief the opportunity to examine their own needs and feelings through the narrative lens. Because of the stigma surrounding grief and the societal need to have those in pain shut it out or set it aside once the "ritual" of mourning has been completed (Kübler-Ross and Kessler), many whose grieving process might be stretched out or seemingly endless may find solace or companionship in grief narratives, whether those narratives are fictional or biographical (Shriver). As stated by Shriver, "When you're grieving, sometimes your only constant companion is a book" (xii).

Method

A narrative rhetorical criticism approach was utilized in the analysis of five novels chosen from the required reading list for a doctoral-level literature seminar offered at a midwestern university as part of their Creative Writing Ph.D. program. The works were chosen due to the author's enrollment in the class, and the initial draft of this article was written to fulfill the final essay requirement. Of the eleven books required for the class, two were non-fiction treatises on the use of illness in fiction and two were books of autobiographical poems. As narratives, specifically, were required, these four books were automatically excluded. Quite Mad by Sara Fawn Montgomery and The Cancer Journals by Audre Lorde – two other required readings – were excluded from analysis due to a lack of one solid grief "thread" that could be followed throughout.

Additionally, the Kübler-Ross theory of grief was chosen as the lens through which the narrative criticism was focused due to public familiarity with the cycle, its five stages, and the general acceptance of it as a viable method for grief management amongst laypersons. Other grief approaches could be applied to

similar studies to further research in this area, but to keep this article streamlined, only the Kübler-Ross theory was actively applied.

Depictions of Grief in Narratives

The Illness Lesson: The Dangers of Inherited Denial. Discussing denial in her seminal work, On Death and Dying, Kübler-Ross states that denial is typically a short-lived stage due to the constant intersession of reality-affirming events. These events could range from hospital stays to medical necessities to the behavior of others (Kübler-Ross). According to Kübler-Ross, "Denial is usually a temporary defense and will soon be replaced by partial acceptance" (39). The Illness Lesson (Beams) is an excellent illustration of the consequences of prolonged denial on both an individual and on those to whom they are connected.

A historical novel taking place in Massachusetts in the late 1800s, The Illness Lesson (Beams) is an unusual case of inherited grief due to Caroline Hood, the main character, being too young to fully understand the loss of her mother at the time of her death. In particular, Samuel Hood, Caroline's father, appears to suffer from denial to an almost debilitating degree; a denial he has long passed on to his daughter. However, unlike what is typically considered denial – the refusal to believe, or inability to grasp, the passing of a loved one (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "On Grief") – Samuel's denial centers very heavily around his inability to accept his wife's infidelity as that would solidify his own failings and their consequences. It is this denial of Samuel's fallibility that he passes on to his daughter Caroline almost from birth.

Kübler-Ross and Kessler ("On Grief") present denial as a means "to cope and make survival possible. Denial helps us to pace our feelings of grief…It is nature's way of letting in only as much as we can handle" (10). Samuel, however, and Caroline by extension, is unable to move on from denial because accepting his wife's infidelity and imperfections would unmake him. He needs to believe the delusion he is living in order to continue living (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "On Grief"), and because he needs to believe it, that denial is all Caroline has ever known. It is only when Caroline begins to question his story that the connection between father and daughter begins to crack.

Kübler-Ross touches on the relationship fracturing caused by denial when discussing the case of a twenty-eight-year-old mother of two – referred to only as "Mrs. K." According to Kübler-Ross, Mrs. K. was so deep in denial that she had

not only convinced herself that she was not, in fact, dying from cancer but also that she had been miraculously healed. Though Mrs. K. remained in the hospital and regularly followed her medical plan, her behavior was often erratic and seemed to border on lunatic. The harder Mrs. K. fought against the reality of her situation, the more "unhinged" she became, isolating her from both her family and the hospital staff. A similar descent into madness is experienced by Caroline.

As the novel progresses, Caroline receives more information about her parents and their marriage from reliable sources; information that shakes her foundational denial. Caroline becomes desperate to hold onto the lies her father lives by, and this desperate denial is accompanied by her descent into "hysteria," a key plot point in the novel. It is only after Caroline's denial is completely shattered that she can move on to a different stage – anger – which facilitates her confrontation with her father and her subsequent shattering of his own protective shell of denial.

With the trust between father and daughter broken, Caroline demands that her father face the truth: Miles Pearson's The Darkening Glass was not based on a lie. Anna Hood was not the dutiful, loving, idealized woman she was portrayed to be in both Samuel's memories and her Louisa counterpart. Unable to deter his daughter, Samuel's denial over his sainted wife is shattered, and he confesses to Caroline that he did know of the affair, having walked in on Miles and Anna mid-intercourse in the barn's hayloft. It is only then that Caroline understands the true purpose of her father's denial – his compulsive need to shield himself from his own flaws and fallibility. It was his way of having power over his own life and circumstances (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "Life Lessons"), however flawed that approach may be.

With the breaking of her inherited denial, Caroline has no need for subsequent stages because she has never truly been in mourning. Her grief was vicarious rather than personal. Because of this, Caroline can finally put her inherited grief to rest by taking ownership of her life and happiness in a place well outside the suffocating shadow of her father's continued denial and self-conceit.

Beloved: Justifiable Anger as a Roadblock to Emotional Recovery. Of Kübler-Ross's five stages of grief, anger is one of the most common because it is a natural and immediate reaction to injustice (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "On Grief"). More than just natural, however, anger is necessary. Anger informs someone that they have been hurt in an unacceptable way; it is when that anger is not processed or expressed that it becomes a burden and, in many ways, dangerous. According to Kübler-Ross and Kessler, "Problems arise when we either express anger

inappropriately by blowing up or suppress it so that it accumulates. We end up either giving a situation more of our anger than it deserves, or none of it" ("On Grief" 126).

In Beloved, by Toni Morrison, anger plays a key role in both the plot and characters. Taking place eighteen years after the protagonist, Sethe, escaped from the slave plantation of Sweet Home, the book revolves around the life Sethe and her daughter Denver have made for themselves in a home haunted by the ghost of the daughter Sethe murdered. The baby ghost expresses violence and hatred toward the family, going so far as to drive Sethe's sons into running away. Despite the violent actions of the baby ghost, Sethe does not condemn or chastise the baby ghost and, in some ways, defends her actions after the arrival of Paul D, who ultimately drives away the baby ghost through a violent display of his own anger.

Later, the baby ghost returns in physical form as Beloved – Sethe's murdered daughter – and with her, she brings memories of Sethe's slave past. The more Sethe remembers of what happened to her at Sweet Home, the more anger she feels, and the more anger she feels, the more anger she diverts and suppresses. Her diverted anger, in many ways, appears to manifest in Beloved, who begins to devour Sethe emotionally, mentally, and physically through the outward expressions of that anger.

Read metaphorically, Beloved is the manifestation of the justified anger Sethe, Paul D, and Baby Suggs have locked inside themselves for decades. Sethe's anger is two-fold: she is angry at Schoolteacher and his rapist nephews for ruining her beyond forgiveness, and she is angry at herself for murdering her own daughter – an action she believed necessary to save her from a fate worse than death. This can be seen in chapters Nineteen and Twenty, when Sethe justifies keeping her anger and bitterness inside because Beloved already knows what happened and why she did what she did: "Thank God I don't have to rememory or say a thing because you know it" (Morrison 226).

Paul D retains similar anger – anger at Schoolteacher for taking away his right to be a man, anger at the owner he was sold to, at the white men who imprisoned him and dehumanized him – but as the novel goes on, he discovers an anger he never knew. Mr. Garner treated his slaves as men, but as Paul D comes to realize "Garner called and announced them men – but only on Sweet Home, and by his leave…Suppose Garner woke up one morning and changed his mind? Took the word away. Would they have run then?" (Morrison 260). The more Paul D comes to understand the unacceptability of any type of slavery, even slavery under a

"good" master, the more anger he allows himself to feel. Tied in tightly with the anger of Sethe and Paul D is the anger of Baby Suggs – Sethe's mother-in-law who died eight years before the novel begins. Baby Suggs' memories are twined into the novel, and in none more prominently than chapters Fifteen – which features Baby Suggs' POV – and Nineteen, which show Baby Suggs after Beloved's murder from the point-of-view of Stamp Paid.

Having led a horrifying life, it would be wholly understandable for Baby Suggs to hold tightly to her anger and refuse to forgive, but after her son bought her freedom, she immediately went to work as an unordained minister to the black community in Cincinnati. She taught the freed men and women to laugh, dance, and cry and to love themselves "we flesh; flesh that weeps and laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in the grass. Love it. Love it hard" (Morrison 103). This ability to let go of the past and love oneself is an important step in healing anger caused by grief. "Once we forgive others, or ourselves, we are restored to a place of grace…In forgiveness we take back our power to live and flourish beyond an offending incident" (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "On Grief" 178-9).

Unfortunately, forgiveness is often mistaken as excusing or accepting bad behavior (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "On Grief" 178). This can be seen in Beloved when Baby Suggs withdraws after Sethe's murder of Beloved, locking herself into her room and waiting to die. Baby Suggs is unable to let go of the anger she feels against white people for always ruining anything good, against Sethe for murdering Beloved, and even against God – though she denies it – for seeming to lie about His grace. The anger Baby Suggs feels devolves into a depression (Kübler-Ross; Kübler-Ross and Kessler "Life Lessons" "On Grief") from which she is unable to extract herself. In a very real way, Baby Suggs' unexpressed anger poisoned her to death (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "Life Lessons").

This same self-poisoning can be seen near the end of the novel when, driven off by Denver and the townsfolk, Beloved leaves 124, abandoning the anger she had been expelling back on Sethe, who still does not know how to work through it. Sethe takes to the same bed in which Baby Suggs died to wait for her anger to eat her up from the inside. In the end, it is Paul D, who worked through his own anger and came to a place of peace, who draws Sethe out of her anger and into a sense of understanding that she is worth forgiving. A self-forgiveness that finally brings peace to 124 and, ultimately, forgetting (Morrison 123-4).

The Kissing Bug: Grieving Through Obsessive Bargaining. In On Death and Dying, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross describes bargaining as "an attempt to postpone" the

inevitability of death. However, in 2005, Kübler-Ross revisited her definitions of grief and its stages in her joint venture with David Kessler, On Grief and Grieving. Unlike On Death and Dying, On Grief and Grieving looks at the processing and metabolizing of grief through the eyes of those left behind rather than from the perspective of the dying.

Daisy Hernandez, in her memoir The Kissing Bug, engages heavily with the bargaining stage of grieving as defined by Kübler-Ross and Kessler ("On Grief"). In their section on Bargaining, they state "The 'if onlys' cause us to find fault with ourselves and what we 'think' we could have done differently" (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "On Grief" 17). This is seen in Hernandez when, after years of looking into kissing bugs and Chagas disease, she comes to an understanding of her own grief, of which she was previously in denial, as seen in her statement, "I convinced myself that my research into the kissing bug disease did not have much to do with Tía Dora" (Hernandez 70).

That sought-for understanding came through an exhaustive search and, ultimately, was inconclusive because, as Hernandez stated when asked about her hoped for resolution with her auntie by her students, "She died" (259). Because Tía Dora is already dead, Hernandez will never find full resolution and acceptance of the true reason for her grief: "When I cried, I was not grieving my auntie, but what I had hoped would happen between us one day" (258). With this realization, the intellectual journey Hernandez took part in takes on a different shade of understanding in the reader. Rather than a journey to better understand the disease that killed her aunt, Hernandez appears to have been on a journey to better understand her auntie. "It was work that felt necessary to me, work that connected me with Tía Dora and the immigrant community that had raised me…And it was work that kept my grief in its place" (Hernandez 250).

The idea of keeping grief in its place is a strong sign of bargaining; it is the idea that, as long as she continues working, Hernandez will not need to deal with or process her grief. This is especially appealing as it is a grief she does not understand. In her own words, Hernandez did not "know why I am grieving you. You were awful to me, and yet here I am crying in public" (70).

Grief is not an easy or predictable path. It is not even a "path" in that it is not linear with one stage leading to the next from Denial to Acceptance (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "On Grief"). Sometimes, as is the case with Hernandez in The Kissing Bug, some stages, such as anger and depression, do not factor much into the grieving process while others, like denial, are only touched on. Hernandez spends

the bulk of her grief in bargaining, wondering what she could have done differently to change her auntie from someone who "hated" her into someone who could love and accept her as she was (Hernandez 140). Something that Hernandez, at the very start of her book, had already described as "impossible" (4).

The Sound and the Fury: Suicidal Depression from Unresolved Grief. There is a common misconception that the five stages of loss established by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross are exclusive to grief over death, likely perpetuated from the title of her seminal work On Death and Dying. However, loss and grief are far broader concepts than death alone, something that is illustrated very well in Quinton's section in William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury.

From the onset of Quinton's section, his depression is glaring. He is obsessed with the running of the clock, dragged down by the weight time has on him and his inability to control the time he's lost. Specifically, Quinton is worn down by his inability to save his sister Caddy from an unwanted marriage – a marriage that took place two months before. To Quinton, it would have been better had Caddy died, which is why he both offers and attempts to kill her, and he grieves her as if she did.

Quinton's intense grief focuses around depression caused by his inability to rescue Caddy from the men whom he feels have ruined her. Not only had they ruined her body and reputation, as in the case with Dalton Ames, but they also ruined her chance at happiness, which Quinton seems to regard as an even worse crime against his sister. He demands Caddy tell him whether she loves Dalton Ames, the man who got her pregnant, or Herbert Head – with whom she ran into marriage – or any of the other men he does not know by name, and his depression grows when he learns she does love Dalton Ames but not Herbert Head. It grows further when he tries to avenge Caddy but finds himself severely lacking. His inability to rescue Caddy from Herbert Head – or at least avenge her of Dalton Ames – leads him to obsession over his uselessness. As previously stated, Quinton offers to kill Caddy to save her but is unable to follow through (Faulkner 100-1), which opens the way for Caddy to marry Herbert Head, with whom he knows she can never be happy.

Depression is a natural and necessary part of grieving (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "On Grief"), but as with any of the stages, when taken to extremes, depression becomes dangerous and life-threatening for the bereaved. At the start of his section, Quinton is so deep into his depression that he is past the point of making plans to relieve himself of the pain; his decision is already made. Suicidal depression leaves

a mark on those around the person feeling depressed, and Quinton is no exception. The intensity of his feelings is palpable to those he meets throughout the day from his roommate Shreve to the watchmaker at the jewelry store to the little girl he nicknames Sister, who follows him around and keeps an intense eye on him at every presented opportunity. They see the signs, but Quinton appears so reasonable and detached that no one reaches out further than propriety would allow. This is also due to the culture of the period in which Quinton lives, where things such as depression were considered a mental illness, which was a highly taboo subject amongst polite society.

Quinton would have known this – especially considering the autistic presentation of his younger brother Benji and the strife it has long caused his family – which is why he kept his feelings so tightly enclosed. His one chance at working through his depression before it became dangerous was when he spoke about his feelings to his father. Feelings that were brushed aside with little to no consideration. With nowhere else to turn, Quinton allows his time to run down by forcing his time to speed up. A decision that echoes throughout time to resonate with the niece he never knew, the sister who needed him, and the brother who would resent him for the rest of his life.

Parable of the Sower: Acceptance as a Defense Mechanism. Of the five stages of grief, acceptance is always considered the last step to be taken (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "On Grief"), that makes finding books in which acceptance pays a key role extremely difficult. The one glaring exception is Parable of the Sower by Octavia E. Butler. Lauren Olamina, the novel's viewpoint character, takes careful note of the dystopian world in which she lives and refuses to allow herself to see it for less. "I'm no good at denial and deception" (Butler 136) Lauren says upon the probable death of her father, and it shows in the pragmatic way she looks at death, life, and survival throughout the course of the novel.

Lauren's acceptance is founded primarily in the Earthseed religion she "discovers" through journaling, of which the primary tenet is that "God is Change" (Butler 116). By accepting this idea as fact, Lauren is able to use her acceptance of the inevitability of change to "Shape God" (Butler 125) and thereby shape her own destiny. The intensity of Lauren's acceptance of the world in which she lives, as well as her own belief that God is Change, grows through the course of the novel. At the beginning of the novel, Lauren discovers the "truth" about God, and from that moment comes progressively larger moments of acceptance. Her beliefs allow her to kill a wild dog despite her hyper empathy – a neurological disorder that forces

her to share feelings and emotions with the living things around her; predominantly other human beings. The ability to kill that wild dog led her to the understanding that she can, and will, kill another human if necessary and does, in fact, lead her to do just that; a mercy killing of a wounded enemy later in the novel.

However, before Lauren can reach the point of acceptance where survival, at all cost, is equal to her belief in God as Change, she has to pass through several other relevant points of acceptance. She has to accept that her family can be broken, that her community can be destroyed, that her father can be – and is – killed. That last point of acceptance was particularly difficult for Lauren as, until the day her father disappeared, she believed, on some level, that her father cannot die.

In a very real way, by accepting the realities of her surroundings and worsening society, Lauren practices a sort of pre-grieving process. Throughout the novel – primarily before any great tragedy occurs in her life, beginning with the death of her half-brother Keith – Lauren experiences moments of anger, denial, bargaining, and depression, but they are all short-lived moments that, through her writing and discovering of Earthseed, she works through before the emotions can cripple her.

Unfortunately, Lauren's pragmatic ability to control and direct her emotional responses toward acceptance sets her apart from the community at large. Even her father, who sees many of the same things as Lauren, is unable to grasp the entirety of her reasons and ideologies and so forbids her from carrying her concerns to the rest of the neighborhood. Lauren does her best to tone down her need to preach Earthseed to those around her due to not wanting to upset or disappoint her father, but that need never disappears.

After the neighborhood is destroyed, Lauren carries Earthseed with her and passes it along to her companions during their travels. Her preaching gives even further strength to her convictions and allows her to actively change even in the span of just a few weeks as she shifts from being wary and suspicious of everyone to becoming more and more open and accepting of others joining their group as a means of forming a community. A community that is able to band together against seeming impossible odds in order to survive using the idea that God is Change.

While on the surface, Lauren's near instant acceptance of change – no matter how devastating – can be seen as a good thing, there is a level of apathy in her acceptance that presents a dangerous opening. By allowing herself to accept everything, Lauren could potentially maneuver her followers into accepting the unacceptable as inevitable, allowing them to survive to "shape God" enough to create their own great change. By learning to temper her acceptance with active

grief, something she seems to forget to engage in more and more as the novel goes on, Lauren can create a strong community that can share one another's pain while still being able to accept that God is Change.

Discussion

The different depictions of grief in these narratives offer an intense focus on only one aspect of Kübler-Ross's theory and should not be taken as prescriptive or used in place of clinical therapy. Additionally, studies on grief management vary far more widely than the Kübler-Ross theory alone, and additional research should be done to allow for a broader application and understanding of how grief theories and grief-centered narratives can provide assistance to those who either do not recognize or are struggling to manage their personal grief. Recognizing shared grief in others – be they fictional or otherwise – could allow narrative consumers to make connections between the feelings expressed by the characters on the page and their own feelings of denial, bargaining, anger, depression, and acceptance. They can also see the dangers that can appear when those emotions are left unmetabolized or are allowed to deepen. It is possible that by seeing Quinton's determination to end his personal suffering, a reader may recognize in themselves the same dangerous spiral and seek help or, perhaps, by connecting with Daisy Hernandez and her desperate need to understand Chagas and the kissing bugs, they might better understand the suddenly altered behavior of a friend or family member.

However, because this paper is based entirely on theory, a practical study utilizing measures for narrative transportation, identification, and parasocial interaction would be imperative in verifying the validity of this research. Having volunteers read all or part of the works – or similar works with a broader commercial appeal – before filling out a measures questionnaire is the first level of solid research required along with controlling questions for determining types and levels of grief suffered by the volunteers. Due to potential IRB conflicts, specifically selecting volunteers based on grief and loss trauma may not be feasible, but a mixed representative sample will include individuals who have experienced grief in one form or another.

Conclusion

The way individuals grieve is intensely personal. Just as no two people grieve the same way, no one should feel entitled or experienced enough to dictate to another the form their grieving should take. However, there are models of behavior expressed in cultural and societal settings that can help someone suffering a loss to find peace more quickly, models that go well beyond the culturally accepted works of Kübler-Ross. The connections readers make with the characters and settings of popular and literary fiction can facilitate self-reflection and stimulate lasting prosocial belief and behavioral change (Baezconde-Garbanati et al.; Cho et al.; Dahlstrom; Nabi and Green) regarding grief and grieving. Additionally, experiencing the way parasocial others process grief in positive, negative, and transitory ways can help readers recognize in which category their personal grieving behavior falls. This recognition could then lead to the modeling of positive behavior (Singal and Rogers).

While NTT is still relatively new with much of the seminal literature written in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the relative novelty makes the exploration and even exploitation of the concept that much more intriguing. The immersive and identification factors of NTT are invaluable to any persuasive narrative due to their minimizing effect on counterarguments and ability to create an empathetic link between the consumer and characters (Green; Green and Jenkins; Igartua and Barrios). By reading about others' struggles with grief – whether biographical or fictional – sufferers of grief may come to better understand their own struggles (Shriver), even if the situation from which their grief originated is not in any way similar. NTT provides a gateway through which the reader can feel a sense of connection to grief models in narratives by way of situational empathy. By seeing themselves in a grief-affected character, the reader is also able to see similarities between that character and their own life and circumstances. If the empathetic connection is strong enough, significant behavioral changes – such as understanding what the five stages of grief look like and how they can manifest – can occur in the reader as a result.

Self-help books can provide a framework for understanding grief and the common stages through which the grieving pass, but they can also cause unintentional trauma when the expectations raised through reading these books are not met (Back; Corr; Stroebe et al.). Narratives, on the other hand, can create a space for exploring complex, complicated, and often dangerous emotions and the situations to which excessive indulgence of those emotions can lead (Singhal and Rogers). Additionally, when those narratives are deeply engaging, the information,

understanding, and ideas presented within the text can be transferred to the reader to affect positive behavioral changes toward not only how and why they grieve themselves but also how and why others' grief may not manifest in the ways society has come to expect (Baezconde-Garbanati et al.; Dahlstrom; Green et al.; Green and Jenkins; Iqartua and Barrios; Hoffner and Buchanan; Schreiner et al.).

Too often today, people are taught only how to mourn and not how to grieve (Kübler-Ross and Kessler "On Grief"). Mourning is done publicly, and it is expected for those close to the deceased to become upset physically, mentally, and emotionally. However, once the ritual is done and gone, outsiders expect grief to follow. As stated by Kübler-Ross and Kessler ("On Grief"), "We live in a new death-denying, grief-dismissing world…we don't die well and we don't grieve well anymore" (205). By connecting with grief narratives that depict both the positive and negative aspects of grief and grieving, consumers may be better prepared to face situations in their own lives that may evoke the same or similar emotions (Hoffner and Buchanan).

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Vaccinated Against Reality?: The Global Post-Truth, Anti-Vaccination Infodemic

KEITH MOSER

This essay explores the force of the global anti-vaccination movement in the post-pandemic, post-truth era from a transdisciplinary lens focusing on the ubiquity of fake news and conspiracy theories inextricably linked to COVID-19 denial and vaccine hesitancy in a disinformation dystopia that several theorists in the hard sciences and humanities have labeled an infodemic. As the World Health Organization director, who felt compelled to conceive the WHO Information Network for Pandemics in order "to stem the tide of misinformation that threatens to drown society" (Witze 22), recently declared, "We're not just fighting an epidemic, we're fighting an infodemic" (qtd. in Alam and Chu 101). In a disquieting anti-science, anti-intellectual climate in which millions of people around the world appear to have lost the "ability to identify and curate trustworthy, evidenced-based knowledge resources," the postmodern French philosopher Jean Baudrillard's concepts of hyperreality and integral reality offer a rich theoretical framework for investigating how absurd notions that find their "origins outside of concrete reality" have substituted themselves for the real in the collective imagination of a large segment of the population (Jordan and Haladyn 253).

Beginning with the publication of his first book Le Système des objets in 1968, the maverick thinker Baudrillard "prefigured a day when all information might become destabilized" (Coulter 6). Decades before most other French philosophers, with the notable exception of Michel Serres, recognized the seismic shift in late capitalism from a society revolving around the production of material goods to a post-industrial economy fueled by the incessant reproduction of digital images bearing little or no connection to actual reality, Baudrillard reflects upon the perils of "the epidemic" of simulation (Seduction 69). When people spend the vast majority of their time in front of television, computer, smartphone, or tablet screens,

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Baudrillard posits that there is "less and less relationship to an external reality" (Røyrvik and Brodersen 651). For all intents and purposes, Baudrillard theorizes that many individuals live in a parallel universe of simulation that is so utterly detached from reality that it takes on a life of its own. Owing to the nefarious effects of proliferation, a key concept that will be operationally defined in a later section of this article, Baudrillard contends that millions of people dwell within the confines of a symbolic realm in which they are constantly bombarded by artificial simulacra that are "beyond truth, beyond reality" because nothing stands against them (Forget Foucault 99). Even if Baudrillard's main point is somewhat overstated, as the final section of this essay concludes, "[t]he collapse of the information systems" to which Baudrillard refers is a serious problem with real-life consequences (The Transparency of Evil 193). In the post-pandemic world in which a steady stream of "alternative facts" emanating from various informational vectors including social media "can strongly influence people's behavior and alter the effectiveness of the countermeasures deployed by the government" (Cinelli 1), Baudrillard's hypothesis that many individuals no longer "know what is real anymore" is supported by a growing body of evidence (Penaloza and Price 127).

Even if Baudrillard takes it a step too far with his analysis of the "changing status of signs in industrial and post-industrial culture" in the United States and around the world, as evidenced by the efficacy of the implementation of critical media literacy training in schools that has started to bear fruit, this study demonstrates that the nonconventional philosopher's theories explain how we have arrived at a pivotal crossroads in contemporary global culture saturated in a cesspool of simulacra (Greaney 140). Compared to many other articles devoted to the infodemic that only scratch the surface of the origins of hyperreality[1], Baudrillard's thought provides a rich, theoretical framework that is missing from other studies that helps us to comprehend the emergence of the brave new world in which we live in the age of information more fully. It should also be noted that research within the medical humanities drawing on Baudrillard's understanding of the nature of reality and how it is constructed is scant. Furthermore, the end of this essay will examine how Baudrillard's astute observations related to the omnipresence of filtered reality paradoxically suggest a preliminary roadmap for resistance. Since we are in the early stages of a battle against disinformation that

[1] For instance, see Agrawal, Ehsen and Alam, and Paul, Mohanty, and Sengupta.

has already proven to have deadly ramifications in the fight against infectious diseases, as manifested by vaccine hesitancy that has claimed many lives in America and across the globe, we have no choice but to roll up our sleeves and contest the scourge of fake news obfuscating the real. Otherwise, the next time that we are faced with the monumental challenge of dealing with a new zoonotic virus, the semiotic contamination to which Baudrillard refers could be the death of us all.

Brief Historical Overview of the Anti-Vaccination Movement

A brief historical overview of the origins of the anti-vaccination movement reveals that the "epidemic of simulation" is not a novel phenomenon. In other words, disinformation has always been an obstacle standing in the way of medical advances. Nevertheless, scientists have now been forced to counterpoint a deluge of misleading and false claims about infectious diseases and vaccines like never before in the current era of (dis-) information. From a historical vantage point, Tara Haelle underscores how "the world's first known mandatory vaccination law, requiring the general population to receive the smallpox vaccine" in Massachusetts in 1809 encountered fierce resistance from "anti-vaccination groups (who) argued the compulsory vaccination violated personal liberty" (Haelle, my insertion). Julie Leask explains that there were also widespread and sometimes violent skirmishes between police and those "who protested against mandatory smallpox vaccination in nineteenth-century England" as well. "Despite mortality rates between 30% and 40% and the extreme contagiousness of the disease, it was common for anti-vaccinationists to claim that smallpox was only a minor threat to a population" in newspapers and pamphlets that were the purveyors of fake news during this time period before the digital revolution (Larsson). Fortunately, enough people would eventually take the vaccine in spite of these aggressive disinformation campaigns, thereby virtually eradicating this deadly disease from the face of the planet.

Due to the undeniable success of vaccines in the twentieth and twenty-first century with the dawn of modern medicine that "wiped out some diseases […] such as smallpox, rinderpest, and have nearly eradicated malaria and polio" from an objective standpoint, it would stand to reason that the anti-vaccination movement would be a marginal crusade supported by a tiny fraction of the populace (Hussain et al. 1). However, as Kristina Niedringhaus outlines in her aptly named article "Information Literacy in a Fake/False News World: Why Does it Matter and How Does it Spread," the contemporary roots of the anti-vaccination movement can be

traced back to Andrew Wakefield's 1998 article "linking the MMR vaccine with autism" (97). Although "The Lancet fully retracted the article in 2010 citing ethical violations and scientific misrepresentations, among other things," the damage had already been done in the disinformation echo chambers from which millions of people receive their so-called "news" (Niedringhaus 97). Wakefield's concerns were soundly disproven to the point of being entirely discredited, but his article would lay the foundation for the present anti-vaccination movement. Before an unprecedented public health crisis would shake the very foundation of human civilization to its core, the seeds of COVID-19 denial and vaccine hesitancy had already been sown. In a post-truth society "in which deception has become commonplace at all levels of contemporary life," the unfounded skepticism about the utility and safety of vaccines would soon reach epic proportions in the informational channels where millions of individuals are immersed in an alternative (hyper-) reality with the emergence of the novel coronavirus (Hopf et al. 1).

The Advent of Hyperreality, Integral Reality, and the Post-Truth Society in Baudrillard's Transdisciplinary Philosophy

Baudrillard's radical reworking of symbolic exchange offers invaluable insights related to how we have arrived at this critical juncture in contemporary consumer republics, an expression coined by the historian Lizabeth Cohen in A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America. According to Baudrillard, the incessant promulgation of images laden with purely symbolic meaning disseminated to us through a plethora of divergent screens has further eroded our already tenuous grasp on reality. Given that many people "have mistaken the image for the real thing" (Root 237), "we exist in a state of hyperreality, where little distinguishes the real and the imaginary" (Wright 171). Owing to the onslaught of commercial simulacra that endlessly flicker across our screens, Baudrillard maintains that our defenses are weak. Outside of the economic realm, Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality sheds light on why a substantial portion of the population seems to devour "void signs" without any reflection whatsoever about the veracity of the claims in question (Baudrillard, Amérique 26).[2] The "crisis of representation," or the increasing inability to distinguish between reality and contrived, sometimes even absurd, representations of it has permeated all facets of

[2] All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

quotidian life (Baudrillard, Forget Foucault 73). Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality provides a cogent explanation for understanding COVID-19 denial and vaccine hesitancy in general. In a post-truth climate in which passive consumers of the "nectar of simulation" (Cline) reside within a "web of stray signs" that are often disconnected from evidence and daily experience, an alternate form of (hyper-) reality eclipses the real (Baudrillard, Seduction 74). For people who live in an entirely different (hyper-) reality comprised of floating signifiers, it should come as no surprise that the most bizarre conspiracy theories imaginable about the appearance of COVID-19 and the effectiveness of vaccines somehow make sense.

After reaching the disconcerting conclusion that hyperreality is on the verge of substituting itself for the real completely in many of his earlier essays, Baudrillard announces the advent of what he terms "integral reality" in several later works. The unorthodox and provocative philosopher affirms that we are witnessing the utter "collapse […] of the real" unfold before our eyes (Baudrillard, Seduction 81). Baudrillard defines integral reality as the "final phase of the enterprise of simulation" (The Intelligence of Evil 34) "in a world from which all reference has disappeared" (Coulter 3). In simple terms, integral reality "involves […] the murder of the real," or the complete effacement of reality (Baudrillard, The Perfect Crime 25). Baudrillard hypothesizes that "the whole of the real" has now been forever compromised buried deep under an avalanche of insignificant signs (The Intelligence of Evil 18). With the birth of the digital revolution, Baudrillard asserts that there is no longer any escape from the "gigantic apparatus of simulation" that accosts us from all sides (The Intelligence of Evil 27). For Baudrillard, we are doomed to live in a meaningless, post-truth universe were all signifiers "have lost their referents entirely" in linguistic and philosophical terms (Penaloza and Price 13). Even if COVID-19 denial and the anti-vaccination movement lend credence to Baudrillard's central premise that the ubiquity of hyperreal simulations has hollowed out our ability to discern between reality and its screen-based representation, I will push back against the strong version of integral reality that eliminates the possibility of resisting the hegemony of the code at all. If no frame of reference or type of discourse existed for contesting the hostile takeover of reality through the skillful imposition of signs, it would be impossible to write these lines.

The Hegemonic Force of Proliferation in the Post-Truth Era

Nonetheless, the theoretical structure that Baudrillard methodically outlines for comprehending the aforementioned societal shift highlights how (dis-) information spreads so quickly in anti-science, anti-vaccination circles. Specifically, the philosopher's theory of proliferation explains why there is not enough resistance to far-fetched conspiracies, fake news, and deep fakes. In his seminal essay Seduction, Baudrillard offers the following definition of proliferation: "by giving you a little too much one takes away everything […] the more immersed one becomes in the accumulation of signs, and the more enclosed one becomes in the endless over-signification of a real that no longer exists" (Seduction 30-33, italics in original). When we are incessantly drowning in an ocean of seductive simulacra, the outside world or "things disappear through proliferation or contamination" (Baudrillard, The Transparency of Evil 4). As Douglas Kellner notes, "As simulations proliferate, they come to refer only to themselves: a carnival of mirrors reflecting images projected from other mirrors" (128). This Baudrillardian notion underscores how "the utter proliferation of images […] most directly mediated to us through screens" renders it more difficult "for people to construct meaning and to hold on to something real among all the fluid flashes of light images from their screens" (Root 239; 239). The concept of proliferation stipulates that there is "no exit" from the all-encompassing self-referential network that has replaced commonplace reality (Kellner 128). Baudrillard argues through his theory of proliferation that "the matrix of information and communication" has irrevocably severed all ties between the alienated postmodern subject and reality (Seduction 170).

The Nefarious Effects of Proliferation in Anti-Vaccination Echo Chambers

The force of proliferation elucidates how "misinformation spreads more rapidly than the disease itself" in the post-pandemic world (Alam and Chu 101). In essence, the "constant flow of a media and infodemic narrative […] does not stop at the sphere of the network and social media, but is actualized and becomes real" (Vincenti 196). In a testament to the power of proliferation that "is evidently the most striking characteristic" of the phenomenon of hyperreality (Baudrillard, La Société de Consommation 25), fake news about the coronavirus generates "its own horizon of meaning" (Vincenti 196). Presenting the results of a recent study dedicated to conspiracy theories that challenge the existence of COVID-19 and the usefulness of vaccines, Kristina Niedringhaus reveals, "True stories took six times

as long to reach 1, 500 people as false stories" in cyberspace (100). Moreover, the systematic exploration of the nefarious effects of profusion in anti-vaccination echo chambers conducted by Md Saiful Islam et al. identifies "2, 311 reports of rumors, stigma, and conspiracy theories in 25 languages from 87 countries" (1621). The present infodemic driven by profusion is a global pandemic that seems to know no bounds. "The anti-vaccine discourse on social media" is everywhere touching all corners of the globe, thus preventing scientists and other medical experts from formulating an even more robust response to the worst public health crisis since the dawn of modern medicine (Bhatta et al. 96).

For instance, there is a direct correlation between the propagation of conspiracy theories regarding the origins of COVID-19 and the refusal to take one of the many vaccines that are free and widely available. In the self-referential, hyperreal networks that Baudrillard cautioned us to be wary of for decades before his death in 2007, chimerical myths, stories, and downright fabrications about the origins of the novel coronavirus abound. A few of the many hyperreal metanarratives that continue to proliferate themselves include the unsubstantiated notion that COVID-19 is a bioweapon "that a scientist from China had engineered" (Islam et al. 1624), the idea that "Big Pharma" conceived the virus along with the cure in order to generate millions of dollars in revenue (Özdemir 158), the theory that "Fifth Generation Mobile Technology" is connected to the deadly outbreak (Manda 255), and the radical fundamentalist position that COVID-19 "was a punishment from God" (Manda 256) espoused by "63 percent of Americans" according to a recent poll (Manda 256). An empirical study conducted by Jad Melki et al. discovered that "those who trust information from clerics" regardless of the religion in question as opposed to scientists or other experts in the medical field were almost defenseless against fake news related to both the emergence of COVID-19 and the efficacy of vaccines (1).

This finding supports Baudrillard's scathing critique of "rampant Christian fundamentalism in the U.S." (Coulter 126). Baudrillard describes the United States as the hyperreal model to be emulated where almost all traces of reality have disappeared in "this universe rotten with wealth, puritanism, and misery" (Amérique 59). As demonstrated during the Trump administration, the so-called alt-right derives much of its strength from evangelicals who championed and endlessly disseminated every "shameful and pointless hoax" that Trump conceived

during his four years in office (Baudrillard, The Gulf War Did Not Take Place 72).[3] Baudrillard suggests that it is hardly surprising that people whose entire worldview is predicated upon magical thinking could be so easily duped by any purveyor of disinformation. It is in this sense in which Trump's republican nomination and subsequent presidential election in 2016 should be understood. Illustrating how Trump skillfully manipulated millions of voters with a flood of simulacra directly contradicted by evidence on a regular basis, Jacques Berlinerblau reveals, "[a]t first consideration, it would appear that Donald Trump would be the least likely Republican presidential candidate to win the votes of conservative White evangelicals. And yet the thrice married, crude-talking, religiously unsophisticated, reality show star who has been accused of sexual assault won 81% of the white evangelical vote in the 2016 presidential election" (18). After tapping into evangelical culture on an unprecedented level, Trump became a cult-like figure whose "denialist positions," promotion of fake cures like hydroxychloroquine and the injection of disinfectants, and evident xenophobic rhetoric about what he referred to on multiple occasions as "Kung Flu" were rarely questioned by his most ardent supporters who appeared to have lost all connection with concrete reality outside of pervasive anti-science, anti-knowledge echo chambers (Manda 261).

Trump was also partly responsible for the litany of conspiracy theories regarding masks in the United States. By poking fun at political opponents like Joe Biden for wearing a mask in public, Trump's lack of "consistent messaging on mask-wearing" mobilized millions of people against the urgency of masks and vaccines (Kirk qtd. in S. Smith). Trump's incoherent stance added fuel to the fire for those who have somehow convinced themselves "that masks are bad for our health" (Caulfield). Given that there is not a single documented case of a mask ever hurting anyone in any country, the fact that cyberspace is replete with fake news stories about the "danger of a face mask" supports Baudrillard's arguments about the withering away of reality (Goodman and Carmichael). From a philosophical angle, the medical doctor Tom Lawton's highly publicized twenty-two-mile run with a facemask was a counter-hegemonic effort designed to tear "a hole in our artificially protected universe" of simulation (Baudrillard, The Transparency of Evil 95). Dr. Lawton undermines the hyperreal claim all over the Web that masks

[3] For a more systematic exploration of how Trump harnessed the power of simulation like never before during his presidency that transcends the pragmatic limitations of this study, see my article entitled "'Alternative Facts' Trump Reality in American Presidential Politics?: A Baudrillardian Analysis of the Present Crisis of Simulation" in the *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*.

deprive individuals of oxygen rendering it more difficult to breathe in an attempt to "stop the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories around face coverings and to raise funds for charity" (Mahmood). People who inhabit a distorted disinformational bubble in which even a mask is a potential agent of death have also been some of the most vocal opponents of COVID-19 vaccines in hyperreal spaces where science or evidence have no place.

Some of the most prevalent and lethal fake news stories, which have persuaded millions of people to refuse vaccinations all throughout the world, have been inspired by a misunderstanding related to how vaccines work. Perhaps, the most common conspiracy theory about COVID-19 vaccines is that they alter the DNA of the subject. As Jack Goodman and Flora Carmichael highlight, "the fear that a vaccine will somehow change your DNA is one we've seen aired regularly on social media." Victoria Forster observes that this debunked myth has been around for decades in anti-vaccination circles with other vaccines. Explaining how the notion that vaccines modify your genetic code, thereby transforming the patient into a new hybrid creature, predates the appearance of COVID-19, Forster declares, "One of the most popular circulating myths at the moment is that mRNA vaccines will alter your DNA, with pseudoscientific content flooding social networks such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. The good news is that they simply can't do this […] where did this belief in DNA-changing vaccines come from." Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality once again provides a plausible explanation for what is initially a rather baffling phenomenon. When signs proliferate themselves to such an alarming extent, "there is nothing outside of their operational logics" (Abbinnett 69). In the ubiquitous matrix of (dis-) information where supporters of the anti-vaccination movement are "informed," "There is no truth of the object, and denotation is never more than the most beautiful of connotations […] The function(ality) of forms, of objects, becomes more incomprehensible, illegible, incalculable, every day" (Baudrillard, Le Système des objets 196, italics in original).

Not only do infodemics hamper the tireless efforts of the scientific community to save even more lives in the post-pandemic era, but hyperreal, disinformation echo chambers also offer a safe haven to racists and bigots who have created and propagated racially charged conspiracy theories about COVID-19. The most salient example is the unsettling rise in hate crimes directed against Asian communities on a global scale. The usage of racially motivated terminology in both traditional and online media in reference to the origins of COVID-19 (e.g. "Kung Flu," "Chinese Virus," "Wuhan Virus") has led to overt acts of discrimination and violence against

Asian people in multiple countries. As the journalist Sam Cabral reports, "from being spat on and verbally harassed to incidents of physical assault, there have been thousands of reported cases in recent months […] linked to rhetoric that blames Asian people for the spread of COVID-19." Owing to the seriousness of the anti-Asian sentiment in the United States, "the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act" became a law in May 2021 (Liu). Chelsea Gray and Kirstine Hansen recently uncovered that anti-Asian hate crimes have also risen drastically in London based on "data from the Metropolitan police for the whole of the Metropolitan area of London" (3). Many people of Asian descent no longer feel safe in communities where they have sometimes lived for generations because of this ludicrous form of prejudice that has spread like a cancer through social media. This anti-Asian discrimination and aggression is yet another example of how the deleterious effects of proliferation to which Baudrillard refers have supplanted the real resulting in "the viral contamination of things by image" (Wulf).

Counter-Hegemonic Forms of Resistance to the "Hostile Takeover of the Real"

As numerous critics including Gerry Coulter, Douglas Kellner, and Nissim Mannathukkaren have noted, Baudrillard is pessimistic about counter-hegemonic strategies for resisting the hostile takeover of the real. According to Baudrillard, "we should entertain no illusions about the effectiveness of any kind of rational intervention" (The Transparency of Evil 119-120), because "the murder of reality is a crime that alas cannot be solved […] precisely because all 'critical distance' […] has vanished into the play of signs" (Smith 79). In reference to Baudrillard's premise that resistance is now futile with the "perfect crime" already being committed (i.e. the utter implosion of reality), Nissim Mannathukkaren asserts, "The greatest difficulty with Baudrillard's analysis is that he does not propose a way out of the condition of 'hyperreality'" (428). With the inception of integral reality, Baudrillard posits that the postmodern subject is condemned to live in a world in which every sign is merely a "simulacrum without perspective" (Rubenstein 74). During the final stage of simulation, which we have now entered, Baudrillard ironically pines for the "happy days, when the simulacrum was still what it was, a game on the fringes of the real and its disappearance […] This heroic phase is now over" (The Intelligence of Evil 69). Despite the evident dark humor in this passage, Baudrillard's grim conclusions imply that it is pointless to try to

defend ourselves against the imposition of integral reality. The philosopher would be skeptical at best that it is still possible to poke a hole in the fabric of the hyperreal that he argues has now superseded reality in the aforementioned anti-vaccination echo chambers.

Even if Baudrillard overemphasizes his main point, the growing distrust of established knowledge and expertise amongst the general public is undoubtedly exacerbating the crisis of simulation. One of the many problems with disreputable sources that proliferate disinformation about COVID-19 and vaccines in general is that "alternative facts" grounded in hyperreality appear to be more trustworthy for a considerable segment of the population than evidenced-based theories linked to scientific discoveries. When many people devour conspiracy theories in front of their screen, these misrepresentations of reality seem to be more reliable than medical opinions from doctors and infectious diseases experts whose immense erudition is discounted or trivialized. As Kristina Niedringhaus outlines, "we've reached a point where academia, intellectual pursuits and knowledge work are viewed with suspicion in some communities. It is a way of asserting individual independence to reject the advice of experts, especially on public policy matters […] it is viewed by some as democratic that my 'opinion' matters just as much as anyone else's, even if I know nothing about the subject" (99). Niedringhaus's analysis of the erosion of confidence in scientific and intellectual pursuits connected to the digital age in which many individuals think that they can google the answer to everything without taking into account the reliability of the source explains the rage that is on full display at anti-vaccination protests around the world. Although the medical community reached a consensus very quickly about both the reality of COVID-19 and the efficacy of several life-saving vaccines, the larger problem is that actual knowledge is no longer recognized or valued at all.

In an anti-intellectual climate, which could be described as an epistemological crisis, it is difficult to refute Baudrillard's claim that it is at least harder to fight back against obscurantism and post-truth metanarratives. Tom Nichols's recent book The Death of Expertise: The Campaign Against Established Knowledge and Why it Matters systematically investigates the repercussions of living in a post-truth universe. In particular, Nichols "lays out the case for why we are turning away from the experts and professionals in our lives" (Pulliam 35). When we dwell within "our isolated 'information silos,'" "the advent of the Internet has made it easier than ever for every person with access to become their own 'expert' in all things" (Pulliam 35; 35). Nichols's notion of the death of expertise recalls

Baudrillard's concept of the "perfect crime." Furthermore, Nichols's theory helps us to understand why millions of people in the United States are convinced that they (or Trump) know more about infectious diseases than the renowned scientist Anthony Fauci who has devoted much of his life to rigorous scientific inquiry. Instead of relying on the advice of medical professionals, "people no longer respect the opinions of experts" (Yoo 4). Many internet users suffer from the delusion that they can become more knowledgeable than scientists by watching YouTube videos or processing disinformation from anti-vaccination echo chambers like QAnon, Breitbart, Reddit, or Gab.

Nichols's concept of the death of expertise is connected to the problem of confirmation bias. Based on the erroneous conviction that anyone can properly inform herself or himself in cyberspace and ignore real experts, "users online tend to acquire information adhering to their worldview" (Cinelli et al. 1). Confirmation bias explains why preposterous "news stories that are in line with existing narratives" (Grüner and Krüger 1) such as the "QAnon conspiracy about pedophilic Satan worshipers in politics and the media" are legitimized and accepted by a certain percentage of the population (Witze 23). Homo sapiens appear to have an innate predilection to only "search for information that supports their beliefs and ignore or distort data contradicting them" (Peters 1). Our species seems to be hardwired from a biological standpoint to take advantage of cognitive "shortcuts to help assess different choices" (Newkirk). When we are faced with too many decisions, or when we do not have enough time to process the flood of information in which we are encapsulated in the digital age, we often dismiss dissenting views and focus on the bits of (dis-) information corresponding to our preexisting beliefs. Given that "Time counts" and "this is not, therefore, thinking time, but reaction time," the digital revolution has resulted in an increasing dependence on these mental shortcuts (Baudrillard, The Consumer Society 103). The postmodern lifestyle has further problematized the possibility of liberating ourselves from the omnipresent realm of simulation.

Nevertheless, evidence suggests that the situation may not be quite as dire as Baudrillard theorizes. In fact, it could be argued that "the radical semiurgy developed by the provocative theorist of hyperreality reflects a rudimentary blueprint for the promotion of a more critical visual literacy" for contesting hyperreal, post-truth metanarratives (Moser, "The Philosophy of Jean Baudrillard" 85). If we truly lived in the "golden age of simulation" in which "the visible allegory of the cinematic form […] has taken over everything-social and political life, the

landscape, war, etc.," it would be impossible for the scientific community to reach those who are vaccine hesitant at all (The Intelligence of Evil 69; 124-125). It is also hard to accept Baudrillard's theory that "there is no critical distance from which to oppose" the hegemony of the code whatsoever at face value (Nechvatal). Even though many people obstinately cling to conspiracy theories and no amount of evidence or data seems to be able to convince them otherwise, some individuals have changed their mind. Deconstructing Baudrillard's nihilistic position regarding resistance, Jad Melki et al. discovered that "Echo chambers may be disrupted through critical media literacy training" (2). With the proper guidance, people can learn how to recognize "questionable versus reliable sources" (Cinelli et al. 5).

After underscoring the gravity of the infodemic, Alexandra Witze refuses to succumb to despair or apathy. Building upon research exploring critical media literacy training in schools around the world, Witze reveals that children, adolescents, and adults can develop strategies that make them less vulnerable to the devastating effects of hyperreal, echo chambers. Specifically, Witze emphasizes the importance of what researchers have labeled "prebunking" that could be defined as "the process of debunking lies, tactics, or sources before they strike" (Nolan and Kimball). Witze elucidates that prebunking is like "a vaccine that allows people to build up antibodies to bad information" (24). Since we desperately need to find a way to get through to those who have been effectively vaccinated against reality by a veritable deluge of post-truth signs in the post-pandemic era, the most important question is: "What percentage of the population needs to be vaccinated in order to have herd immunity against misinformation" (Witze 26). We may face an uphill battle, yet research devoted to prebunking demonstrates that our capacity for critical reflection has been greatly diminished in the postmodern world, but the Baudrillardian perfect crime has yet to be committed. Even if "the fight against internet-enabled disinformation will be Sisyphean in nature," the struggle is not in vain (Mecklin 109).

In addition to critical media literacy training as a counter-hegemonic device for challenging the proliferation of disinformation, many theorists and politicians affirm that social media platforms have a role to play in the regulation of hyperreal content. The contentious idea that companies like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter have a responsibility to combat the sometimes deadly effects of fake news and conspiracy theories has received a lot of traction in recent years. The key question is whether "social media companies must flatten the curve of misinformation" by removing or flagging content that can easily be proven to be false (Grüner and

Krüger 2). In a society in which people have the freedom of expression, governments across the world have been forced to address this thorny problem that has become a public health issue and a serious threat to democratic institutions themselves. After the January 6th coup d'état attempt by Trump supporters and QAnon followers, Sundar Pichai, Mark Zuckerberg, and Jack Dorsey were admonished by American politicians for hours as part of a televised hearing related to the lack of online regulations. During this public event, politicians discussed the possibility of modifying or overturning "the legislation that protects online platforms from liability for content posted by third parties" (Wakefield). "The issue of whether social media should be regarded as platforms that are not responsible for content or publishers, like traditional print publishers, that may be held liable for the content that they disseminate" lies at the heart of this debate (Hopf. et al 4). Regardless, world leaders have realized that the hyperreal indoctrination that occurs in various echo chambers cannot be swept under the rug. With the January 6th insurrection and the current infodemic that is preventing the medical community from potentially eradicating the COVID-19 virus, we may have reached "a tipping point for greater regulation" (Wakefield).

Even if the solution is to crack down on social media platforms that are the greatest traffickers of disinformation, these corporate titans will undoubtedly resist these counter-hegemonic initiatives because fake news is extremely lucrative. As Nancy Pelosi underscores at a virtual forum hosted by George Washington University, "Social media executives have failed to stop the spread of disinformation on their platforms […] Instead, they have sold out the public interest to pad their corporate profits. Their business model is to capture your time and attention, even if it's at the expense of the truth" (qtd. in Hopkins). Pelosi wonders if it is realistic to expect companies who derive immense economic benefits from the post-truth climate that they have helped to create to police themselves. Other international politicians have also observed that "[s]ocial media firms are hampered by their commercial interests when tackling fake news" (Geddie). In late-stage capitalism dedicated to the principle of unfettered growth and expansion at all costs, "experts say profit motive hinders battle against online disinformation" (Iovino).

For a transnational corporation that only cares about increasing profits, some researchers and politicians argue that legislation is the answer. Owing to the necessity of undermining hyperreal metanarratives in order to protect citizens from pandemics and to ensure the integrity of democratic institutions themselves, numerous countries have created "laws against the spread of false news" (Grüner

and Krüger 2). Yet, this counter-hegemonic response to infodemics is also fraught with peril. The problem is that the expression fake news can be appropriated to refer to factual "information that does not reflect one's own […] opinion" (Grüner and Krüger 2). The best case in point is how the notion of fake news became Trump's "favourite phrase" for criticizing evidenced-based theories that contradicted his hyperreal tweets and "alternative facts" (Woodward). The situation is even more dire in Hungary where "[c]ivil rights activists […] fear more censorship under the guise of corona pandemic measures," because of "a new law against the spread of fake news (that) does not clearly define false information" ("Defining Fake News in Hungary," my insertion). For a leader with autocratic tendencies, fake news legislation could be weaponized against political opponents. Hence, many theorists and politicians have expressed legitimate reservations about legal avenues for disrupting anti-science, anti-knowledge echo chambers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this Baudrillardian analysis of the global post-truth, anti-vaccination infodemic has exposed the dangers of living in a world in which millions of people have lost all connection to reality. Despite the fact that he may occasionally overstate his central thesis that concrete reality has been replaced by a self-referential network of stray signs in the collective imagination of millions of individuals, Baudrillard's transdisciplinary philosophy represents an invaluable theoretical framework for understanding how fake news and conspiracy theories proliferate themselves to such an extent. Whereas Baudrillard cynically posits that the only course of action is to wait for the hyperreal structure of consumer society to implode from the inside due to its excesses since "all systems create the conditions of their own demise," research related to critical visual literacy offers a glimmer of hope (Coulter 1). For all of the scientists and medical professionals who are on the front lines grappling with a pandemic and an infodemic, they should heroically continue to fight on both fronts. In global, post-industrial culture perfused with and defined by signs, millions of internet users are engulfed in a sea of enticing simulacra from which there appears to be no escape in their isolated echo chambers. Nonetheless, the perfect crime may be on the horizon, but it has yet to be fully actualized. Similar to how Dr. Rieux in Camus's La Peste stoically accepts his role as "the tireless fighter of the plague," it is up to the entire academic

community including humanists like myself to contest the death of expertise and the ubiquitous hijacking of the real by the simulators of hyperreality (Farr 279).

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Who Holds the Power: A Textual Analysis on the Cancellation of YouTube Star David Dobrik and the Vlog Squad

AISHA POWELL

The internet has created new pathways for the formation and implementation of social movements (Castells; Hill; Poell). Online or digital activism can be described as politically motivated actions on the internet aimed at achieving certain goals or changes for a group of people (McCaughey and Ayers). Elements of the internet – like its low cost, accessibility and ease of use – have created more egalitarian participation in social movements by removing traditional barriers of entry that marginalized groups had pre-internet age (Bennett and Segerberg; Vegh et al.). The use of online platforms, particularly social media, has been cited as a prominent tool used in successful modern social movements (Fileborn; Powell; Wood et al.). However, some have argued the internet is a means to cease activist efforts like the contemporary social movements to call out poor behavior that has been dubbed "cancel culture." The purpose of this study is to get a deeper understanding of the elements that make a successful 'cancelation' of someone in power, who enabled and profited from creating a culture that actively harmed members of marginalized groups. In particular, this study utilizes a textual analysis to investigate the elements that were instrumental in cancel culture's general goal of effectively creating behavioral and policy change towards an oppressor.

Cancel culture is a term coined by Black Twitter users to describe the mass outrage from the public towards a person or entity that has displayed disparaging actions or behaviors (Bromwich; Clark). It has been defined by writers and scholars in a variety of ways. Feminist scholar Lisa Nakamura describes it as a "cultural boycott" in which individuals agree to not "amplify, signal boost (or) give money to" entities and persons that have done controversial things to deprive them of their

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livelihood (Bromwich). David Arditi and Jennifer Miller argue that this type of activism involves the collection of "digital receipts," usually in the form of screenshots, to put offensive behavior in the public spotlight. Eve Ng explains it as a withdrawal of support of "viewership, social media follows, purchases of products endorsed by the person, etc." (623) from those who said or did something that is problematic. Lastly, writer Asam Ahmad explains it as "the tendency among progressives, radicals, activists, and community organizers to publicly name instances or patterns of oppressive behaviour and language use by others" (Ahmad), although the tactic has been used by conservatives as well (Gibson; Paulson). The scholars above have all articulated that the goals of cancel culture are a mixture of bringing awareness to behaviors, de-platforming individuals, and hopefully changing the actions that are deemed unjust. Put simply, cancel culture encompasses collective ostracization on online platforms from the public towards actions of questionable morality, with an end goal of ceasing the livelihood of the wrongdoers and causing some kind of behavioral or policy change. However, there is no consensus on the means for reaching this change.

Cancel culture has faced choice critiques over the years, with politicians, celebrities and companies decrying that it does not work (Bowden; Kurtzleben; Radsken). Former President Barack Obama describes cancel culture as:

> This sense that "the way of me making change is to be as judgmental as possible about other people and that's enough" […] That's not activism. That's not bringing about change. If all you're doing is casting stones, you're probably not going to get that far. That's easy to do. (Guardian News)

In addition, former President Donald Trump, who has participated in cancel culture himself, also conveyed negative connotations about it. At the 2020 Republican National Convention, he stated "The goal of cancel culture is to make decent Americans live in fear of being fired, expelled, shamed, humiliated and driven from society as we know it" (Santucci). In scholarly texts, cancel culture has also been examined as a faulty iteration of activism that focuses on online harassment rather than an instrument that facilitates actual change in individual or institutional behavior (Jusay et al.; Lee and Abidin; Tandoc et al.). Its biggest criticism follows Evgeny Morozov's idea of "slacktivism" or the act of an individual showing low-cost support for a cause without "helping the same cause in more productive ways" (Morozov). His idea has been heavily debated in academia and supported by empirical investigations within various fields including political science,

psychology and communications (Breuer and Farooq; Lane and Cin; Lee and Hsieh). On the opposing side, researchers have found public callouts of unfavorable behaviors to be effective in increasing the likelihood of future support and garnering offline action from the general public (Christensen, "Political," "Simply"; Kristofferson et al.; Lee and Hsieh; Štětka and Mazák).

Very few studies have looked at what makes a successful cancel culture event, and within those limited examinations, there lacks a clear consensus on the role that social media users play in cancelation. Some scholars have found that media consumers can directly impact administration and cause creative changes by using a combination of strategic tactics like starting online petitions; utilizing hashtags on Twitter to spark critical discourse; writing letters to content creators; calling on companies to drop advertising or sponsorships for offenders; and then ceasing consumption of content from problematic entities (Anderson-Lopez; Ng). In addition, on the individual level, scholars have found that people commenting on social media posts and directly calling for a person to be canceled, can also be effective in stopping their livelihood and getting behavioral changes (Velasco). Whereas other scholars found that during cancellation events, virality can obscure a movement's objective (Bouvoir); and that even when users speak about their grievances using a myriad of digital platforms, it does not guarantee a change in behavior from assailants with high social capital (Lawson), and particularly influencers with large followings. This present study aims to be one of the early explorations into identifying the roles that social media users play within newer digital social movements. Using the contemporary case of the cancelation of YouTuber David Dobrik, this study will evaluate the positions and actions that media users took throughout different stages of the event that helped to enact change.

Dobrik is a 26-year-old Slovakian-born immigrant who garnered a mass following on the video platform for creating short video skits with friends. He was the subject of an online cancellation after being the orchestrator of a "prank" that resulted in the sexual assault of a 20-year-old woman (Tenbarge). In 2014, Dobrik created the "Vlog Squad," an award-winning collective of YouTube creators, that regularly uploaded pranks on the video-sharing platform until 2021 (Kile; Mendez II Shorty Awards). On March 16, 2021, a Business Insider article titled "A woman featured on YouTube star David Dobrik's channel says she was raped by a Vlog Squad member in 2018 the night they filmed a video about group sex," was published and changed the trajectory of the Vlog Squad's success (Tenbarge).

Journalist Kat Tenbarge detailed the experience of the victim, who said she was given copious amounts of alcohol before she was sexually assaulted by Vlog Squad member Dominykas "Durte Dom" Zeglaitis (Tenbarge, "A Woman").

Less than a week after the article came out, eleven companies dropped their partnerships with Dobrik including the grocery delivery service Hello Fresh; shaving razor company Dollar Shave Club, General Mills, Door Dash, Facebook, HBO Max, Audible and EA Sports (Billington; Fitch; Perellie and Bradley; Wong). According to Social Blade, the viewership and subscriber count on Dobrik's YouTube also plummeted, with him losing 300,000 subscribers and a decrease of nearly 100 million video views before he posted an apology video on March 23 (Social Blade). A month later, Dobrik had lost nearly 500,000 subscribers and his overall viewership had decreased by two billion views (Social Blade). On March 25, 2021, YouTube announced that it had temporarily demonetized, or the process of ceasing all income made from YouTube videos by suspending advertisement placements (Thompson), on both Zeglaitis' and all three of Dobrik's YouTube channels citing that: "We have strict policies that prohibit sexual harassment on YouTube and take allegations of sexual assault very seriously. We have temporarily suspended monetization on David Dobrik and Durte Dom channels for violating our Creator Responsibility policy" (Tenbarge and Sonnemaker). This situation even garnered mainstream news and entertainment attention, with articles appearing in the New York Times, Washington Post and the BBC among other publications (Andrews; Criddle; Lorenz "David"). In early April 2021, Saturday Night Live portrayed a comedy skit depicting the heedlessness of the Vlog Squad-style videos and Dobrik's apology (Haasch; Jennings). The fashion of Dobrik's decline is consistent with that of the idea of being "canceled" – with his cancellation having a strong emphasis on stopping his streams of income, behavioral change and policy enforcement.

Dobrik is not the first YouTuber to be canceled (Dodgson; Lawson; Haylock) and certainly not the first person to be called out for creating a toxic environment that perpetuates rape culture. The stories that arose from the cancellation come after the height of the broader #MeToo movement, which had been instrumental in the takedown of several famous men who have abused their power to sexually assault and harass women, including Harvey Weinstein, R. Kelly, Matt Lauer, Mario Batali and more (Carlsen et al.; Glamour). However, Dobrik is among the few popular YouTubers to be demonetized for defamatory actions, joining Logan Paul, who was demonized indefinitely in 2018 after uploading a video of a dead body when

visiting a suicide forest in Japan (Jarvey). Dobrik is also among the few YouTubers whose cancellation made it to mainstream news outside of YouTube communities, joining YouTubers like Jeffree Star and James Charles, who have been in the press for instances of racism and pedophilia (Godwin; Lorenz "The Problem"; Sanfronova). Dobrik is also one of few YouTubers to be dropped from every single endorsement and partnership they had, including him having to step down from a company he co-founded, the disposable camera company Dispo, amongst outcries from the public (Porter). The social environment had not only caused a social rejection of Dobrik but also caused big companies and organizations to dissolve long-standing relationships with the profitable creator. As cancel culture becomes a defining method of collective action in modern times, inquiry into how it functions or disrupts our notions of society is necessary to understand the present and future of American culture.

Related Work

Social Media and Power. Social media has unequivocally changed the communication environment. Prior to the internet, the primary means for the mass public to get information was through newspaper and television network programming (Eldridge; Graber; Mondak; Park; Raymond), with companies and organizations deciding the content and disseminating it from a top-down approach. The disruption caused by social media has not only decentralized where the public gets information from (Chan; Kelly; Lăzăroiu; Mitchell et al.) but also enabled the masses to add commentary and share their own perspectives on a litany of public platforms (Carlson; Hermida et al.; Kalsnes and Larsson). A developing area of communication scholarship has looked at the emancipatory potential of social media for disadvantaged groups.

In an analysis of rape justice, Powell asserts that communication technology may be a viable alternative for victims of sexual assault in their justice-seeking measures. In the study, they found that when victims share stories of sexual violence on social media, perpetrators may receive widespread social repercussions that would not happen if victims just went through the traditional criminal justice system (Powell). In addition, for victims who do not and cannot go to the police, the online sphere may help them get "informal justice" (Powell 573). The ideas surrounding online measures to empower sexual assault victims and combat rape culture has been studied by other scholars (Fileborn; Wood et al.) and successfully

shifted the power paradigm in the highly successful #MeToo movement (Swanson and Szymanski).

In a study on the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria, Asogawa looked at how WhatsApp and Twitter were used to radicalize Nigerian youth to want change. They found that 95% of their sample of Kogi State University students' awareness about the election was from social media, and the commentary they saw about each candidate in relation to social change motivated them to vote (Asogwah). Students specifically stated that they used social media because it was cheaper and more accessible than traditional media (Asogwah). Wilberforce Dzisah corroborated the influence of social media and youth political participation in an analysis of two Ghanaian elections. They concluded that access to social media promoted democratic discourse and subsequently equipped the youth to join in civic conversations (Dzisah). Several scholars have shown that social media has leveled the playing field for previously marginalized groups to participate in public discourse and activate social change, in ways that they could not before due to a lack of resources (Bakker and de Vreese; Enjolras et al.; Valenzuela et al.).

The literature shows that the diffusion of public opinion on social media can redefine power structures in modern society, where users are more emboldened to participate in the change they want to see. This study will further this premise, as it investigates the role social media users played in a case revolving around sexual violence and Dobrik's cancellation.

Social Media and the Façade of Power. Through a critical approach, scholars have also examined how social media has exacerbated existing disparities and created a falsehood of digital democracy. The core of this research is ideas surrounding social determinism, or that society itself is ultimately the governing force that shapes cultural values, social structures, and technologies like social media (Mackenzie and Wajcman; Thompson). From this standpoint, several questions have been raised about the effect of social media and who is in power.

In an examination of social media use in authoritarian regimes, Tucker et al. found that social media platforms reflect the power dynamics of a given society. In their review, previously excluded groups had new access to political discussions via social media, but restrictive governments also used social media as a political tool for their own goals that in some ways repressed public conversations (Tucker et al.). Loader and Mercea found similar findings in their study on social media's disruptive potential. They concluded that social media could make for a more participatory environment, but traditional interests of larger communicative powers

that have an invested interest in private social media companies can suppress the public at a whim (Loader and Mercea). In an investigation on online political participation amongst disenfranchised youth, a study contended that social media comes with a caveat of repressive tactics, like censorship and surveillance, which ultimately inhibit users from seizing the full potential of their civic action (Lee). In addition, it was found that social media can reflect the already existing socioeconomic bias in a society because it only alleviates environmental barriers while systematic institutional blockages still exist (Weber et al.).

In a deep dive into social media and society, Fuchs shares several shortcomings of social media including the confines of its participatory culture that are restricted by private ownership; the effects of the political economy on platforms that exploit everyday users; and the overall functions of social media that operate under corporate control. He argues that social media can give an illusion to the public that they are seen and heard but ultimately it works for corporate interest (Fuchs). While social media instigated large discussions about Dobrik, it does not mean that users were the instrumental force in his cancellation. A critical lens has been applied for this study to identify interrogate and define the power dynamics of the cancelation.

Social Media, Social Movements and Civic Engagement. One of the ways that users of social media attempt to influence the public is through the means of online activism. Researchers have often had mixed conclusions when examining the ways that online activism functions.

Kevin Lewis, Kurt Gray, and Jens Meierhenrich examined the Save Darfur campaign on Facebook and its impact on creating social awareness. The Save Darfur Coalition was a human rights advocacy group, whose goal was to raise awareness and mobilize global support for human rights in the Darfur region in Sudan (Lynch). At the height of the organization's efforts, it had 1.1 million members on its Facebook page, who raised more than $90,000 (Lewis, Gray, and Meierhenrich). However, the researchers found when they removed the top 1% of the most active members – and their recruits and donations – 62.84% of the membership and 46.54% of the donations disappeared. In addition, most of the members who did donate, did so one time and failed to recruit more people (Lewis, Gray, and Meierhenrich). Although it spread awareness, the campaign failed to mobilize the masses or create substantive donations.

Kony 2012 was an American-based documentary aimed at getting political intervention from world powers to promote the detainment and arrest of fugitive Ugandan guerilla war criminal Joseph Kony (Vidal et al.). Melissa Janoske,

Rowena Briones, and Stephanie Madden looked at the success and weaknesses of the Kony 2012 campaign by analyzing 500 tweets, 170 Facebook comments, 180 blog posts and 100 YouTube video responses. They found that in general, social media users felt moved to do something after watching the documentary, but they seldom did. They concluded that the initial hype surrounding the campaign did not lead to sustainable action or investment from consumers (Janoske et al.). In a separate study (Madden et al.), the researchers also found that some of the negative emotions from the documentary were misdirected at the organizations trying to help, with people questioning their reputation and legitimacy, rather than collective action against the real problem (Madden et al.). Another study on Kony 2012, also found that despite the virality of the documentary, which had more than 100 million views, neither the public nor global organizations took substantial action toward a solution (Glenn).

On the other hand, research shows that initial exposure through online activism can increase political action in some cases. In a study of slacktivism and civic action, Yu-Hao Lee and Gary Hseih investigated if initial low-cost low-risk behavior could lead to subsequent actions. They found that individuals who sign an online petition were more likely to donate money to a related charity by roughly 20%. (Lee and Hseih). In a 2011 online survey by Georgetown University's Center for Social Impact Communication and Ogilvy Public Relations, researchers discovered empirical evidence from 2,000 Americans, that revealed that social media users who partake in slacktivist behaviors online are twice as likely to volunteer than those who do not. Slacktivists were also more likely to recruit others to sign a petition, contact political representatives and request others within their circles to donate (Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide and The Center for Social Impact Communication at Georgetown University). Hao Peng, Ceren Budak, and Daniel M. Romero also found that online measures, like social media, can influence an individual to participate in an in-person movement. In their examination of the Black Lives Matter Movement, they found that social media users are more likely to join an on-the-ground event and re-participate than those who don't use social media (Peng et al.).

The collective actions against David Dobrik from the public could align with either position from scholars. This examination will focus on social media users' direct calls to action and involvement with the loss of corporate support for Dobrik as a result of the news article. This study aims to answer these two research questions: What reactions and calls to action did social media users have to news

stories about David Dobrik's involvement in the sexual assault? What role did social media users have during the cancelation of David Dobrik?

Methodology

To understand the involvement of social media users in David Dobrik's cancellation, a textual analysis was applied to comments on social media. A textual analysis is a qualitative analytical procedure designed to analyze how language, symbols, pictures and patterns within the text, are used to convey messages about society (Burrows; McKee). With an emphasis on how texts usually represent conflicts, congruences and friction between an individual and the larger social structures, textual analyses is a systemic way to analyze the literal and hidden meaning in messaging (Byrne; Fairclough and Fairclough). Textual analysis has been used to understand social media comments related to domestic and sexual violence (Adekoya et al.; Al-Zaman; Kosloski et al.), sexism in the media (Sensales et al.) and callouts of poor behavior (Pennington).

For this study, Twitter was chosen as the social media platform of focus because it allows for widespread conversation across different demographics (Brock); facilitates dialogue of trending or current topics (Madani et al.; Zubiaga et al.); and allows everyday users to interact with media creators and brands (Einwiller and Steilen; Mamic and Almaraz). After the article was published, the term "David Dobrik" was trending on Twitter, with over 200,000 tweets from users speaking about Dobrik's facilitation and complacency during the assault, which was still posted on his YouTube (B). Co-currently the term "Vlog Squad" and "Durte Dom," Zeglaitis' pseudonym, was also trending with users highlighting his history of sexual assault accusations that date back to 2017 (Bergman), and overall misogynistic and inappropriate behaviors (Asarch) – all of which had been documented in various Vlog Squad videos. Twitter commentary has also been used in previous studies about cancel culture (Anderson et al.; Lawson).

To understand any change in the messaging throughout the different stages of Dobrik's cancellation, Twitter commentary on posts from three different newspaper articles that were published at different times of the cancellation was analyzed. Three prominent news publications were chosen, as they represent entities that have reputable journalistic integrity and yield a large readership. The first article chosen was the initial article about the victim's story, which was posted by *Business Insider* on March 16, 2021. This article was posted on Twitter by the author, Kat Tenbarge,

on the same date and yielded 512 comments. The next article chosen was a *New York Times* article titled "David Dobrik, Losing Sponsors and Fans, Steps Down from App He Co-founded," which was posted on March 20, 2021. This article was written on March 19, 2021, and posted on the *New York Times*' main Twitter page and yielded 38 comments. The last article chosen was another *Business Insider* article, titled "YouTube is temporarily demonetizing David Dobrik's channels following a rape allegation against his former Vlog Squad cohort Dom Durte," which was published on March 26, 2021. This article was posted by the main *Business Insider* Twitter account, on the same day it was posted, and yielded 65 comments. All the comments from each Twitter post were manually collected and analyzed.

A thematic analysis was then applied to the data to draw out patterns and larger themes. Thematic analysis is commonly used in conjunction with qualitative studies, to effectively code and organize the data in ways to identify topics and ideas that arise from the data (Braun and Clarke). The major themes of Twitter users' commentary per stage of cancellation were then organized chronologically in order to answer the research questions.

Findings

Within this investigation period, 615 Twitter comments were captured and analyzed. Nearly 90% of Twitter users' reactions came from the first *Business Insider* article, with a sharp decline during the middle of the cancellation and a slight peak towards the end. The cancellation produced six distinct themes, with the most variety of reactions happening at the beginning of the cancelation, which are discussed below (see Table 1).

The Beginning: Not Shock, Happiness, But It's Behind a Paywall? Twitter users had extremely polarizing reactions to the first news article, which encapsulated the themes of skepticism, predictability, and joy. Most of the Twitter's discussion on Tenbarge's post was a backlash towards the article. This backlash seemed to be centered on anger toward the paywall that popped up before one could read the article (see Table 1, quotation 1-6). Some users who were upset about the paywall felt that it stopped the public from becoming more aware of the occurrence, with one user stating "no offense, and this may not be directly your doing, but people shouldn't have to pay for media that involves r*pe allegations. i feel that it's quite wrong and abhorrent to do so." A good portion of commenters used the existence

of the paywall to discredit the victim's story or argue that Tenbarge was trying to profit off of sexual violence (see table 1, quotations 7-9). In response to a user requesting for Tenbarge to give them access to the story, another user commented "It seems like everyone wants to make money off the victim so....really sad."

Other forms of backlash included straight denial of the story like a user stating, "the fakest accusations I have ever seen in my entire life," and other users accusing the victim of being an attention seeker, like this user stating "That was so long ago. Why would she just start talking about this now? I think shes trying to catch attention. But remember it's only my opinion." It is important to note that within the article, Tenbarge not only details the instance from 2020 but also reviews previous accusations of sexual harassment or assault by Zeglaitis that Dobrik was made aware of. Some of these accusers had shared their own stories publicly, via YouTube videos. While others had shared it privately, and directly contacted Dobrik or Zeglaitis about the wrongdoing to no avail (Tenbarge).

The second most frequented commentary was unsurprised responses (see table 1, quotations 10-11). These users were familiar with the Vlog Squad's content and knew something of this nature was going to come out eventually, as this comment states:

> this is 100% not a surprise. their whole thing about dom in the vlogs is that he's essentially a sexual predator. so when it turns out to actually be true suddenly they're retracting the whole thing? it makes no sense. they told on themselves before this allegation was even made.

In some cases, the users recollected previous apprehension and uncomfortable feelings watching the content and felt that the Vlog Squad trivialized the severity for comedic sake (see Table 1, quotations 12-13). Famously, former Vlog Squad member Gabby Hanna – who revealed that she suffers from bipolar disorder (Smith) – said that she endured extreme bullying from the group and had to leave to protect her mental health (Theil and Cheong). Some of the things she cited as the reason for her 2017 departure include Dobrik constantly body shaming her and criticizing her appearance by frequently calling her "ugly" and unattractive (Bernardini; Theil and Cheong). Social media users who expected public allegations of the Vlog Squad harming people to be made, however, rarely made any direct calls for any reprimands or consequences towards Dobrik.

Date	Theme	Topic	Illustrative Quote
March 16 (Start of Cancellation)	Skepticism because of paywall	Not paying for the article	*(1) "Not paying a dollar homie"* *(2) "Why do we have to pay for this"* *(3) "Ok but the fact that we have to pay to read this is kinda shitty"* *(4) "Why is this behind a paywall?"* *(5) "Why pay wall it though? I don't see how that will help the victim at all"* *(6) "Trigger Warning: you have to subscribe to read the article."*
		Accusations of exploitive journalism	(7) *"Insider has always been a disgusting company. I'm glad this girls story was put out there, BUT they didnt do this to help her. 100% for money, obviously. I hope the girl gets justice but this reporter and her article are a joke. 'Well golly gee sir i just do my job'. what a cunt"* (8) *"Trying to do good by helping the girls have a voice but we have to pay to hear that voice. Disgusting."* (9) *"Did you put this behind a paywall to get money off of a girl's sexual assault story?!? I am so glad I got a free version"*
		Watched Dobrik's channel and saw Durte Dom's behavior	(10) "*As a former fan of many years, I'm not surprised. David and his team should be held accountable. David should've done a lot of things by now, and addressing/correcting/apologizing doesn't cover it."* (11)*"when im watching david's vlog, im skipping every part Durte Dom is in because of how he actes. And ngl i always thought that this (being accused of rape) was gonna happen to him one day."* (12) *"Anyone who's watched the vlog from the beginning knows about all of this shit. For me I saw many things that were happening as fucked up but since there was such positive reactions to the videos and millions upon millions of views I began to be desensitized to a lot of it."*
	Inkling that this would happen	Felt uncomfortable watching the content before	(13) "*Yo I remember this vlog actually, but David just keeps laughing and all his friends laughing so I thought its just something funny"* (14*) "Thank you for magnifying this young lady's voice and getting her story out there where she can be heard."* (15*) "Your reporting is excellent"* (16) "*Thank god. Someone finally explaining what this is about."* (17) "*Good job with this one! They deserved to be outted"*
	Happiness	The story has outed David	(18) *"This story really breaks my heart. Full support to every victim"* (19) *"Thank you for working so hard on this story. I'm so glad she finally got to tell it."*
		Support for victims	(20*) "Thank you for giving victims of SA a platform to be heard and to have justice for the voiceless. You are doing great work for uncovering these criminal acts people do."* (21) *"Thank you so much Kat for reporting this. We believe you Hannah and we stand with you."*
March 20	Unaware of the situation	Does not know David Dobrik	(22) *Who?* (23) *I'm sorry who the fuck? A nobody until this boost you just gave him.* (24) *This that goofy dude y'all kept reposting to get a free Tesla?* (25) *"There is nothing comedic about his content. The bullying, the racist jokes, the anti semitic jokes, the sexual assault en the borderline casting coach porn... yes let's call it fast paced comedy"* (26) *"Good. This man facilitated a rape. He profited off of a woman's assault and trauma. Also has a long history of racist and sexist content and former members of this group have accused him of bullying and a toxic environment."*
	Dobrik is troublesome	Power imbalance and history of issues	(27) *"I hope more attention goes to power imbalance issues and assaults in the future."*
		Cancel David	(28) "*Cancel him"*

			(29) "*The Andrew Cuomo of Youtube? Can we just cancel everyone and get this over with?*"
March 25	Unsatisfied reactions	YouTube needs to do more	(30) *That really doesn't mean anything. Didn't they say they were doing the same to Shane during his scandal. It's just a public statement they make while the dust settles and they'll monitize him again.*" (31) Temporarily, huh? Youtube making those hard decisions against the sexual predators who earn them their money." (32) *"it should be permanent."* (33) "*it should be permanently, wtf youtube* *Only temporary?"* (34*) Youtube bears more responsibility than this. They have encouraged this type of content for years.* (35) "*What does this really do long term, though?"* (36) "*Great to see some action. But temporarily?* (37) "*Come on @YouTube knows that they won't be uploading anyway for a while. So am i to assume that by the time david is back uploading he has his montization back? Pretty disappointing."* *(38) "Aka we're gonna pull ads then when this dies down we're gonna put them back while no one notices."*

Table 1. Themes Identified and Exemplary Quotes

The last reaction was happiness towards Dobrik being "exposed" (see Table 1, quotations 18-21). These tweets ranged from general "thank yous" to the author, or compliments to the reporting like this comment: "gottem good. Thank god for journalism, the only way to bring the big ones down." These users were also more likely to add supportive messages directly to the victim, like this: "I believe you Hannah. Thank you for coming forward I know it wasn't an easy decision" (see Table 1, quotations 18-21). These joyous and happy tweets however were less frequent than other commentaries and were more likely to be short responses.

The Middle: Cancel Dobrik, But Who Is He Again? Four days after the Business Insider article was posted, the New York Times wrote about the situation, reviewing the details of the sexual assault allegations and actions companies took in response. It is important to note that at this time, more women came out about their own experiences of being assaulted or harassed by Zeglaitis and posted stories on Twitter and TikTok (Mehta), in the #MeToo movement style – which is marked by sexual assault survivors created online threads or videos to share their story on public platforms to bring awareness (Gill and Rahman-Jones). Commentary on this tweet was extremely sparse, however, almost all the reactions were related to two themes: people who were unaware of who Dobrik was and people who were happy something was being done.

Several social media users had no idea who Dobrik was and expressed confusion over why the New York Times wrote a story about him (see Table 1, quotations 22-24). Some users even accused the newspaper of giving Dobrik a

"boost" in publicity by writing about him in the first place (see Table 1, quotation 23). One commenter even mentioned that the *New York Times* had a paywall as well and that would stir away people from reading the otherwise "shitdrivel" story about someone no one knows.

On the other end, Twitter users expressed happiness about the revelations surrounding Dobrik but in more substantive ways than earlier in Dobrik's cancellation (see Table 1 quotations 25-26). These users historicized Dobrik's deprecating behavior, how he profited from the situation and how the current conversation can illuminate how power imbalances can silence sexual assault victims (see Table 1 quotations 27). Dobrik was and had been an extremely popular YouTuber when the allegations came out. Dobrik's YouTube, simply named "David Dobrik," was the channel where all the Vlog Squad's videos were posted, amassing nearly 19 million subscribers and more than 8.2 billion cumulative views on 471 videos as in 2021 (Social Blade). Not only was Dobrik the figurehead for the Vlog Squad, but according to Dobrik himself he also managed and organized the content, wrote out scripts for their videos, told members to solicit guests, took part in editing every video, and uploaded them on YouTube (*Entertainment Tonight*). Dobrik also capitalized immensely from the YouTube channel, receiving major brand endorsements from companies, even proclaiming that he makes $275,000 a month from YouTube ads alone (*Men's Health*; Monton). In 2020, he ranked at number nine on the Forbes list of top-earning YouTubers, earning $15.5 million (Berg).

Other reactions were individuals correcting the language used by the New York Times, like this one "It's not just sexual assault allegations, it's straight-up rape." Several users explicitly stated that David needed to be "canceled" (see Table 1, quotations 28-29). Responses in this stage also did not reflect any calls to action but showed that there was an increase in awareness regarding the issue.

The End: Unsatisfied. The end of Dobrik's cancellation marked a new string of reactions from Twitter users that were all centered on the same sentiment: people were not happy with YouTube's decision to temporarily demonetize Dobrik.

Twitter users were mostly disappointed in the actions YouTube took because they claimed it was not enough (see Table 1 quotations 30-33). Users with these sentiments had simple statements like "Make it permanent*"* and more elaborate responses like:

> He profited off of organizing, filming and then publishing a r*pe on THEIR PLATFORM!!!! Their no tolerance for sexual harassment or assault

> obviously isn't that strict. I get more and more pissed off about this whole situation everyday. Remove his channel. This is disgusting.

Commenters also used this moment to speak about YouTube's history of allowing and promoting demeaning content – that is racist, xenophobic, sexist and transphobic (Bryant; Lewis, Marwick and Partin) – on their platform (see Table 1, quotation 34). Several users also questioned the long-term effects of YouTube's decision, citing that the temporary demonetization will go away and Dobrik will come back seemingly unscathed and make more content (see Table 1 quotations 35-38). One Dobrik sympathizer felt that YouTube's actions were misdirected and done without due process:

> Also YouTube taking sides on stuff they don't even know it true is f'd up he worked his ass off for his channel doesn't matter if what they accuse him or not that's his private business not YouTube's business to demonetize.

On the other hand, a small number of users were satisfied with YouTube's decision, commenting things like "good," "yes," and "finally." Commentary on Twitter at the end of Dobrik's cancelation was extremely sparse, in comparison to the first day, and lacked a diversity of thought about the actions taken against Dobrik.

Discussion

David Dobrik's cancellation represents the power of the internet in helping social movements, like that of cancel culture, triumph in creating change. However, this analysis of Twitter commenters showed that users' involvement in creating the change was minimal. In fact, if Dobrik's cancellation was contingent on only social media users, there would be no consequences because the commentary lacked a consensus on whether people saw his involvement as problematic and an equitable punishment for those who did. Discussion on Twitter showed that although public awareness was growing, it did not mean everyone was on the same page about canceling Dobrik.

The first article yielded the most contentious reactions from Twitter users, who were more focused on the presentation of the article than the actual content. Most users were perplexed about paying to get access to the article, although the author explained that paywalls support investigative journalistic pieces that uncover wrongdoings. Users' resentment towards paying for the article, turned into accusations against the authenticity and truth of the content. As seen in previous movements, some social media users' increased awareness became misdirected

anger towards the author(s) and the victim (Madden et al.). This reaction from users can cause further transgressions on the victim because doubt was cast on the story, even if the user could not read it; and people discredited the publications, calling them "money-hungry" instead of entities that could do social justice work. In the previous literature, the misdirected anger of the masses towards entities exposing an issue was related to the overall ineffectiveness of civic engagement (Madden et al.). A similar result can be concluded from the current movement.

In the realm of awareness, many social media users were able to confirm that their initial uncomfortable feelings towards Dobrik's content were valid. This evoked self-reflexivity in Twitter users who expressed their own complacency in watching Vlog Squad videos with troublesome plots. However, a large portion of users did not know who Dobrik was or care about the situation. This could be the result of *New York Times* general readers not being privy to YouTube creatives drama, and the articles not linking Dobrik's situation to the greater conversations about rape culture. In other cancel culture studies, researchers have asserted that without a linkage to a more mainstream movement, injustices that happen in niche communities can fail to get widespread support from the masses (Lawson).

Lastly, the lack of calls for action was a key theme in social media users' responses. Throughout the cancellation, users mostly reflected on their personal feelings towards Dobrik, what they understood about the situation and their interest in the story unfolding. However, little retort was given to calling for reform or organized requests to companies to stop working with Dobrik. In some of the previous studies on cancel culture, social media users' direct calls to brands, companies, and corporations were instrumental in the plight of the cancellation (Anderson et al.; Velasco). For Dobrik, users' reactions seemed stagnant and remained online, with no indication that any offline civic action occurred. On the last day of the event, users were the most vocal about wanting more consequences for Dobrik from YouTube, after the slew of corporations already decided to stop working with him.

This analysis showed that social media commentary had barely any influence on the directive actions taken to cancel Dobrik, but he was still effectively de-platformed and changed his behavior. His cancellation was still successful despite the divisive and mismanaged reactions of social media commenters, which indicates that there were bigger powers that were instrumental in Dobrik's cancellation than the everyday Twitter user.

Limitations and Conclusion. The study yielded some natural limitations. This study focused on Twitter user reactions only, to get a general understanding of social media responses from the most conversational platform. Any future research on the subject matter can broaden the sample pool by looking at other social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Tik Tok and Reddit. Secondly, there were other posts than just news articles that documented the situation as it unraveled. These included podcasts, YouTube videos, Twitter threads and several other articles from smaller news outlets and entertainment sites. This study only reviewed commentary on three of the most circulated and read articles to exemplify the most prominent media content and reactions at different stages.

Cancel culture can be used to trigger social consequences against individuals who display poor behaviors. Social media plays a role in these social-justice-oriented movements by bringing awareness and creating larger discussions about them. Cancel culture has become a defining term in the lexicon of contemporary movements and has become a go-to for the public to utilize when they perceive wrongdoing. Highly credible newspapers also help to instruct change by bringing it to mainstream attention. However, social media can also be ineffective in creating change due to the same democratic participatory elements of the web that can get a movement going in the first place. For cancel culture, social media commentary can work to stifle change because it can propagate diverse perspectives that can work against the goal of the larger movement. However, when larger authorities direct the change, social media commentary is almost an insignificant factor. Thus, the emancipatory potential of social media during cancel culture can be highly contingent on bigger entities with power like companies and corporations. As progressive as newer media technologies boost their platforms to be, the same corporate gatekeepers of traditional times can have the same influence and stronghold on our current media landscape. Future studies on cancel culture should investigate the power play of social media discussions versus corporate actions to further explore the power dynamics of what is instructing the change that occurs. Despite this exploration into a YouTube star, a similar study can also be conducted on canceled politicians, celebrities and even brands.

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More than the Renaissance: The Reclassification of the Disney Animated Films of the Classics Period

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Over the past ten years, more than 200 peer-reviewed articles with Disney in their titles have been published across disciplines, especially in the humanities and social sciences. Beginning in the 1930s with Disney's first motion picture, the company, its venues, acquisitions, movies, and other products have become a robust research topic for academics, constantly refreshed with new ideas and perspectives. As Disney celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2023, researchers and readers examining the movies could benefit from some consistency in how the passage of time is described, and yet the methods of classification of these movies are not robust or universally implemented. In this era of culture wars, how Disney has changed over time has become a political litmus test. A common vocabulary supports the claims made by defenders and detractors. This article will provide a foundation for future Disney research across disciplines on a variety of topics through a categorization and organizing system to define a context, an essence – what the movies are – and an impression – what the movies "feel like." This structure could also be used to create consistent categories of time to measure cultural changes in other popular media longitudinally.

A survey of Disney articles shows inconsistency, at best, in the "lumping" of Disney movies into specific clusters and then the "splitting" of them into different moments in time, but their periodization can be examined in two general methods – what Kollmann refers to as "grand scale" periodizing – attempting to explain the entirety of a historical trajectory – and "micro-periods" – the "small scale changes" that occur within a larger era (440). These both have important functions in periodization.

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In Disney movies, grand-scale periodization is often found in the popular and fan presses. An article on the blog, *Odyssey,* includes clusters such as The Golden Age, The Wartime Era, and the Post-Renaissance Period (Jones), which are created through a combination of internal and external factors. World War II and financial hardship for the company provide the foundation for the structure of periodization in the early years, sometimes including movies created into the late 1980s, while later years are defined by its competition with, and acquisition of, Pixar and the success of Disney's Princess movies. The characteristics uniting these clusters include new art styles, musical collaborations, and/or a change in perceived quality (Jones; Astell). This periodization style primarily examines changes at a macro, and generally external, level but also includes characteristics from some of the movies contained within.

Academic scholars in humanities and social sciences seem to focus on micro periods. These clusters of movies vary in name, time, and boundaries, which lead to clusters of different sizes across articles. In reviewing 16 different articles that examine Disney movies as a chronology, the topics varied as did the lumping and splitting structures. In an article about the evolution of gender over time, for example, Abdulqadr et al. aligned certain Disney movies with the stages of feminism (Abdulqadr et al.); Azmi et al. connected models of female speech with heroic characteristics (Azmi et al.); and Davis examined how the world outside of these movies helped to shape the characters within (Davis). Benhamou similarly places Disney animated movies in historical and cultural contexts using his understanding of multiculturalism while Condis examined race through how the relationships with – and use of – animals differ for characters of different backgrounds (Benhamou). Faustino, Rowe, and Coats also examined feminism, manhood, and motherhood, and how these are manifested in both the animated movies and the True Life Adventures (Faustino, Rowe, and Coats). Two studies examine parenting and family types, focusing specifically on parenting approaches, single and nuclear families, and their interactions with each other (Zurcher, Webb, and Robinson; Zurcher et al.). Other research focused on age, villains, and Walt Disney himself (Towbin, Duffy, Croce).

Despite the disparate approaches of these and many other articles on Disney movies, those that share a longitudinal examination used distinct periodization methods that divide the time into as few as two and as many as nine distinct clusters.

Many employed the term "classics" or "classical," referring to the time before The Little Mermaid (Duffy 4; Fraustino and Coats 128; Hefner et al. 511; Towbin et al. 25) or even incorporating The Little Mermaid into a classic period (Abdulqadr et al. 833). Hine, Ivanovic, and England additionally used "old" (1959) and "new" (2016) (1). Other articles referred specifically to well-known clusters such as the Disney Renaissance or the Disney Princesses (England et al. 555; Heatwole 2; Hine et al. 4).

Davis, in her book on women in Disney animated movies, divided the movies into three eras: the classic years (1937-1967), the middle era (1967-1988), and the Eisner era (1989-2005) (Davis). Similar models have been embraced by others who have used three or fewer clusters to follow the treatment of gender (Johnson 2-3; England, et al. 555; Azmi 235), villains (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen and Schmidt 3; Duffy 4), race (Benhamou 154; Condis et al. 44), or romance (Hefner 511) over time. These articles have focused on the "early," "classic," or "old" movies and the "late," "contemporary," or "modern" movies. They have also used names such as "not-yet classics"; "earlier," "middle" and "recent"; "first," "second," and "third." Some of these scholars also mixed the language used to describe time using "classic years," "Eisner era" and "modern princess movies" in the same article (Hefner 511), or "earliest movies" and "second wave" (Condis 44). Finally, there are other groups of movies that stick to a date-based time organization with groups of one or two decades in length (Zurcher, Webb, and Robinson 9; Zurcher et al. 140). These methods work for the individual papers, but a unifying method would prove helpful as the collection of research continues to grow and as the time period that can reasonably be called "classic," and scholars' understanding of what that means, changes. A periodizing model will support the maintenance of this field.

Periodization. These articles on Disney demonstrate that though Zerubavel has argued that "standard time is among the most essential coordinates of intersubjective reality and one of the major parameters of the social world" (2), how time is measured is not always consistent across groups. How collectives organize history and develop periodizing models relies on common understandings of time and how people move through it and without a standard time, comparisons at different moments are difficult and relationships between elements are hard to engage. The process of historical periodization is the creation of time clusters that allow researchers to make meaning of the social facts that they observe, and to draw more significant comparisons among them. The changes that act as signposts for periodization can be specific to the topic of research – the structure of the plots of

the movies, for example – or they can have an external source – often an event occurring in the larger world outside of the direct focus of the research (Diner and Templer).

Constructionism and Essentialism. External periodization supposes that a change in the world influences how the topic of interest proceeds. Internal periodization refers to a change within the topic which, in turn, may change the way it is perceived from the outside. The process of periodization often occurs through a combination of these perspectives (Diner and Templer) and the conflicted relationship between constructionism and essentialism provides a useful foundation for revising a periodic structure. As constructionism argues that "knowledge is essentially 'situated' and thus should not be detached from the situations in which it is constructed and actualized" (Ackerman 5), it is a useful framework to connect with periodization and to social institutions (Fujimura 254-6).

Creating the boundaries of a particular cluster (Vergne and Wry 58-61) and placing it within a particular context also calls for understanding the essential characteristics of the cluster which are often presented in contrast to constructionism. Essentialism focuses on the belief in some "invisible essence that is shared by all members of a particular group or social category" (Morton and Postmes 656). Although some speak of essentialism as enhancing constructionism (O'Mahoney 723), essentialist perspectives have also been used to stereotype groups of people and as a justification for the belief behind their stereotypes (Bastian and Haslam 229) and, in this way, essentialism can be closely tied with reductionism. The explanation of a person's behavior, for example, by reducing it to its parts, is, at least, problematic (O'Mahoney 723). Despite this, there has been research that has found some value to essentialism as, for instance, viewing something like sexuality as an essential biological element has been shown to reduce prejudice (Morton and Postmes), and examining the essential educational competencies of a school can assist in maintaining its innovative educational model (Tyner-Mullings (a)).

This research takes a perspective on periodization that I am calling constructivist essentialism. While an essentialist perspective posits that a social fact has an essence that exists in all iterations (Rothbart and Taylor 16-9), constructivism provides a context and places the determination of the essence of a social fact within its time and place, providing space for change, variation, and evolution. Constructivist essentialism understands that social facts can have an essence that is context-based and therefore may change over time. The use of this

perspective requires the description of an essence, the setting of the boundaries of that essence's existence, and an acknowledgment of the characteristics of the impressions within.

Research Question

As described above, there are several different ways that current Disney periodization is problematic – how the movies are selected or lumped, the way those groups are categorized through splitting and naming, and finally, how time is described – and, additionally, the years, ages, eras, and periods used denote different magnitudes of time with different levels of specificity. The examples described above have also used distinct elements and methods of periodization to determine how the movies should be organized. This research will apply the theories of periodization to enhance the creation of a chronology of Disney movies to ease future social science research into these films and their impact while also providing the space for change and adjustment as the company continues to grow and change its catalog.

I will create a foundation for other research projects by redefining the canon of movies – the essence – from which the Disney periodization should occur while suggesting other "salient features that dominated, or at least animated, a particular segment of time" (Herubel 145). It will also outline the strategy for creating boundaries for clusters to examine distinct points of time in the structure of Disney's animated and hybrid movies, including discovering the deliberate characteristics – the impression – of that era. Defining an essence and an impression through constructivist essentialism will also allow for expansion as additional movies are created and analyzed.

The following research question will be addressed: How can Disney animated movies be organized into consistent clusters of time to represent the types of stories they tell and to measure change over time?

Methods

Disney movies hold an important place in American – and global – culture. In 2001, the researchers of the Global Disney Audiences Project (GDAP) found that the average age of first exposure to Disney movies worldwide was just under five years old (40). In the United States, it was only three (Wasko et al. 40). Exposure to these

movies was found to be consistent throughout childhood as nearly 98% of respondents had seen a Disney film by the time they turned 12 (Wasko et al. 42). It is important to note that GDAP's research was completed prior to the company's acquisition of the Muppets, Pixar, Marvel, Lucasfilm, and 21st Century Fox as well as the launching of Disney+. The company and its movies are even more pervasive now as the expansive catalog and Disney+ means a larger audience has access to more movies at their fingertips.

The Walt Disney Company itself is a huge part of our cultural landscape. According to Brand Finance, Disney is in the top 25 of the world's most valuable brands at 23 in 2023 (Brand Finance "Brand Finance Global"), and it was number 8 in the United States the previous year (Brand Finance "Brand Finance 2022"). Including the returns from Avatar 2: The Way of Water, movies from Disney, or companies it has acquired, are seven of the ten highest-grossing movies worldwide of all time (IMDBPro Staff (a)). *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1937) remains on the list at number ten worldwide, once inflation is accounted for (IMDBPro Staff (b)).

Determining the Essence and Uncovering the Impression. These movies come in a wide variety of topics and genres and employ different production methods. Nowhere is this more visible than on Disney+ which includes movies, television shows, and shorts (some made for TV, some for the movie theater, and others, specifically for Disney+) arranged in a variety of ways. As of January 2023, Disney+ contained more than 500 movies (Disney+) yet the Walt Disney Company is best known for their animated movies, especially their princesses. The Princess line has continued to be a valuable property which was valued at $5.5 billion in 2015 when the doll segment of the Disney Princess line changed hands to Hasbro from Mattel (Suddath) and then led to an 8% jump in share value for Mattel once it was announced that the rights to the dolls had returned (Ziobro).

Though Disney Princesses may feel inescapable in Disney movie research, Princess movies are only a small part of Disney's collection. However, there is a particular essentialist quality – a princess essence – within many Disney movies that leads viewers to see the company as producing mostly princess movies. That princess essence holds these distinct movies together and can be used to create a framework for these and other movies. This essence is important even for non-princess research (see Tyner-Mullings (b) for a more in-depth analysis of the difference between princess and non-princess movies). This essence is determined by four characteristics found in these movies.

The typical Disney Princess film is animated, building on the 1923 foundation when Walt and Roy first began the Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio and produced the Alice Comedies (History.com Editors) and continued with *Snow White*, their first feature film. Although some periodization focuses singularly on the animated movies, the hybrid movies – where animated characters interact with live-action characters – also fit much of this pattern and a conscious choice was made to include them in this essence.

The origin of the stories found in Princess movies is another element of the princess essence, and although Disney animated movies are not always based on fairy tales, they have historically been from, or inspired by, another source. The sources of these movies come from picture and other children's books, adult literature, fairy tales, myths, legends, fables, and comic books rather than television. These movies also often create a type of "Distory" – the version of history (and in this case literature) created by The Walt Disney Company focused on nostalgia (Fjellman) and American values (Croce 5; McReynolds 788-9) – that maintains parts of the original source while discarding or changing others.

Almost every Princess movie is from an original Walt Disney studio, rather than Pixar, Marvel, 20th Century Studios, or Lucasfilm. Over time, Disney has had different levels of partnering with, separating from, and owning Pixar, which complicates this relationship and how connected Pixar's work is to Disney over time which, if included, would affect the consistency of the model. Pixar has maintained some independence, which allows them to draw from different sources in their inspiration. Marvel and Lucasfilm have so far not had any fully animated or hybrid movies but similarly maintain some independence. The acquisition of 20th Century Fox complicates the hypothesis but does not disprove it. At the time of this writing, 20th Century Studios has not produced a Princess movie under Disney's ownership. It is highly unlikely, but *Anastasia* would be an example of a character from 20th Century Studios who could be added to the Disney Princesses.

Finally, Princess movies are distributed in theaters, which means there are two types of movies that are not part of this essence: sequels and non-feature films. Frozen II is the first non-Pixar sequel to be released as a feature film. The others have been home movies in digital or hard media form. Animated shorts follow a similar distribution as sequels, although they may sometimes be shown before a full-length movie but not as the main draw.

These characteristics provide a sample of 45 movies with the princess movie essence which will be used to define the essential movies of Disney's Classic

Period, which I have named for the early clamshell VHS tapes produced by the company's home movie division (also referred to as the Black Diamond collection). Following geologic measurements of time, each period will be broken into epochs, each of which has a common impression. This is followed by the defining of the ages and the impressions within.

In order to begin this analysis, the 45 movies were viewed at least twice, and notes were taken during the first viewing and confirmed in later viewings. After reviewing the notes from these movies, several larger patterns emerged that were extracted from the data using a grounded research approach and became the impression of each cluster. The characteristics used in the epochs and ages are not essentialist, as they are not present in every movie – but are being defined as an impression and representing important elements of each epoch.

Disney Time Results

Princess Epoch. Much of the work of lumping Disney time is through the setting of a boundary which asserts that there is a particular moment – in this case, a movie – that creates separation or builds a bridge between two clusters. Of these 45 movies, *The Little Mermaid* (dirs. John Musker and Ron Clements, 1989) is the clearest and most consistent boundary. Often referred to as the beginning of the Disney Renaissance (one of the few Disney historical clusters that the company acknowledges in their own materials), the late 1980s and the 90s is the time most associated with princesses. Although *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (dirs, David Hand, Perce Pearce, Larry Morey, William Cottrell, Wilfred Jackson, and Ben Sharpsteen, 1937) was the girl who started it all in 1937, Ariel started it all again and both Disney scholars and the Walt Disney Company agree that *The Little Mermaid* started the Disney Renaissance and that it represented the company's reemergence as an animated studio. This is the beginning of the "boundary work" (Nippert-Eng 564) in the division of Disney time into epochs: before Ariel (the Before Princess Epoch) and after Ariel (the Princess Epoch).

A distinct signpost of the upcoming start of this epoch was the change in Disney's production logo or "vanity card." Prior to *The Great Mouse Detective* (dirs. Dave Michener, John Musker, Ron Clements, and Burny Mattinson), in 1986, The Walt Disney Company used a specific vanity card at the beginning of their movies to symbolize itself. This was generally Walt Disney Pictures written out in cursive on a background formatted to integrate with the opening credits of the

movie. Just shortly before the transition into the Princess Epoch, the vanity card switched and became the logo that is now the symbol for Disney's animated films, Cinderella's Castle – the central hub of Walt Disney World. This logo has changed over the years – with iterations that included *Pinocchio*'s (dirs, Wilfred Jackson, Bill Roberts, T. Hee, Norman Ferguson, Ben Sharpsteen, Jack Kinney, and Hamilton Luske, 1940) "When You Wish Upon a Star" and *Peter Pan*'s (dirs. Wilfred Jackson, Hamilton Luske, and Clyde Geronimi, 1953) Tinkerbell flying overhead – but it has remained a Disney staple for more than 30 years. The most recent cards are also in 3D and some call back to previous vanity cards with the visuals, music, and sound effects related to the movie they introduce, rather than the *Pinocchio* theme.

As one of the boundaries of the Princess Epoch, *The Little Mermaid* divides the Classics period into two fairly equal slices with 24 movies produced before and 21 after. Disney has spent more of its time in the period focusing on non-Princess movies with more than 50 years prior to the Princess Epoch and only the last 30 in this period that seemed to be dominated by princesses (see Tyner-Mullings).

Within the Princess Epoch, there exists a smaller age of princesses (PE1) which claims the Renaissance title. The end of this age is generally agreed to be at *Tarzan* (dirs, Kevin Lima and Chris Buck 1999). Most of the movies in PE1 are musicals so *Tarzan* is distinct from the others in PE1 because of its lack of musical elements. None of the characters sing and though some of them play instruments, it is in a scene that is not important to the progress of the story. As one of the main thrusts of a musical is that the characters produce the music to move the story along, this would put *Tarzan* into a different cluster. However, most of the movies in PE1 are about an often-naïve woman being rescued or kidnapped from her existence as a mermaid, an intellectual, or a princess, by a man, and Jane seems to fit in well with the Princesses. There are even suggestions in the movie that she might be a descendant of Belle as she wears a similar yellow dress and has a Mrs. Potts tea set. Given this, *Tarzan* represents the end of PE1. As a movie that represents a transition between ages in its representation of both eras, *Tarzan* has strong boundary-setting elements.

The next age within the Princess Epoch (PE2) is also easy to define. With the agreement that PE1 ends with Tarzan, PE2 begins with *Atlantis* (dirs. Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise, 2001). Like PE 1 before it, the end boundary of the age is a little more complicated. *The Princess and the Frog* (dirs, John Musker and Ron Clements, 2009) is known for ushering in a new Disney Princess age, but as the Jim

Carey-animated *A Christmas Carol* (dir. Robert Zemeckis, 2009) came out the same year as *The Princess and the Frog*, it would make sense to put it into the last age with *The Princess and the Frog* rather than splitting the year. The boundary built by the two movies together transitions well from PE2 with its male main character and to *The Princess and the Frog* as an introduction to the adventure princesses in the next age.

Before Princess Epoch. The Before Princess Epoch (BE) begins with *Snow White* and ends with *The Little Mermaid*. Near the middle of the epoch, a clear pattern emerges – movies with animals as their main characters. As *Sleeping Beauty* (dir. Clyde Geronimi, 1959) is both most often associated with the classical princesses (Snow White and Cinderella) and includes animals in important roles, it makes a strong boundary to divide BE into BE1 and BE2. *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* (dirs. Hamilton Luske, Clyde Geronimi, and Wolfgang Reitherman, 1961) similarly includes animals as main characters with humans as strong secondary characters, so it serves the role of a boundary element of the next age. Splitting the eras between *Sleeping Beauty* and *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* strengthens that boundary and with *The Little Mermaid* in 1989, representing a girl who is part human and part fish, they are the perfect boundary between an age populated with animals and one populated with human princesses.

The movies of BP 1 include a few princesses, but they are primarily populated by other fantastical characters: animals who can talk across species (*Bambi* (dirs. Samuel Armstrong, Bill Roberts, Paul Satterfield, Norman Wright, David Hand, James Algar, and Graham Heid, 1942), children who never grow up (*Peter Pan*), and wooden puppets who turn into boys (*Pinocchio*). This is the age with the least cohesion and the weakest impression as many of the movies, if they were situated differently chronologically, could fit into other ages. One could also think of these as setting the foundation for the different clusters of movies to come.

Providing descriptive names for each of these ages allows ease of communication and comparison. Although the Disney Renaissance will always have a place in any research or discussion on the movies, a suggestion might be to use Disney World-related terms to reclassify the ages, Given the importance of Disney World's Cinderella's Castle to Disney movies, these could become Magic Kingdom (MK), Animal Kingdom (AK), Fantasyland (FyL), Adventureland (AL), and Frontierland (FtL), respectively**.**

Discussion

Impressions of the Eras. Each era has been built around an impression that helped to define that era's boundaries. However, the eras also have other elements in their impression that allow these lumps to cohere. The patterns that became visible while examining these movies as a cluster focus primarily on the gender and species of the main character and how they affect certain characteristics of the movie and the idea of magic. Actual and perceived Disney Princesses also led to the categorization of a movies in three ways. The official Disney Princess movies include one of the 11 Official Disney princesses in this research. Movies with a character who is actually a princess by their society's definition, regardless of how Disney defines them, are categorized as an actual princess movie. Finally Damsel movies include a female character who is rescued, generally by a male character. The presence of magic as a solution to, or cause of, problems was also examined. It is important to note that many of these variables are subjective but can still provide a framework for the work of Disney researchers. The characters in the Magic Kingdom age, for example, struggle with problems that are created by magic as this age has the second highest number of movies with problems solved by magic.

Beginning in 1961 with *One Hundred and One Dalmatians*, eight out of the twelve movies featured an animal as a main character. The movies of AK have more than twice the number of animal main characters than the next highest age, as 58% of the movies in the age have animal main characters. This does not even include movies like *The Jungle Book* (dir. Wolfgang Reitherman, 1967), where the main character is human but the story takes place in an animal world.

Although the number of dark or sad scenes in Animal Kingdom is not necessarily distinct from other ages, the movies in this age often feel darker as some movies end with, or include multiple, dark, and sad moments, often indicated by death or another kind of loss of innocence. *The Fox and the Hound* (dirs. Ted Berman, Richard Rich, and Art Stevens, 1981) teaches children a sobering lesson about friendship and growing up and is an example of this type of darkness. It is rarer, but also within this variable, are moments with a scary character, scene, or storyline. This darkness is especially apparent in *The Black Cauldron* (dirs. Richard Rich and Ted Berman, 1985) which was Disney's first PG-rated animated feature. There are no Official Disney Princesses in AK and the age has the smallest percentage of female characters.

Surprisingly, Fantasyland does not have the highest percentage of Official Princesses, Actual Princesses, or female main characters. This is likely because

several movies, while associated with a more general idea of princesses, do not actually include princesses and/or are not about the females but are about the male lead. *Hercules* (dirs. John Musker and Ron Clements, 1997), *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (dirs. Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise, 1996), *Tarzan* (1999), and *Aladdin* (dirs. Ron Clements and John Musker, 1992) are all included in this category. FyL does have the highest percentage of damsels. This age also has the highest percentage of movies with a focus on romantic love.

While one of Fyl's impressions is the musical princesses, AL is distinct because of the proportion of movies that include an adventure. Though many Disney stories can be categorized as adventures, capturing aspects of Joseph Campbell's (1949) Hero's Journey – the idea of leaving home, accomplishing a task, and returning – gives AL the second-highest adventure score.

Many consider Adventureland to be a dark age for the company as these movies represented a transition away from the traditional cell-shaded, musical fairytales the company had become known for. AL's movies seem to be very focused on males and may have been an attempt to reconnect with that demographic following FyL's focus on princesses. This age is the shortest with the fewest number of movies and has the second smallest percentage of female main characters, just behind MK, with only one movie with a female lead, who is a cow. Many members of Disney's audience are unfamiliar with this age's *Treasure Planet* (dirs. John Musker and Ron Clements, 2002), *Atlantis* (2001), and *Meet the Robinsons* (dir, Stephen Anderson, 2007). The first movie is a science fiction take on *Treasure Island* (1882); the second is based on the legend of Atlantis: and the third is based on a children's book about a boy trying to find his family.

Frontierland begins in 2009, and with the official Disney Princess product line created in 2000 after Mulan, Tiana in *The Princess and the Frog* was the first Princess to be added to the line after its creation. For many, she is also considered the first Princess to be created specifically to be a part of the line and to rectify the lack of an African American member. The story of *The Princess and the Frog* has generated controversy, both because of what it was initially and what it became. The main character in the first draft of the story was Maddie, the chambermaid, who was offensive to many African Americans because it harkened back to racist caricatures with similar names (Misick; Akbar). For others, the movie's decision to have Tiana remain a frog for most of the movie, only turning back into a woman in the last few minutes was a point of contention (Barnes; Stephey; Hebert-Leiter 969). Rapunzel in *Tangled* (dirs. Nathan Greno and Byron Howard, 2010) is the

other Official Disney Princess in this age. She was reintroduced to many families in 2020 as a girl trapped in her home after being kidnapped from the kingdom of Corona and became a reflection of children's experiences during that time's global pandemic.

Frontierland has a smaller proportion of Official Disney Princesses than MK and FyL but is between the two on Actual Princesses. *Frozen* (dirs. Chris Buck and Jennifer Lee, 2013), *Moana* (dir. John Musker, 2016), and *Big Hero 6* (dirs. Chris Williams, and Don Hall, 2014) represent a move away from the more traditional fairy tale love story to a more adventurous storyline, literally and figuratively, and in the case of *Moana* and *Frozen*, a female main character who goes on an adventure.

Future Research

The End of the Sentence. As is the problem in much of periodization, it is difficult to define the essence, impression, or boundaries of a cluster while it is still being formed. For the foreseeable future, Frontierland seems to be the final frontier of the Classics Period as the essential elements of movies after *Moana* appear to move in a different direction. While these movies have an important place on Disney+, and in marketing, Disney's plan glancing into the future seems to be to enter a period of live-action remakes, sequels of animated movies, and a focus on original scripts. The first few movies in the new period also seem to have an impression that highlights cultural elements and characters which cements the role of Moana as a boundary of this period and age. Until a new constructivist essentialism periodization can begin once the period has matured, I will refer to this new period as the Revival period, beginning with the age of the Character, leaving the Classics Period behind (Tyner-Mullings).

Conclusion

Refining the formulations used by many Disney scholars, the five ages defined here provide a clear and informative framework to organize the movies in the Disney Classics Period. They provide a foundation for any researcher analyzing Disney movies over time and can be used to examine the similar or distinct interactions the audience has with them as well as how included movies work in concert with or in opposition to the impressions of their age. This can help Disney scholars develop

their work and raise questions as we embark on this new period in Disney Animation. The use of constructivist essentialism also provides both flexibility and structure for the creation of time clusters when examining cultural phenomenon over time. The lack of consistency across Disney studies in the past will hopefully inspire other popular culture scholars to consider the challenges in their own disciplines and provide them a framework to address them.

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The Educational Benefits of Comics: An Exploration of the Medium as an Educational Tool

LAITH ZURAIKAT

When discussing the topic of comic books in the modern era, it is likely that many things spring to mind. Some may think of popular superheroes like Batman or Captain America, others might think of beloved comic strips like *Garfield* or *Dilbert*. Ardent fans of the medium may think of groundbreaking stories like *Watchmen* or *The Sandman*, while more casual fans may be immediately drawn to popular TV shows like *The Walking Dead* or movies like *Deadpool* which are based on comics. What may not immediately come to mind though is school. If one were to bring up the topic of comics and education, it is very likely that the first thing the average person thinks of is some news story of a school banning a comic book or graphic novel.

Despite how popular comics are across all ages, they can be a target of criticism in educational settings due to the belief that they contain material which will have a negative impact on children (Lee; Wertham). These concerns of course echo the principles of Cultivation Theory, which posits that the mass media can transmit and shape the values, beliefs, and actions of those who consume its content (Gerbner, *Cultural Indicators*; Gerbner, *Cultivation Analysis*). Opponents of this medium thus worry that children who are exposed to depictions of violence in comic books may mirror what they are reading and seeing, leading to increased aggressive behaviors in those children (Burton).

However, while the discussion around comics as a source of controversy in the U.S. educational system due to various political differences, their content, and the so-called "culture wars" can be a prominent one, it is not the focus of this specific body of work. We mention these discussions not to contribute to either side of the debate, but rather to stress that when discussing this medium in an educational

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context, there is a tendency for this singular aspect of the conversation to dominate the focus of fans of the medium and casual observers alike.

The purpose of this work is to highlight how this genre of reading material has great value and potential as an educational tool (especially in elementary education), attributes which may be overlooked or lost in the noise being generated by current debates centered around censorship and comics content. This focus speaks directly to one of the key benefits of popular culture studies, in that it provides a way for society to understand the things that permeate our lives (Reinhard), while also providing an opportunity for the public to analyze how and why we construct our reality through the creation and consumption of popular texts. This body of work contributes to this approach by examining how an incredibly prevalent and popular form of media (comics) can be used to contribute to the understanding of our present reality via the traditional learning environment.

To achieve this goal, we examine how comics have been used to have a tangible positive impact on student learning outcomes, why comics are such a useful educational tool, and provide examples of methodologies and approaches which used comics to successfully achieve a variety of positive educational outcomes. We seek to then build on these findings by providing suggestions of additional comics which could be used in similar interventions, introduce some ideas for teachers who are looking for innovate ways to integrate comics into their curriculums, and to put forward a new comic-based teaching approach which we believe is worth exploring further in future works.

Types of Comics

To examine how comics can be used in the classroom, it is important to first understand that the comic medium is by no means homogenous. The most common forms of this medium are the single-issue comic book, graphic novels, trade paperbacks, and manga (Belton). A single-issue comic book refers to the magazine-style format book that most people think of when they hear the term “comic book” (Van As). While these publications can be single stand-alone issues, they tend to be part of a serialized story. Comic strips are a series of drawings arranged within sequential panels which tell a story. Comic strips are traditionally associated with being found in newspapers and are often later bound together into larger collections like the *Peanuts* books by Charles Schulz.

A trade paperback (TPB), "is a collection of comic book material which has been published in other formats previously and bound into one book" (Van As 1), and usually is made up of multiple single-issue comics. Graphic novels are a comic format, and the term "graphic novel" is sometimes used as an interchangeable description for a trade paperback. However, while both graphic novels and trade paperbacks are collections of comics, they are not technically the same thing, as unlike trade paperbacks, the original graphic novel (OGN) "is a long-form comic that contains original material, which hasn't appeared anywhere else" (Van As 1).

Manga refers to the popular Japanese style of comic which are often first produced in serial format (usually in black and white) and are then collected into a trade paperback or graphic novel. Manga tends to be read right to left, and while many of these stories do contain adult themes and content, there are a wide variety of this style of comic, many of which are suitable for a younger audience (Belton). Osamu Tezuka's *Astro Boy* series is a prime example of child friendly manga, and it is important to make note of this type of comic as it is one of the fastest growing comic genres amongst young readers (Clark). Beyond providing greater insight into the medium, it is important to talk about these distinctions, as certain comic genres and formats are better suited to achieve specific educational goals than others.

Growth of the Comic Book Industry. While the comic industry has experienced peaks and valleys of popularity and sales over time, the last few decades have seen the industry experience a great deal of financial success and increased cultural prominence. This popularity is tangibly reflected by its sustained financial growth over the past decade. In 2021, the North American comic book industry set a new annual record of $2.075 billion in sales (Clark). This number continues a trend of almost uninterrupted sales growth for the industry over the past nine years, which included earning an estimated $1.28 billion dollars in sales in the U.S. and Canada in 2020, despite many industries suffering major financial losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Griepp and Miller).

In fact, since North American comic book sales totaled approximately $805 million in 2012, the comic industry has seen an increase in year-by-year sales in every year except 2017 (Griepp and Miller) and is predicted to continue this trend through 2030. This financial success is by no means limited solely to North America, as evidenced by the 2014 worldwide industry figures produced by Diamond Comic Distributors, which found that, "overall sales of comics and graphic novels increased by 4.39% year-on-year in 2014 (comics were up 4.03%, with graphic novel sales rising by 5.18%)" (Virtue 1). This continued the trend of

industry growth from 2013, in which overall comic sales growth rose by 10% (Virtue).

Part of this growth has been thanks to the massive critical and financial success of comic-based TV and movie franchises like, the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Warner Brother's *Dark Knight* trilogy, and Amazon Prime's TV series *The Boys*, which has inspired an increased and renewed interest amongst the public in the comics which they are based on (Buesing). Another contributing factor to these increased sales has been the growth and diversification of the comic book audience over the past several decades with many new series aiming to attract a more 'mature' and older reading audience (Our Culture Mag & Partners).

However, while superhero-based comics and an expanded reading audience have certainly played a major role in the recent success of the industry, children and young teens remain major consumers of this media (Gonzalez; Alverson; Barnett). An in-depth look at the record comic sales which occurred during the past few years of the COVID-19 pandemic show that a large part of this growth has been driven by increased interest in manga and children's graphic novels (Clark). The works of children's comic authors like Dav Pilkey and Raina Telgemeier have routinely topped U.S. best-selling charts over the past decade. For example, in September of 2019, the number one and number three best-selling books in the U.S. for the week were Telgemeier's *Guts* (76,216 units) and Pilkey's *Dog Man: For Whom the Ball Rolls: From the Creator of Captain Underpants* (44,863 units), meaning that two of the top five best-selling books (not just children's books) in the country were graphic novels aimed at young readers (MacDonald). These numbers are by no means an anomaly either, as Telgemeier's autobiographical graphic novels have sold over 18 million copies worldwide and have been credited with transforming the children's graphic novel market (Alter), while Pilkey's 2021 children's graphic novel *Dog Man: Mothering Heights* was the best-selling print book in the United States that year (Maher).

Integrating Comics into the Educational Realm. Putting aside the arguments surrounding the "appropriateness" of the material in certain comics, the use of comics in an educational setting often faces several other common obstacles. Some educators have been hesitant to use comics partially because of the misconception that these stories are too simplistic as, "comic books have historically been stigmatized as a lowbrow medium among scholars, parents, and educators" (Branscum and Sharma 430). Other critics have worried that children will use comic books to replace other more "educational" or "wholesome" reading

materials. However, contrary to these fears, several studies have found that children who read comics end up reading as much, or more, than non-comic readers, "It has also been reported that among middle- and lower-income youth, when compared with non-comic readers, child comic-readers engaged in significantly more pleasure reading, and report greater enjoyment for reading" (Branscum and Sharma 431).

When looking at the many successful uses of comics in an educational setting, this association between reading and pleasure is noted far too consistently to be considered a simple coincidence. While there are many different reasons to integrate comics into educational curriculums, it is the opportunity to harness a child's preexisting interest in comics to stimulate learning which serves as the key advantage this medium has other more traditional educational materials. For example, when examining the integration of *Archie* comics into school curriculums, Bonny Norton found that when elementary students were reading for fun, they took a greater amount of control over the reading process than when they were "studying" a literary text. Norton found that many students associated traditional literary texts with being boring and a chore that had to be completed before they could have fun, while getting to read *Archie* comics was viewed as a 'reward' and something to look forward too. Beyond simply being more "fun" to read, using *Archie* comics as a reading tool allowed students the opportunity to "construct meaning, make hypotheses, and predict future developments" (143). Based on her findings Norton argues that this interest presents an untapped opportunity for educators to increase student engagement in their literacy efforts while also better preparing students for the many semiotic modes which they encounter in their everyday lives beyond the written word.

Building off this Norton's findings and the idea that reading for fun generates greater student engagement and educational ownership, it therefore makes sense for educators to integrate more comics into class reading materials. This basic but key first step would help to lay the groundwork for some of the more inventive and complex interventions we explore later and would help to erode some of the stigmas attached to the comics medium. Some potential materials could include the *Owly* graphic novel series by Andy Runton, which has won an Eisner Award for best publication for a younger audience. The *Owly* series is a great tool because the series is composed of a variety of different reading formats including graphics novels, single-issue comics, and several traditional children's books, allowing educators to utilize the series in many ways. Another option is the graphic novel *El*

Deafo which uses anamorphic bunnies to tell about the story of author Cece Bell's loss of hearing and can introduce children to a variety of important life lessons about overcoming adversity, accepting differences, and building friendships.

Comics as an Educational Tool

While the ability to increase interest and engagement in reading is certainly a beneficial trait, comics also provide more educational use and value beyond simply serving to encourage reading. They are an incredibly multifaceted educational tool which can be used to impact several different aspects of childhood learning. The key to their use as an educational tool lies in part in the unique way in which comics combine the visual and narrative elements of reading and storytelling. This combination is helpful for younger readers because, "Comics can help younger struggling readers, or those of any age learn English, by combining pictures and words, giving visual cues as to what the text is explaining" (Branscum and Sharma 431). When children view the images in comic books the deductive process that they employ to determine the meaning of the images and the information being transmitted by those images is the same process by which they determine the meaning of the written word:

> Visual literacy is exactly the same kind of process as what you need to do to be able to make sense out of words. You use inference, you use deductions, you make connections in your head you predict the future you empathize with the characters. All of those things are what reading is. Reading is not phonic; it's actually constructing a story in your head. (Bringelson and Glass 23)

It is in this way that comics can be used as the first steps in a child's development of their literacy skills and abilities. Image forward graphic novels like the *Noodleheads* series by Tedd Arnold offer a great opportunity for young readers to practice developing the deductive process that they will utilize when moving on to more advanced reading material. Because "The first things the youngest readers often look to when connecting letters, words, and narrative are the accompanying pictures…Clear, well-honed imagery can even allow these readers to expand the complexity of the narratives they tackle" (Karp 1). A more simplistic series like the *Noodleheads* can thus serve as a gateway to more complex comics and other reading materials.

In addition to providing an opportunity for children to pair words with pictures (a benefit which can just as easily be accomplished by providing early readers with picture books), the seamlessly integrated nature of text and image in comic books, as well as the left-to-right sequential nature of their stories, provides a benefit for early learners that picture books and novels with illustrations do not. The tendency for comic panels and pages to be set up in this very formulaic left-to-right sequence is critical to aiding with the development of reading skills, "Although we are conditioned to read from left to right, early readers are still getting this training. With a left-to-right sequence (the action and order of the word balloons within the panel) within a left-to-right sequence (the order of the panels themselves), a comic book reinforces sequences like nothing else" (Karp 1). Furthermore, the use of word balloons and narrative boxes, combined with the visual nature of the comic book, forces readers to critically think and analyze the information that is being presented to them, "Readers must learn to identify the differences between pragmatic features – the particular shapes of word balloons signifying characters' utterances versus the meaning of visual cue; speed lines to indicate motion; and how the content of panels help readers understand the larger story" (Rapp 64).

The inclusion of these elements (which are not present in many traditional educational reading materials) provides many benefits, including offering an "appealing way for students to analyze literary conventions, character development, dialogue, satire, and language structures as well as develop writing and research skills" (Schwarz 58). More importantly, "they offer a new kind of text for the classroom, and they demand new reading abilities" (Schwarz 63) making them potentially better suited for the modern student who increasingly require fluency in multiple literacies to succeed in a world which no longer relies purely on text-based communication.

Comics and Vocabulary Development. In addition to helping advance the development of general literacy skills, comic books can also expose children to a wide range of new and high-level words and concepts. This exposure in turn assists with the overall development of their total vocabulary. Furthermore, studies have found that on average comic books contain greater rates of higher-level words and concepts then the average children's book and, "five times as many than the average conversation between a child and adult […] If a child read one comic book a day, over the course of a year they would be exposed to approximately 500, 000 words, which is half the average reading volume of most middle school children" (Branscum and Sharma 431). This statistic is of particular importance, as it helps

to refute the stereotype of comic books as glorified picture books. In reality, the images in these stories are only half of their content, and the narrative aspects of these stories can range from simple to quite complex.

The use of comic books to build reading and vocabulary is further supported by studies of interventions which used comics books as an educational tool in elementary education. One such intervention found that the incorporation of graphic novels into a Tier 2 Response to Intervention (RTI) program for struggling elementary aged readers helped participants in the program to develop a multitude of word recognition, vocabulary, and reading skills, and ultimately resulted in increased progress for student' fluency as measured by DIBELS (Smetana and Grishman).

In the study, students who lacked substantive prior experience with print and had a vocabulary that was restricted to Tier 1 words (words that are found in spoken vocabulary) were placed into an intervention program that provided graphic novels to support the traditional materials of the program. As the study progressed students were then given graphic novels to use in a less structured manner to support their learning. Prior to engaging in the program, the students involved in the experiment were reading between 75 and 83 words per minute as measured on the DIBELS passages. Following their participation in the program with the use of graphic novels, students' scores increased on average by 25 words per minute, and their fluency rates increased by 15 percentiles (Smetana and Grishman 195).

Students in the program also noticeably started to incorporate some of the vocabulary they had read in the graphic novels into their own work, as well as added visual elements, text, and sketches into their essays. This observation is important because it shows that students were using the format that they had witnessed in the graphic novels a method of translating their thoughts and ideas into written language, which in turn helped them to further develop their reading skills. The teachers also observed, "that students were also completing a larger percentage of their classroom reading assignments. They were able to more rapidly decode multisyllabic words and they recognized the need for an authors' choice of words" (Smetana and Grishman 196).

The Benefit of Serialized Storytelling. Another major benefit that comics offer as an educational tool is their ability to help develop critical thinking skills due to the serial nature of the medium. Because a variety of different comic formats (including TPBs, OGNs, and single-issues) tell continuous stories which are spread across multiple issues or volumes, "To comprehend such events, students must

consider how stories are going to advance in ways that single-volume texts normally ignore or avoid" (Rapp 64). Unlike many other text-based mediums, which usually end after a few stories at most, many comics present stories and characters which have gone on for decades, providing educators with literally thousands of issues to use in the classroom. Not only does this encourage children to continue to engage with the medium, but it also gives students a chance to "to evaluate cultural context, story innovations, character development and so on. These are complex literacy practices that complement traditional classroom activities" (Rapp 65). Furthermore, while even long running literary series like *The Hardy Boys* or *Harry Potter* eventually come to an end, because comic book characters are not reliant on a single author or even a single series, educators can be fairly confident that these characters will continue to grow and develop for years to come.

Another added benefit of the serialized nature of comics is that publishers can take characters and story arcs and adapt them to suit a variety of different ages and reading levels. The ability for students to engage with characters and interconnected storylines across a multitude of reading levels, is a truly unique one, and could with planning, be used to great effect when developing multigrade reading plans. For example, rather than introducing students to disparate reading material as they move from grade to grade, schools can incorporate comics across multiple grades and levels of reading, meaning that as students progress in their studies, the characters they are reading about will progress with them, serving as a constant source of engagement and interest. For example, young readers could be introduced early in their education to the *Tiny Titans* comic series which was produced by DC Comics to introduce elementary school aged readers (typically grades 1-3) to the Teen Titans superhero group. When students move on to grades 4-5, they can be introduced to more challenging graphic novels like *Batman and Robin and Howard* which features several characters from the *Tiny Titans* series. Readers in grades 6-7 can start to read DC Comic's *Lil Gotham* series which features the main characters in the DC Universe in an art style which will appeal to children of this age. *Lil Gotham* serves as an excellent bridge for readers from the more simplistic stories in *Tiny Titans* and *Batman and Robin and Howard* to DC's line of young adult comics like *The Lost Caravel: A Dick Grayson Graphic Novel* and *Gotham High* and which are excellent sources of reading material for students in grades 7-9 and 10-11 respectively. This reading development plan can even be continued into high school if so desired, as educators can now introduce students to DC's

main line of superhero titles. Through this approach students are introduced to characters like Batman and Robin as beginning readers and continue to read stories about them which develop in complexity and difficulty as their reading skills progress. While the above example uses superhero comics as an example, there are several different comic lines which can be used in this approach.

The Benefits of Creating Comic Books

The educational benefits of that comics can offer are not limited solely to the skills and tools that young readers can develop from reading these stories. The creation of comics can also offer several educational benefits. Because comic books are a popular and easily accessible medium, when students are "Given the opportunity to create and share their own comic books, students engage in greater literacy exploration than they otherwise would" (Morrison et al. 759). Creating comics allows students to be more creative in their writing and storytelling and engages them in a more holistic learning approach (Morrison et al.). Furthermore, when designing comics students can build both their linguistic intelligence and their visual spatial intelligence (Morrison et al.; Gardner).

Creating comics also helps students to build their instruction skills and develop comprehension strategies as they must, "determine what is most important from their readings, to rephrase it succinctly, and then organize it logically" (Morrison et al. 760). Students must also exercise their research skills when they are designing a comic book. When tasked with creating a comic book or graphic novel students must gather information for the story, and then identify what pieces of information are most important to the story so that they can then, "present this information in a visual manner that both informs and entertains" (Morrison et al. 760). While the idea of asking students to create their own literary works is by no means a new or original idea, because of the unique combination of text and image that is required of a comic, using this medium for these types of exercises provides many additional educational benefits.

Notable Interventions and Findings. There are several notable projects which have sought to examine and quantify the impact that creating comics can have as an educational tool. One of the first of these programs was the Comic Book Project, which was created by a faculty member at Colombia University's Teachers College and focused on students who attended high need schools that lacked the supplies and resources needed to provide art instruction. The goal of the program was to

provide students with the opportunity to, "plan, write, design, and produce original comic books based on themes that connect to their everyday lives" (Sloan 1). A key outcome from this program was that it showed that having children work as a group to create a comic book not only taught them artistic skills, but also helped them how to develop valuable problem solving and compromising skills. Furthermore, the project also helped the children to develop their language arts skills, as the creators of the project, "observed students who were struggling to keep up in their language arts classes pour over each sentence of their stories, continually refining punctuation syntax, tone, and grammar" (Sloan 2). Through the combination of learning and play, this program provided students an opportunity to develop their language arts and writing skills in a non-traditional setting, which ultimately helped the program to succeed and achieve the desired learning outcomes as the students did not feel as confined or restricted as they did in a more traditional academic setting.

The Comic Book Project is by no means the only program to use comic book creation as an educational tool. Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher took this concept in a related direction by focusing mainly on using comic books as a language and writing development tool. Frey and Fisher had members of the class read excerpts of Will Eisner's graphic novel, *New York: The Big City* together and then discuss the word choice and vocabulary that was used in the excerpt. Students were then given excerpts from graphic novels as writing prompts and were told to develop endings for the story. As the study progressed, the researchers were able to identify tangible growth in the student's writing abilities by measuring the increased use of complex sentences and multiple ideas within the students' writing over time (Sloan).

At the end of the program the researchers concluded that using comic books and graphic novels as part of writing exercises "provided a visual vocabulary of sorts for scaffolding writing techniques, particularly dialogue, tone, and mood" (Sloan 3). Most importantly, the educators noted that their "students became not only better writers but also more knowledgeable consumers of ideas and information" (Sloan 3). They concluded that using comics as an educational tool, "can engage students in learning across content areas, particularly when projects allow students to illustrate their own lives or see communities from a different perspective" (Sloan 7).

A Suggestion for Future Studies. While these programs share many similarities, there are two key differences between the programs which could serve as the basis

for another approach to using the creation of comics as an educational tool. The Comic Book Project had students create a comic book based on their own ideas and interests, which does not necessarily require the students to read and then build onto an existing comic. Frey and Fischer's program required students to read comics and extrapolate what they read to formulate potential endings and new chapters but did not require the students to work in groups or create an actual comic depicting their ending.

While both programs were effective, it does raise the question, if could they be even more effective when combined? In this type of program students would be given a series of comics or a graphic novel to read as a group and then be provided with the assignment to create a follow up comic or sequel graphic novel to what they had read. This approach would theoretically allow students to develop their reading and literacy skills by reading comics, their teamwork, problem solving, and visual literacy skills by working as a group create to create their own comic, and their critical thinking and writing skills by having to create a narrative and story based off the comics they had read which makes narrative sense. Furthermore, this approach would allow educators to take advantage of the serialized nature of comics as there are numerous storylines and characters for them to have their students develop and try to fit into the larger existing narrative world. At the same time, this approach continues to allow educators to take advantage of their students' preexisting interest and engagement in the source material (which as we noted is a key benefit of using comics in the educational realm) and reaps the rewards of providing students with the opportunity to engage in the learning process in a non-traditional and "fun" manner.

Comics as an Educational Tool for Non-Native Speakers

One of the major benefits of comics is their ability to achieve a variety of educational goals. In addition to being able to help with the development of critical reading and writing skills, comics also have great potential to serve a key tool for teaching non-native speakers the English language. While this is still a developing use of the medium, educators who have started to use comics in this manner have found them to a versatile and effective tool.

In one successful case study using this approach, a teacher working with a class of English Language Learners (ELL) used comics books like the Hulk and Spider-Man as the texts in her English as a Second Language (ESL) literacy workshops.

Spider-Man comics were used to teach students how to recognize the central problem of a narrative story and how these problems are then resolved later in the story, while comic books featuring the characters like the Hulk and Wild Girl were used to draw "attention to the gendered representations of the characters within the comics" (Ranker 299) and thus develop student's critical media literacy skills.

A major benefit of using comics (as opposed to other texts) to teach ESL students is that it allows educators to take advantage of the combination of text and images that make up comics. The images in comics serve as critical representations of the dialogue and story, which is hyper important when teaching non-native speakers because, "When second/additional language learners do not have the relevant target language readily available for comprehension, nonverbal cues to meaning are invaluable" (Ranker 304). The images in comic books serve as sources of these nonverbal cues for their readers and can be a major benefit for students as they try to decipher what they are reading, since they add meaning to the text through visual representation (Levie and Lentz; Tang). The contextual information that the images in comics provide to the stories that English-Language learners are trying to decipher can help these learners with their understanding of the English language and how to use it (Hornberger and Skilton-Sylvester).

The popularity of comic books, as well their potential to present diverse identities also works in their favor as a tool for English-language learners. Just as native English-speaking students benefit from the use of comic books because they find them to be an engaging and interesting tool, "For ELL students, their increased engagement can facilitate their entry and apprenticeship into important social networks that amplify opportunities for academic success in mainstream classes" (Chun 144).

Chun points to the graphic novel *Maus: A Survivors Tale* as a prime example of how comics can create more engagement with ELL students because it provides, "intellectually engaging content realized through its visual narrative strategies of representing history" (147). With its interesting story and captivating images, *Maus* can capture student's attention and imagination. The multilingual nature of the characters in this graphic novel can also help ELL students to connect with story, and need for the characters in the story to wear masks of different animals to remain undetected often strikes home with these students, as "This visual metaphor of the need for people to adopt different guises in daily interactions with people will be noted by students who are learning how to navigate in a new society" (Chun 149).

One of the major benefits of comics are the numerous topics which they cover, meaning educators can tailor their lessons to the interests of their students to ensure optimal chances of educational success, rather than a using a standard text for every class. While *Maus* is a great example of how a graphic novel can be used to assist with the development of the language and literary skills of non-native English speakers, it is just one of many potential options. For example, because the subject matter that *Maus* deals with (World War II and the Holocaust) is fairly serious and mature in nature, it may not be the best tool for younger ESL students. However, a collection of *Calvin and Hobbes* comic strips on the other hand would be ideally suited for younger readers. Because the series originates as a comic strip it is easily digestible for beginning learners, and since the main character (Calvin) is elementary school aged, many of his experiences and adventures will likely be relatable to students of that age which in turn can help with their language comprehension skills. G. Willow Wilson's *Ms. Marvel* comic series is another great option for ESL students as the titular character's struggles with her heritage, religion, new superpowers, and teenage life will likely resonate with many ESL students who may feel overwhelmed or out of place at times when trying to learn a new language and new cultural aspects.

Other Potential Educational Uses

One of the major benefits of using comics in the educational realm is how versatile they can be when it comes to promoting knowledge and growth. While we have mainly focused on how comics can be used to teach children various reading, writing, and language skills, it is important to note that one of the reasons that we believe that comics should be integrated into teaching practices is because they have the potential to serve a variety of topics.

Comics and Health Education. One such avenue is the potential for comics to be used as a tool to promote health education. This is not a new idea in the United States, as the U.S. government has used comic books as a health promotion tool several times over the past century (Branscum and Sharma). These instances include incorporating anti-drug messaging into single issues comics in the 1970s at the behest of President Nixon, and the Environmental Protection Agency's recent develop of comic books whose storylines and content are centered around promoting pesticide safety (Branscum and Sharma).

In addition to these more broad-based government efforts, several non-governmental organizations have also sought to use comics as a tool to transmit health related knowledge and information to the younger generation. In 2000, a group of Chinese researchers developed a comic book geared towards 4th grade children in rural areas who were especially susceptible to contracting schistosomiasis (a parasitic disease) from infected freshwater. The researchers found that the "4th grade children from five villages receiving the video and comic book had significantly more knowledge on schistosomiasis prevention" (Branscum and Sharma 434). Furthermore, the students who read the comic also reported an increased use of safe water. (Branscum and Sharma; Yuan et al.) highlighting the effectiveness of the medium as an educational tool.

The World Health Organization (WHO) took a similar approach when seeking to combat an outbreak of Lymphatic Filariasis (LF) in the Nile Delta region. The WHO, in conjunction with the Egyptian Health Ministry, developed a comic book designed to increase awareness about the drug used to treat the disease and to decrease fear and stigmatization of the disease and its' treatment (Branscum and Sharama; El Setouhy and Rio). The comic book was distributed to 2nd and 3rd grade children, and the researchers found that:

> After reading the comic, children significantly reduced their fear that LF is a killer disease, increased knowledge on targeted aspects of LP, increased positive attitudes towards LF patients, and fewer children reported they would avoid an LF patient. (Branscum and Sharama 435)

While studies examining the use of comics in health education remain limited, the interventions which have been conducted thus far seem to indicate great potential for their use as a health education tool for children, and certainly warrant further exploration into how they could be adopted and use in elementary, middle school, and even high school health classes.

Comics and STEM Education. There also exists great potential for comics to be used as an educational tool in the STEM fields. One major benefit that comic can offer in STEM education is that they draw on many common tools already used in this field. First and foremost is their use of pictures and images, as illustrations have long played a major role in science textbooks and education (Farinella). Many traditional texts in these courses contain illustrations and visual diagrams which require students to have a high-level of existing knowledge to understand the information being presented, which can make them less accessible to students who are not as proficient with the subject matter. Comics offer a potential solution to

this learning barrier because while they use a combination of words and pictures to convey information to the reader like traditional scientific graphics and images, they "also divide the information into panels (McCloud, 1994) which can facilitate the reading experience and highlight important information such as parts and processes" (Farinella 5). Comics also have the added benefit of being able to be arranged in numerous ways to convey information. This allows them to be organized in a traditional linear manner to convey information, and in non-linear ways, which is very similar to how, "science often requires readers to make connections between multiple scales and domains of knowledge, not necessarily arranged in a hierarchical, linear order" (Farinella 6).

Beyond the structural elements of comics which lend them to being an effective tool for scientific education, their heavy use of metaphors (both visual and text based) also makes them uniquely suited for this area of education. Metaphors have long been useful in guiding scientific research and education because, "when writing about science for a general audience,

metaphors can be useful to establish a common ground and allow readers to use their own domains of knowledge to approach new abstract concepts" (Farinella 8). As a fundamentally metaphorical medium, comics deliver narratives which seamlessly combine information and metaphors to the reader in a fully cohesive manner (Wolk). This presents an opportunity in science communication to use this medium to map "abstract scientific concepts on to everyday objects and experiences, helping the public to engage with the material at a more personal level" (Farinella 8), including when developing educational scientific materials for younger students. The potential for this medium to be used in this field certainly is an exciting idea, and one that deserves more exploration in future studies.

Conclusion

Despite some opposition to the use of comics in schools, this medium possesses great potential as an educational tool and can be incredibly beneficial for educators. There is a growing body of successful studies and interventions which highlight the numerous ways in which comics can be used in children's education, and it fair to say that the true potential of this medium remains untapped to date.

A key benefit of this medium as a tool for advancing literacy and critical thinking skills lies in the way comics combine images and text to tell a narrative story. Unlike many of the traditional tools used to develop literacy, vocabulary, and

other educational skills, comics provide multiple sources of information to convey meaning. This combination of text and image provides both native and non-native English-speaking students with multiples sources of information to decipher the messages and content of the "text" which they are learning from, and thus can be more effective than traditional educational approaches. The multimodal nature of this medium also makes comics especially well-suited for the modern learner who increasingly needs to be able to fluent in multiple forms of communication. The use of this medium as an educational tool is further strengthened by its variety, as comics can serve readers of numerous reading levels and diverse interests. Table 1 provides a compiled list of the comics noted previously in this body of work which helps to reinforce this point, as these are but a mere sampling of what the medium has to offer.

Furthermore, using comics as educational tool has been found to generate increased student engagement by taking advantage of their preexisting interest in the stories and characters. Because comics are still considered a non-traditional tool for education, they also do not carry the stigma attached to some traditional tools, i.e., the "boring old textbook", and can create greater levels of excitement amongst students when they are used to supplement or replace these more traditional learning apparatuses.

The use of comics as reading materials and the creation of comic books as an educational activity have both been found to be beneficial in an educational setting. These benefits include helping to increase the literacy rates and vocabulary levels, as well as assisting with the development of critical thinking and artistic skills. Comic books have also been found to be an effective tool in helping ELL students to develop their abilities to read, write, and comprehend English. Here again, the incorporation of images in these stories provides valuable contextual information for these readers. Also, due to the incredibly diverse nature of the medium and the stories told within these them, comics provide the opportunity for ELL students to learn using stories which relate closely to their backgrounds and personal experiences.

Another major benefit of using comics as an educational tool lies in their versatility. Not only can comics help to develop literacy and reading skills, but they have also been found to be a very effective tool for conveying health information to children. Comics have also shown great potential as a science education tool and could provide a solution to some of the challenges currently facing teachers seeking to increase student interest and engagement in STEM related subjects.

Comic	Grade Level	Topic Matter
Noodleheads	1-2	Humorous stories of twin noodle brothers who get into misadventures and shenanigans
Tiny Titans	1-3	Tells of the adventures of the superhero team the Teen Titans which is composed of the sidekicks of famous DC Comics superheroes
Owly	K-5	Focuses on the good deeds of the titular character and his friends
El Deafo	2-5	Memoir focusing on the author's experience losing her hearing as a child
Batman and Robin and Howard	4-6	Damien Wayne (Robin) gets sent to a new school where he learns the value of teamwork and friendship
Archie Comics	4-7	Variety of adventures of teenager Archie and his friends
The Essential Calvin and Hobbes: A Calvin and Hobbes Treasury	4+	A collection of comic strips depicting the real and imaged adventure of a young child (Calvin) and his best friend a stuffed tiger (Hobbes)
The Lost Carnival: A Dick Grayson Graphic Novel	7-9	A story of magic and young love centered around future superhero Dick Grayson during his time as a carnival performer
Spider-Man: Miles Morales Vol 1	7-10	Follows the adventures of the teenage superhero Miles Morales as he battles crimes as the new Spider-Man
Ms. Marvel Vol. 1: No Normal	9-12	Introduces a new Marvel character (Kamal Khan), a Muslim teenager who must learn how to navigate being a superhero when she is unexpectedly given extraordinary powers
Gotham High	10-11	A reimaging of iconic Batman heroes and villains as high school students at Gotham High School
Will Eisner's New York: Life in the Big City	10-12	Contains a series of short stories encapsuling a variety of aspects of life in New York City

Table 1. Suggested Comics for Educational Use Identified with Corresponding Grade Level and Topic Matter[1]

Comics have proven to be an enduringly popular form of entertainment for people of all ages. While these stories continue to be valuable source of leisure reading and enjoyment for younger readers, they also have the potential to be a valuable educational tool as well. As popular culture studies theorist Ray Browne notes, popular culture is the likes, dislikes, habits and attitudes of society, and helps to democratize society (Browne, 1997). Incorporating comics into educational curriculum speaks directly to this idea of taking something that is of great value and interest to the public and integrating it into one of the formalized structures of society (i.e., the educational systems) thus helping to contribute to the democratization of information, communication, and learning. Current research on their use in this manner provides both theoretical and practical support to this claim. However, the existing research on this subject is more limited than is ideal. This lack of exploration may be attributed to several factors, including a possible lack of awareness of their potential in the educational realm. With that in mind, the need for further exploration of their use in this manner is well warranted. The potential that has been demonstrated by comic books as an educational tool is incredibly exciting, and should future research support the findings of the studies highlighted in this body of work, could offer teachers another incredibly effective and versatile tool moving forward.

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[1] Grade levels are based on recommendations from Scholastic Teacher's catalog and Amazon book guides.

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Interview: Rachel Jurasevich and Building Bridges Between Popular Culture Studies and Narrative Studies

CarrieLynn D. Reinhard: Thank you for talking with me. I am going to get Zoom recording so that I can get the transcript.

Rachel Jurasevich: Life is easier when you do not have to transcribe.

CarrieLynn: Indeed. Tell me a little bit about who you are at this particular moment in time.

Rachel: I am entering my second year at Ohio State University. My background is in creative writing and rhetoric/composition. I did my undergraduate at Mills College in Creative Writing and my master's at Cal Poly Pomona in Rhetoric and Composition.

As far as what I'm interested in, one of the franchises I grew up with was Star Wars, and that is how I eventually found fanfiction, but it took a while. I had a shared desktop as a kid without context of where to look, and not too many of my friends were as into the universe as I was, so I wasn't sure of where to find content I was interested in by fans when I was young. I also found that I couldn't have conversations with people about fanfiction until my master's because it was something that felt too personal to discuss. In my final semester of my master's program, I took a narrative studies class, which was a mind blowing experience. That was when I realized it was what I wanted to do my entire academic career, but I didn't have the words and the direction to do it.

What also informs me is that I am generally a big fan of things like Star Trek, Lord of the Rings, Fallout, Transformers, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and more. I believe when you are a fan, you take on an active role where you have the capacity to critique it and to have critical conversations about what the work does. Doing so

RACHEL JURASEVICH is a Ph.D. student at The Ohio State University. In her own research, she focuses on intersections of rhetorical narrative theory, pop culture, and fan studies. Her latest work examines the effects of narrative ethics produced through paratextual communication by authors of *Star Wars* fanfiction on sites like Archive of Our Own. Outside of her academic work, she serves as the current Editor-in-Chief for *Pomona Valley Review*, a literary arts journal created and run by graduate students since 2002.

just enriches the entire conversation – it enriches your relationship with the work and structures it exists within, and that also allows you to connect with people and shifting perspectives. For example, I have had validating experiences with the scholarly Star Wars community when discussing issues I perceived as a child to be questionably racist when watching The Phantom Menace, but back then I didn't know where to find conversations about those issues. Getting to have these conversations with people in the community is something that has been so invaluable over time. I want to continue that conversation by focusing on fanfiction as a very valid form of fan response and production as a way to have those discussions.

CarrieLynn: Especially with Star Wars, fanfiction has had a rocky history when you go back to prequels era.

Rachel: There's still rocky history happening with the Sequel trilogy, too, and it's a helpful thing to be aware of. With the paratext of fanfiction on A03 of the most current films, for example, I am trying to figure out the lines of ethical communication between author and reader, but also the conventions that are created within that community in response to something like re-characterizing General Hux. What does it mean to give him a sympathetic story in the grand scheme of what is canon? The fandom community is having really important, critical conversations right now about these topics.

CarrieLynn: Fascinating! So, you are at OSU. Are you in the English department?

Rachel: Yes, as Narrative Studies, I fall under the umbrella of the English department. Eventually, when I have my advising meeting, something I will need to figure out is where I settle major-wise. I would like to be in that bridge between popular culture and narrative studies.

CarrieLynn: Yes, that was me, too, while there. I was in the bridge of communication and media studies and film studies. So, I had classes over in the English department when I was there, and I think that is an interesting question to ask. How do you see the bridge between narrative studies and popular culture studies? Do you see it as a beneficial bridge? Have there been bumps on the bridge? What is your sense about that relationship?

Rachel: That is a great question, and I preface this, too, because I am still relatively new to narrative studies that I am figuring out the ropes. In and outside of the projects that I have worked on so far, at least, conversations between pop culture and narrative studies are always happening. Narrative studies can be such a niche field, but the fundamental elements can be important for anybody who is interested in the surface of storytelling alone. With narrative studies, I want to bring that over into popular culture from a fan production standpoint. From a rhetorical standpoint, narrative is so connective to people's everyday lives that these two things can't not come together. Because they are inseparable, it is just a matter of what balance to strike when that conversation happens between the fields.

CarrieLynn: I would imagine narrative studies has a little bit longer history, especially attached to literature. Have you been experiencing any kind of pushback? Like anyone looking at you a little bit askew because you want to look at something that they might consider more popular culture and fan studies, and maybe less legitimate.

Rachel: I think pushback is valid. I often have to give context about what fanfiction is and can do, but my advisor is incredibly supportive, and because he's so well established in the field, it's validating to hear him taking my ideas seriously. I also looked at previous dissertations that people wrote at OSU, and there was somebody who recently graduated that looked at alternate universe fanfiction. It was fascinating but also encouraging, so I am curious to see how my place in the field will develop.

I can also add that my cohort has been very supportive. There have been plenty of instances where they'll say, "I read fanfiction, I want to talk about it," and I want to bring attention to how interconnected the spaces of fandom practices are to academic discourses. And this extends to conferences where a lot of people dabble in fascinating ways through interconnected disciplines like my cohort.

CarrieLynn: It does seem that at this point in time, there is more acceptance of not even just necessarily popular culture or fan studies – which to me fan studies is a subset of popular culture studies – it is that interdisciplinarity seems to be much more accepted.

Rachel: I agree on the note of acceptance. When I initially crafted my Hux paratext project, my personal anxiety of not knowing how it would be received made me question if it was worth doing. But the rhetorical focus I spent a semester working through helped ground my approach so I could look at the communicative effects of author and readerly positionalities, and how the fictionality and nonfictionalities we engage with every day is something that helps us work through important cultural discussions – for example the implications of sympathetic retellings of unsympathetic characters. When I also started my paratext study, I'd found one or two pieces focusing on fanfiction in a prominent narrative studies journal. Going back to bridging gaps, I'd like to see more publications that address textual fanfiction as an expression of narrative play and pop culture.

CarrieLynn: What would you define as popular culture?

Rachel: I think on one level, it includes everything that we encounter content-wise: shows, movies, books, and everything that helps us think about where we fit into or not in the world. But then it can also be defined through questions related to the fandom side of things. How do works structure information audiences actively or passively receive? How are we processing it? How are we as fans using texts we enjoy, and creating works that re-address ideologies present in past works to improve or expand? How can we encourage content creators, especially under corporations like Disney for Star Wars, to reconsider the implications of content that produces lasting narrative impacts across generational spectrums. For me, the responsive fan elements of pop culture is what I latch onto as a way to define it within my research.

CarrieLynn: So, going to the – I guess, by this point, classic – Henry Jenkins textual poaching, empowering approach. But I mean popular cultures consist largely of three entities that are in these dynamic relationships with each other: content or texts, audiences with responses, and the industries and systems within which all of that is circulated. And you are more interested in – if I think about it as a communication loop – the feedback from receiver to sender.

Rachel: That's definitely what the rhetorical narrative model provides: there is always a feedback loop that helps us as fans, as enjoyers of media, scholars, etc., to

dig into the question of who does the telling, for what reason, and how structures we might internalize affect future engagement or our work.

CarrieLynn: When you think about your research, then, in looking at fanfiction, do you have the goal of hopefully being able to educate people – educate audiences, educate content producers. I mean, what impact would you hope that your research could have?

Rachel: I know I want to bridge the two fields – the narrative and the pop culture spheres – by bringing the tools of fanfiction and fandom into the classroom. Last semester, I proposed a course that got approval to specifically look at how fandom is constituted across not just fanfiction but other modes of engagement, like sports media. I would hope this type of research is generative for students, some of whom might be writers and readers of fanfiction, for example. I want to offer students a space to process how tools of narrative studies can deepen their personal connections with content they're interested in. And to extend their ideas to empower people in their lives to think more critically about their positionalities within pop culture and beyond.

CarrieLynn: So many people are engaging with fandoms in their day-to-day lives, that fanfiction is just as valid as literature or anything else that we engage with. We need to teach what we talk about, right? It is kind of that idea of Shakespeare during his time was popular culture.

Rachel: True. The production of fanfiction also reminds me of Charles Dickens in some sense with how serialization and works in progress can inform writer-audience feedback loops. I would hope that fanfiction gets a fair shake.

CarrieLynn: When you are also saying that you are interested in influencing students, are you thinking college, high school, or younger than that?

Rachel: For the time being, because I am at OSU, I'd love to work with undergraduates. In the English 1110 courses I've taught, which is about writing and information literacy, I work to bring my voice into the curriculum. Because my students are asked to create personal research projects across the semester, I try to model versions of the projects using my research interests to encourage students to

see how they can also incorporate their experiences and voices into their work. It allows them to see who I am, and what I am interested in. In the past, I had a student create a project around Hello Kitty, which led to her questioning the changing formats of the animated shorts by focusing on their seriality and duration. It gives me life to see students actively use what might initially feel like abstract tools in narrative studies to explore what's already familiar to them. At the end of the day, it's their ideas and their work, but offering them a set of tools to start developing their research questions and directions is my goal.

CarrieLynn: I know this type of work also occurs at high school levels. Libraries are doing it, increasingly. I am on a Ph.D. dissertation committee at my school for an information studies and library studies student analyzing the information needs of queer fanfiction writers.

Rachel: I love that. Historically, fanfiction has existed as queer spaces and ways of expressing and exploring gender and sexuality. And, with how concentrated platforms like A03 have blown up in the last decade in contrast to sites I used to get fics from like Angelfire, LiveJournal, and Quizilla, which doesn't even exist anymore, there's also more consideration toward the diversity of fanfiction offerings.

Back in my master's program, when I first started to ask how I could do something with fanfiction, my rhetoric and composition focus led me to scholars like Rebecca Black, whose work focused on literacy studies for English-language learners. I found her work to be inspiring because she merged literacy, fanfiction, the experience of people of color, which I identify with, and their connections to grade school and high school. What she's done was something that I didn't know I needed to hear, but I needed to hear it.

CarrieLynn: You mentioned that it was something you did not think you needed to hear. Have you had other experiences where, during a master's or into the Ph.D., you have had these encounters with knowledge, skills, or scholars that kind of just sparked that epiphany?

Rachel: When I first looked into master's programs, I had honestly thought to pursue literature as opposed to rhetoric and composition because that was closer to what I was familiar with in my undergraduate studies. But the more that I

researched what rhetoric and composition was, and what Cal Poly's program offered, it combined my undergraduate love for creative writing and literature with a critical focus toward understanding the structures that informed my past experiences as a writer and reader.

An early "aha!" moment happened in my first rhetoric course that made me realize it is where I needed to be to have the conversations I desired to have but didn't have the toolkit for. Following that, another "aha!" moment I mentioned earlier came in the final semester of my master's program when I took an intro to narrative studies class with Dr. Donald Kraemer. The readings, discussions, and research I did for that class empowered me to realize the combination of rhetoric and narrative studies was what I wanted to do. Up until that point, I was doing forms of narrative studies in an unconcentrated manner. So, while applying to Ph.D. programs, OSU became my top choice because I wanted to more directly combine my love of fanfiction with studying it through a lens of narrative, rhetoric, and pop culture.

CarrieLynn: What do you think helped you navigate all of that?

Rachel: Aside from my master's coursework, the small program I was in allowed me to have conversations with professors outside of classes. I want to shout out Dr. Kate Ozment, an associate professor in literature at Cal Poly for this reason. After taking her class on Transatlantic literature, she was very kind to offer me help with figuring out the process of reworking and submitting my work to journals. That opened up room for me to reach out to other professors so I could start connecting the dots to research fanfiction. Just having those brainstorming sessions allowed me to bounce ideas and gave me something as simple as key wording and phrasing to start searching through databases I had access to at that time.

Once I started figuring out the basics, my next step was to ask, how are people writing about fandom and fanfiction? What is the history of the work? I also need to shout out my best friend since undergraduate, Tiffany Watson, because she has been my sounding board for over a decade. Her openness to unraveling ideas with me has been an invaluable support system because it also lets me rethink concepts I'm still learning about. Connected to academia, I joined a writing group last year that supported me first as a person and as an academic. I would not be here without these support networks.

CarrieLynn: Which is interesting. We often hear the stereotype of the scholar is the person who is sitting by themselves, nose in a book. But it does not seem that that is always the best, most fruitful, or even healthiest approach when it comes to scholarship.

Rachel: Going back to my points about my cohort, the conversations we have in the grad lounge or other spaces is where ideas from coursework and project threads carry over and click for me. By myself, I'll write six versions of a single essay because there are so many ideas that I want to put into it. But having people willing to listen and hear what I am trying to say, being open to letting me know what I have to tease out, or that I am not making enough connections yet is key. Even though I remind myself my ideas are valid, I don't think I would be where I am without all of that. It also reflects aspects of fandom – although we're all in it for some reason or another, the interconnections we create helps us develop.

CarrieLynn: I do not know if it was my generation or the generations in the past, there was always this talk about being careful with your ideas. You do not want them to get stolen. Have you ever come across that concern?

Rachel: I haven't found myself butting up against this experience, but it's valid and I don't want to disregard very real concerns. I am also in the early stages of my career, and I'm still meeting people. In spaces like conferences or social media, I want to create connections, but I also try to be cognizant of my own time and boundaries. And that's an exercise I am always working on, which can be difficult.

CarrieLynn: I also think that social networking sites like Twitter and others, and the extent to which people have that support system, even indirectly, or just the willingness to be there for people, even if you do not know them – all of that seems to be growing in academia.

Rachel: I agree. Recently, Adam Sherif, a fellow presenter at the Realizing Resistance Episode III conference I attended, turned out to be a friend of a friend in my writing group. I bring him up because it was initially through Discord, email, and then a personal connection that helped us meet over Zoom and have a wonderfully generative conversation about our work, ideas, and to just be fans over stuff. I don't think I could imagine working up the courage to talk to people prior

to my graduate career, but opening myself up and saying I want to have these conversations with people is, again, a process.

CarrieLynn: That was one of the hardest things was to get over, the shock that these "big name scholars" – these BNSs – are just human beings and a lot of them are really nice. That if you reach out to them, it is good.

Rachel: That is exactly what I have been trying to do. Dr. Katlin Sweeney-Romero, who is a dear friend and currently working at UC Davis, set me up for conferences early on. In my second conference experience where I presented with a brilliant panel of women (including Kiedra Taylor, a fellow Ph.D. student and the founder of Write On Black Girl!, and Dr. Christian M. Hines who works at Texas State University), Katie encouraged me to acknowledge my feelings of vulnerability, but to also challenge myself to speak to at least three people by the end of the conference.

It's never as bad as I think it's going to be. The gentle nudge to hold me accountable by reporting on three conversations I had with big name scholars helped ease the worry I went in with. And I try to pay it forward by encouraging friends to do something similar.

CarrieLynn: Seeing places like PCA and MPCA – I am going to guess other ones as well – increasing these mentor programs that they have on site for conferences, that is hopeful. I was also brought up on ICA – International Communication Association – which might be a little bit more cutthroat.

Rachel: There are plenty of smaller societies where dynamics might be tougher to break through, and I don't want to invalidate anyone's experiences. But, so far, the experiences that I've had with the people that I've either presented with or am friends with within certain societies, has been encouraging.

CarrieLynn: If you were to give a piece of advice to an undergraduate who is thinking graduate school, or a grad student who is just about to start – and they are somehow engaging in popular culture studies – well, given your experiences, what would you tell them?

Rachel: Oh, that is a big question. I think one stage, which is advice my dad always told me, and what I also tell my students, is that there is no dumb question. Much of what I am doing now has come from learning how to ask questions that I worried were going to be disregarded because I was afraid of not being smart enough, which is its own can of worms. But if you find people you are interested in talking to, or maybe you find a book, and it happens to be by an author who is at a university, and they have their email listed on the website – it's okay to reach out. The worst that can happen is you get no response. Then you can figure out, okay, is there somebody else that maybe I can talk to instead or a Discord to join?

I would also say, practice and work your way up, but ask those questions. It's not always cut and dry in systems that can undercut student agency, but there are ways to empower yourself into those spaces with questions. By the time your focus becomes more niche, or you're starting to figure out who is in the field, then you can figure out who is talking about the things that are important to you. And it's okay to reach out to them. Your ideas matter even if responses might not validate them from the outset.

CarrieLynn: From my perspective I would say, if someone says that your question is dumb, then that person is someone you do not have to talk to, and you can move on. Their response is not a reflection of you.

Rachel: Exactly, and it might just be the situation: that person might be having a bad day, you never know. It's not a perfect response because there can be any number of systemic roadblocks, and advice is easier to give.

CarrieLynn: You need at least ten rejections under your belt before you start being better with rejection. And that is, of course, if you do not have rejection sensitive dysphoria, which makes handling any rejection harder. But the lovely thing is these days, the more open we are, and genuine, I think the more the same will be visited upon us.

Rachel: I have friends who remind me "you're learning, and it's okay." Plus, everybody is at a different stage, and it is okay to not feel adequate, but to recognize that you're here for a reason. It just takes time. My best friend loves to tell me "It's a marathon, not a sprint," and I need to hear that a lot.

Introduction

CHRISTOPHER J. OLSON

In the spirit of the current special issue on constructed languages, I wanted to consider how popular culture functions like a language, and for that I looked to the work of linguist Arika Okrent. In her book *In the Land of Invented Languages*, Okrent writes:

> The variety of shape, pattern, and color found in the languages of the world is a testament to the wonder of nature, to the breathtaking array of possibilities that can emerge, tangled and wild, from the fertile human endowments of brain and larynx, intelligence, and social skills. (5)

This idea could easily describe popular culture, which demonstrates its own variety of shapes, patterns, and colors across a wide assortment of media, platforms, and technologies. Popular culture is a language in and of itself, one that features numerous dialects that take the form of movies, TV, novels, comic books, video games, board games, and more. Fans of popular culture texts learn to speak this language, using it to converse with other likeminded individuals and create communities that forge connections via references that only other fans truly understand. From Whovians to MSTies, from Trekkies to Warsies, and from Sherlockians to members of the SPN family, fandoms speak the language of popular culture but do so in a plethora of different accents.

It is the job of popular culture scholars to decode these various vernaculars and thereby understand the relationship between popular culture and fans, or popular culture and society, or popular culture and other forms of culture. In this way, popular culture scholars are not unlike linguists. Again, I turn to Okrent who contends:

> The job of the linguist, like that of the biologist or the botanist, is not to tell us how nature should behave, or what its creations should look like, but to describe those creations in all their messy glory and try to figure out what they can teach us about life, the world, and, especially in the case of linguistics, the workings of the human mind. (5)

Popular culture scholars similarly study popular texts and those who consume them to understand what they can tell us about life, the world, and the workings of the human mind. In other words, to paraphrase Douglas Adams, we study popular

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culture and its fans to better understand life, the universe, and everything. In our capacity as researchers of popular culture, we study films, TV, video games, comic books, and the like to translate their specific languages and uncover how they both reflect and shape society. We also study these texts to explore how fans, those who immerse themselves in the dialect of different popular texts, use these languages to connect with one another. Doing so helps us recognize the impact that these texts have on people and the world(s) they inhabit.

The reviews collected in this issue all discuss books or other texts that demonstrate the range of the popular culture dialect. First, in keeping with the special issue, one of the guest editors provides a review of David Peterson's *The Art of Language Invention: From Horse-Lords to Dark Elves to Sand Worms, the Words Behind World-Building*. This seminal text presents an introduction to those unfamiliar with constructed languages or conlangs. Then, Gabrielle Stecher of Indiana University Bloomington looks at Ruby Blondell's monograph *Helen of Troy in Hollywood*, which analyzes onscreen depictions of the woman whose face "launched a thousand ships" to understand what such portrayals reveal about numerous sociocultural issues. Next, Adrielys Calderon Ortiz of the Ohio State University reviews *Monstrous Things: Essays on Ghosts, Vampires, and Things That Go Bump in the Night*, which collects some of media scholar Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock's essays on supernatural creatures. Dennis Owen Frohlich of Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania returns to tell readers about Dale Leorke and Daneille Wyatt's book *The Library as Playground: How Games and Play are Reshaping Public Culture*, a look at how libraries around the world use games and play to reach new audiences and publics. Finally, frequent reviewer Elizabeth Shiller briefly analyzes the blockbuster film and cultural phenomenon *Barbie* while Hee-seong Lim offers insight into the K-drama series *The Glory*.

Before I send you off to read these thoughtful and engaging reviews, I would like to take a moment to recognize my new assistant editor, Casey O'Ceallaigh of the University of Wisconsin - Whitewater. I will let Casey introduce themself:

> Casey is a lecturer at UW - Whitewater who received their PhD in English: Media, Cinema, and Digital studies from UW - Milwaukee in 2023. Their research focuses on game and sound studies as well as digital rhetoric. They have published chapters in collected works such as *Gender and Sexuality in Video Game Sound* edited by Dana Plank, *Live Streaming Culture* edited by Bo Ruberg, and *Approaches to Digital Game Studies* edited by Josh Call.

> When they are not teaching or researching, you can find them either playing games or making them.

I greatly appreciate Casey's invaluable input on the content and writing of these reviews, as their feedback helped me ensure that the Reviews section is once again as well-written as possible.

As always, I want to encourage readers of the *Popular Culture Studies Journal* to reach out to me if they would like to submit their own constructive reviews. We have helpfully provided links to several publishers' websites in the "Submitting Reviews" section of the PCSJ website, and you are welcome to browse titles published within the last two years to see if there are any you might want to review. We also need reviews of films, TV shows, games (both digital and analog), comic books, and other recent popular texts, and I urge readers to submit suggestions. If you would like to review something for the PCSJ, please reach out to me via email at chrstphrolson@gmail.com. Now, on to the reviews.

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Special Issue Book Review

Peterson, David J. *The Art of Language Invention: From Horse-Lords to Dark Elves to Sand Worms, the Words Behind World-Building.* Penguin Books, 2021.

David J. Peterson's *The Art of Language Invention* is an introduction to the world of conlanging, or created languages, of which he has created nearly 50. With the surging popularity of conlangs like Klingon (*Star Trek*), Na'vi (*Avatar*), and Peterson's own Dothraki (*Game of Thrones*), it's not surprising that more content creators than ever are interested in either constructing their own conlang or, as Peterson suggests, hiring a professional conlanger with which to collaborate. Often framed as a "fun introduction to linguistics," colleges like UC San Diego who offer classes in the topic are surging in popularity (Drozdowski). However, as the essays in this volume show, academic interest in conlangs has gone beyond departments of linguistics into the many roles that conlangs are playing in popular culture. While Peterson's book serves as a useful introduction to the topic from the how-to perspective, his vivid "case studies" and glimpses behind the scene offer compelling material for students of popular culture more broadly.

For Peterson, a conlang is "any language that has been *consciously* created by one or more individuals in its fullest form," with the caveat that "the intent or the result of the creation process is a fully functional linguistic system" (emphasis in original 16). Peterson distinguishes these languages from the more common "fictional languages" like the Ubese language of *Star Wars* (16), which from his perspective is only a "sketch" and not a "fully developed conlang" (19).

Peterson's stated purpose is to "help conlangers avoid expending mental energy on some of the nuts and bolts of language creation so they can focus on the more important question: What do I want to say with this new language that I can't say in my native language – or any other language that exists?" (16). To that end, Peterson provides extensive commentary and examples of linguistic principles useful for aspiring conlangers, such as phonetics, words, phrases, grammars, and evolution (language change), drawn mostly from his background in linguistics. Much of this "nuts and bolts" material is admittedly technical and assumes a fairly deep familiarity with linguistics. For example, his section on negation strategies

includes this observation: “And so we had our negation strategy: A full negative auxiliary that resulted in nominative-accusative alignment in negative clauses while retaining ergative-absolutive alignment in positive clauses” (233). Interpreting such text may be as challenging as deciphering a complex line of Dothraki, but it does demonstrate the challenge of creating a fully-functional conlang. Indeed, his advice in the book’s postscript is that many writers may simply want to collaborate with a professional conlanger already well-versed in linguistics. For those who are interested in learning more about linguistics, however, this book would serve as a useful textbook, particularly for a class in a university linguistics program (perhaps at the graduate level) on writing conlangs.

The fifth chapter of the book concerns writing systems and is perhaps the most engrossing for non-linguists. Peterson includes numerous examples of his own conscripts (Irathient, Castithan, and Indojisnen) as well as alphabets, abjads, and syllabaries from other conlangers, many of which, like Trent Pehrson’s Kstalai or Sylvia Sotomayr’s Ceremonial Interlace Alphabet, are simply stunning. Peterson develops conscripting as an iterative process, starting from a proto-system that evolves over (fictional) time as writing technology and media evolve. As with other chapters, Peterson provides examples from real languages as well as rather imaginative conscripts, and even includes instructions for creating fonts to accommodate the conscript. Due to the highly visual nature of this chapter, Peterson’s discussion and examples are cogent and fascinating. Perhaps a future edition of this book might include a sound library so that the preceding chapters could also be more accessible to non-linguists – or at least those who are less comfortable with International Auxiliary Language (IAL), which Peterson uses in the bulk of his other examples.

While Peterson focuses on the linguistics of conlanging, he does provide a series of “case studies” and behind-the-scenes anecdotes that are sure to be of interest to scholars researching Dothraki and other conlangs. For example, in “The Sound of Dothraki,” Peterson reveals that he was instructed to make the language sound “foreign and ‘harsh’” (89). One of Peterson’s techniques (guided by the few words and phrases supplied to him by George R. R. Martin) was to use non-English consonants and overemphasize words with sounds like [x], or the *kh* in words like “*khal, khaleesi,* and *arakh*” (93). Knowing which words would more frequently appear in the script was helpful in this process, as he could prioritize these particular sounds in words that the audience would hear in many episodes.

More importantly, the idea that any language may sound "harsh" and that a "harsh" language is fitting for any group of people, whether historical or fictional, is at the very least problematic. Peterson acknowledges that what sounds "harsh" or "guttural" is relative; "German may sound harsh to an American speaker, but might not to a Dutch speaker from the Netherlands" (25). Peterson argues that while "the history of cultural stereotyping" certainly plays a role in conlanging, "It's the comparison of entire sound systems that produces a phonaesthetic character in the mind of the listener," which includes "a number of sociological factors" (25). Peterson does not enumerate these factors, but undoubtedly one must be the tendency of cultural appropriation. For example, Adams argues that Okrand's Klingon language contains "phonological or grammatical features of some Native American languages or Southeast Asian languages – the languages with which Okrand was most familiar [...] but, for the most part, not by design" (Adams 118). Even if such borrowing is respectful, mindful, and ethical, more problematic possibilities could arise. What if a conlanger's cultural bias led them to incorporate sounds or other features from natural languages spoken by vulnerable cultures in order to make their fictional people seem more warlike or barbaric? Even if the borrowing was done unconsciously and without ill intent, as Adams and Peterson suggest, such a conlang could reinforce negative stereotypes about those languages and speakers in the real world. How can conlangers guard against inadvertently reinforcing cultural stereotypes as they create their languages?

Peterson suggests somewhat paradoxically that while a careful study of historical (natural) languages is essential for any conlanger, conlangs nevertheless fall into two distinct categories: *a priori* and *a posteriori*. The key difference is that the former is "not based on an existing language," whereas the latter is "drawn from an existing language" (19). Despite Peterson's demarcation, it seems precarious to assume that even the most deliberately "alien" conlang could truly be bereft of any and all influence from the creator's own language(s). This point is seemingly reinforced by the many examples where Peterson notes that English speakers may tend to apply one rule or principle simply because they are unaware of common alternatives in other languages. More to the point, Marc Okrand, who developed Klingon into a fully-fledged conlang (and whose work Peterson mentions throughout the book), "Cribbed from natural languages, borrowing sounds and sentence-building rules…[to produce] an ungodly combination of Hindi, Arabic, Tlingit, and Yiddish" (Okrent, 2009), and others have noted how Klingon

"resembles agglutinative languages,[1] among which are many Native American and Southeast Asian languages familiar to Okrand" (Okrand et al., 122). The versions of Elvish are also well known for having been developed from existing rules in a number of existing languages.

It is not clear if Peterson would classify Klingon as an *a priori* or *a posteriori* language given these facts, but it would seem more a matter of degree than absolutes. It would be revealing on this question to study and compare conlangs created by speakers of many different languages. Would conlangs created by Dutch speakers from the Netherlands differ in any predictable fashion from those by Peterson or Okrand?

If conlangers should be aware of unconscious appropriation and bias when creating their conlangs, are there any aspects where they might make a positive contribution to a more equitable society? One intriguing (if brief) glimpse Peterson provides concerns "feminine pejoration" (182). After noting the "specific and frustrating" way that the "female-referring word" in pairs like bull and cow reveal a "pattern of misogyny" inherent in historical languages, Peterson reminds us that conlangers are not required to adhere to it. He writes, "As a language creator, it's often a difficult thing to balance realism and ethics," and notes that even though speakers of a conlang may well be patriarchal in their thinking, "creating a language means creating the vocabularies of *all* speakers. A language's lexicon contains words used by the privileged and the disenfranchised…There's always room for representation of all aspects of a culture" (emphasis in original 182). These seeds of discussion and analysis seem quite fruitful for conlangers seeking to apply their art for ends beyond the page or screen. What would a conlang that was purged of all such unfortunate vestiges look like? Would learning such a language help reveal unconscious biases inherent in natural languages?

All in all, Peterson's *The Art of Language Invention* is a useful text for scholars and advanced students of popular culture interested in the art and business of conlanging. Beyond the linguistic material and practical advice for practitioners of the art, Peterson provides copious anecdotes and examples from his rich experience on many of the most successful shows and movies ever to feature a conlang or conscript.

Matthew Barton

[1] Agglutinative languages allow "many more prefixes, infixes, or suffixes" to words than isolating languages like English, which rely more on word order to convey meaning (Okrand et al, 122).

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Book Reviews

Blondell, Ruby. *Helen of Troy in Hollywood*. Princeton UP, 2023.

Helen of Troy, whose abduction by the Trojan prince Paris according to Greek myth initiated the decade-long Trojan War, remains an object of fantasy, ever present in the public imagination yet continually out of our grasp. Women including Elizabeth Taylor, who was well-established at the time as a legendary Hollywood beauty, but most often newcomers such as Diane Kruger, the German model-turned-actor, have taken on this role and the attempt to realize Helen with varying degrees of success. How does any woman, even those who are disarmingly, conventionally attractive, live up to Christopher Marlow's oft-quoted description of "the face that launched a thousand ships?" How could one woman ever confidently embody this mythical being for which the beauty standards are unachievably, superhumanly high? Stepping into the role of Helen is an invitation for intense criticism from all sides, and the scrutiny is nothing short of personal as it is so often directed towards the

actor's body. In her latest book *Helen of Troy in Hollywood*, Classics professor Ruby Blondell discusses these challenges – the casting and reception of Helen in film and television – and more.

Helen of Troy in Hollywood provides an enlightening and accessible overview of the pervasive presence of Zeus's daughter in American popular culture, ranging from silent Hollywood cinema to televised speculative fiction. A must read for scholars of both classical reception and popular culture, this book is notable for the way Blondell unpacks how popular culture democratizes and adapts ancient narratives in ways that reveal as much, if not more, about ourselves as producers and consumers of myth as they do about the woman whose beauty has, for centuries, inspired countless artworks. Though there have been and will continue to be many adaptations and performances of Helen across media, Blondell narrows her scope by only considering productions in which Helen is a named and therefore unmistakably identifiable character. Crucially, Blondell invites readers to consider how the adaptation, casting, and performance of Helen on screen is intimately tied not just to questions of beauty and gender, but also of race and sexual violence.

One of the greatest strengths of this volume lies in its first chapter, "Olympus Moves to Hollywood," which tasks readers with thinking critically about the relationship between film, antiquity, and femininity. Perhaps most exciting, however, is the way Blondell contextualizes how and why Hollywood historically took great pains to associate the burgeoning industry with antiquity and, even more specifically, its classical beauty standards that push the boundaries of how sexuality and the body could be displayed on screen, while also presenting film as a means of disseminating high culture to all classes. Further, Blondell cites Greek myth's "provision of material that is not of this world – the supernatural, the monstrous, the unreal – as fodder for the new medium's illusionistic power" (23). An additional thread that emerges in these discussions is that, though Helen dominates Blondell's narrative, the author also provides us mechanisms through which to reconsider other performances by antiquity's most dangerous women, including the vamp roles of Cleopatra and Salome.

In chapter two, Blondell centralizes the First National silent film *The Private Life of Helen of Troy* (1927), starring European movie star Maria Corda and directed by her husband Alexander Korda, loosely adapted from the 1925 John Erskine novel of the same name. In it, Blondell considers how the film presents Helen's various identities, born out of Corda's pairing of classical beauty and European exoticism, as well her Helen's insistence upon being identified as both a

modern woman and an immortal. In doing so, Blondell illuminates how Helen was presented and received as an unruly vamp and how the film, therefore, was positioned as a "variation on the flapper film" (53).

Blondell begins "Part II: Big Screen Epic" with a study of *Helen of Troy*, the 1956 Warner Brothers film starring the Italian Rossana Podestà in the titular role, within the context of "Hollywood's second wave of big budget epics" (85). In addition to a fascinating overview of the studio's casting of Helen and the film's anti-vulgar insistence, she usefully clarifies how the film reflects Christian "American Cold War ideals, with the beautiful Helen embodying virtuous 1950s femininity" (100). Chapter four shifts the discussion to *Troy* (2004), as a case study for the ancient epic's third wave, one that was intent upon "glorifying the male action hero" at the cost of its female characters, including not just a deglamorized, static Helen but also Thetis, the divine mother of the great Greek warrior Achilles, and the Trojan women Andromache, Hecuba, and Cassandra (132). Blondell ultimately argues that *Troy*'s Helen is deglamorized and decentered from the narrative by Brad Pitt, whose performance as Achilles allows him to become "a male Helen for the turn of the twenty-first century" (160).

Finally, in the third section of the volume, Blondell shifts her attention to Helen's presence on television. Chapter five considers the Helens of the telefantasies *Star Trek: The Original Series* and *Xena: Warrior Princess.* In the case of *Star Trek* and through the exotic character Elaan of Troyius, Blondell homes in on the series' racial politics and the "threat of the feminine Other" (181). In her discussion of *Xena: Warrior Princess,* Blondell once again considers race and the series' "dethroning [of] 'Greek' beauty and its oppressive baggage," while also considering *Xena* as a series predicated upon female identification (216).

Though the book possesses pedagogical value, for those interested in teaching classical retellings in popular media, the preface to *Helen of Troy in Hollywood,* which contextualizes the relationship between antiquity and pop culture, makes for accessible and engaging introductory reading. Teachers of mythological retellings may also take interest in Blondell's reception case study of USA's *Helen of Troy* (2003) miniseries in chapter six. Throughout the volume's presentation of these productions' reception histories, Blondell delineates between professional criticism and amateur blogging, and she criticizes the amateur trend of chastising "inaccuracies" introduced by the taking of any creative liberties (especially feminist ones) in the adaptation of classical source texts. The most intriguing reception study, however, comes from her citation of teenaged Filipina students' IMDb

reviews of *Helen of Troy*, submitted as an assignment for an English class. Her analysis of these reviews reveals how, instead of faulting the series' inaccuracies, the students responded enthusiastically to the way its "emotional impact… enable[d] them to understand the *Iliad* better by making it 'real' in their terms" (260-1). This audience study allows Blondell to discuss the pedagogical necessity of studying such texts that encourage a "sophisticated understanding of mythology, canonicity, and tradition" (263).

Many of us come to appreciate and enter the world of classics through popular films; Blondell presents herself as no exception. Yet what she ultimately does is provide a toolkit for us to reexamine our relationship with these stories, their sexual and racial politics, as well as their accuracy and realism, and to imagine the future of what further woman-centric myth retellings – across all forms of media – may bring.

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Leorke, Dale and Daneille Wyatt. *The Library as Playground: How Games and Play Are Reshaping Public Culture*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2022.

Media formats are often pitted against one other with some viewed as superior or more artistic than others. While books and cinema have often been afforded the highest praises for their aesthetic merits, other media formats – such as video games – have long been denigrated as childish, immature, commercial, or crass. Some might be surprised to learn that public libraries, often considered storehouses of knowledge that collect historical and contemporary literary works for the intellectual benefit of society, are increasingly turning their attention to games in all their formats. In *The Library as Playground*, the authors argue that libraries are "[n]o longer only 'cathedrals of knowledge,' detached from their surroundings and

devoted to silent study" but rather have embraced "games and play in all their forms" (xi). In this short, compact book, Dale Leorke and Danielle Wyatt showcase how libraries support games and video games through dedicated children's zones, collections of physical and digital media, installations of escape rooms and other interactive exhibits, and more. Utilizing ethnographic research, the authors' observations span the globe, from Australia to Finland to Singapore and more, to uncover how modern public libraries are reaching new audiences through games.

Chapter 1 begins with an introduction to play and gamification, concepts familiar to anybody immersed in game studies research. They connect the idea of play to public institutions, and how modern cities are increasingly reimagining and incorporating into the fabric of the urban environment. They discuss how digitalization and technology, rather than making libraries obsolete, have allowed libraries to adapt and serve their publics in new and interesting ways. Relying extensively on Huizinga's theory that play is constitutive of culture, the authors argue that play, rather than being antithetical to the image of a peaceful space people often attribute to libraries, is central to how libraries operate. As the book unfolds, play is defined not just in terms of board games or video games that libraries loan to patrons, but that play is imbued throughout a library's structure, from the physical building to the sense of discovery that happens whenever one explores a library's collections and uncovers new bits of knowledge.

Chapter 2, subtitled "The Early History of Games in Public Libraries," argues that gaming collections are not a new development, but rather have existed in various forms for decades. From a world-renowned collection of chess books, magazines, and reports donated to the State Library Victoria between 1959-1966, to billiard parlors in British libraries, to early examples of children's spaces in American libraries, this chapter argues that gaming, while obviously not the focus of libraries, has nevertheless been a component of libraries worldwide long before video games were invented. While the examples included in this chapter are compelling, the scantness of the proceedings (nine pages, including pictures) leaves this reader wanting more.

Chapter 3 contains the primary meat of the book, detailing the numerous ways contemporary public libraries position gaming as part of their mission. While video games and board games constitute the bulk of the discussion here, the authors also detail less-common forms of gaming, including immersive experiences, escape rooms, and live-action roleplaying (or LARPs), which are more common in Nordic countries. The authors argue that "games rarely supplant books in libraries" (56).

Instead, they invite new people into the library who might never have engaged with the libraries' physical collections without gaming.

Chapter 4 changes the focus to the built environment, showcasing how libraries reimagine their physical spaces, and even the building itself and its connection to the outside environment. In effect, this chapter considers how libraries themselves are in a state of play. From children and teen zones dedicated to play, video game and media rooms, computer labs, and even makerspaces containing 3D printers and other design tools, today's libraries are often a far cry from the dark, quiet, musty spaces of decades' past. Contemporary libraries hold numerous gatherings for various publics, from children's programs to hackerspaces to science programs and more, which expands the notion of play in libraries "temporally, spatially, and socially" (90).

Chapter 5 focuses more on social gatherings, specifically the support public libraries offer the games industry by providing spaces for groups, independent developers, and hobbyists to come together to create new games, digital or otherwise. The book ends with a short chapter 6, which meditates on the state of public libraries and gaming. The authors return to Huizinga, arguing that libraries can fit the definition of his "magic circle," a space set apart from the world for the purposes of play. This is linked to Foucault's idea of libraries as a heterotopia, "a meta-space that is separate from everyday or lived space but which reflects upon or re-orders lived space in crucial ways" (111). The authors end with a discussion of whether libraries function as a "third space," that is, a gathering place that is neither work nor home. While some researchers argue that libraries can indeed offer such social space to their communities, the authors also caution that this "third place" idea is challenged by the advent of digital technology. While libraries can function as a play separate from home or work, they also become places to work, through free Wi-Fi and computer centers, or through the hosting of game developers and entrepreneurs.

For anybody interested in game studies, this book is a worthwhile read, highlighting a facet of gaming culture often overlooked – the humble public library. While the book features many pertinent examples of play and gaming in libraries, the research is only a starting point. When notes, references, appendices, and pictures are removed, the book contains less than 100 pages of content. Considering that most chapters reuse the same examples of play and gaming, the amount of unique content in each chapter is even lower, making this a breezy read. Fortunately, any reader can easily confirm or expand on the observations in this

book simply by visiting their own public libraries. As a parent with a toddler myself, we frequent several public libraries in our county, and I have been amazed at the transformation of libraries compared to my youth. Even in the rural setting in which I live, where the libraries pale in size to the ones discussed in this book, the incorporation of play is alive and strong.

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Weinstock, Jeffrey Andrew. *Monstrous Things: Essays on Ghosts, Vampires, and Things That Go Bump in the Night*. McFarland, 2023.

Ghosts, vampires, and monsters become the subject of inquiry in Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock's collection of writings, *Monstrous Things: Essays on Ghosts, Vampires, and Things That Go Bump in the Night*. The volume gathers a selection of Weinstock's work across the years, creating a recollection of his scholarly development on supernatural creatures, which is brought together by exploring what these monsters have to say about American culture. Across the different arguments of his writings, Weinstock's main considerations focus on how monsters expose American culture's desires and anxieties. Thus, as Weinstock frames it, "To consider our current monsters is to reflect on how we think about ourselves and our relation to the world" (190). His collection argues for a reconceptualization of the existence of monsters in film, literature, and academic research that includes the ability of these monsters to take form depending on their time and place (189). American culture becomes something that, over time, has engaged with ghosts, vampires, and monsters with continuous and shifting uses to address their perceptions of race, class, gender, technology, sexuality, and fears over life and death.

Monstrous Things starts with ghosts and their portrayals in American culture focuding mainly on literature, such as Herman Melville's *Bartleby* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved.* Weinstock's research on phantoms, ghosts, and hauntings aims to start a conversation about phantasmagorical phenomena in the constitution of the American national identity and imagination, particularly expressions of justice and mourning. Furthermore, Weinstock describes the disruptions ghosts have to the linearity of history and ideas of absolute truth. In this regard, ghosts are

evidence of a missing piece of knowledge, something that must be addressed and brought to light, creating spectral beings that address justice. Weinstock makes a point by highlighting how areas of research outside monster studies such as American studies, literary studies, and cultural studies all lack a substantial approach to phantoms and ghosts, those beings that hold within their spectral form hints on the constitution of an American national imaginary. Thus, hauntings become a social phenomenon across their depictions in literature and film that actively engage with American culture and society.

On the other hand, Weinstock approaches vampires and their disruptions to the dichotomy of good and evil. As *Monstrous Things* portrays across its section on vampires, these bloodsucking beings have substantially evolved from undead beings representing antisemitism and religious beliefs into complex creatures loved and who are subject to romantic or tragic story plots. By framing the evolution of vampire narratives across cinema, Weinstock exposes the motifs and themes associated with these vampires – antisemitism, suicide, and sexuality, among others – and their strong presence across American culture. What is particularly significant in this section is the illustration of the use vampires had between the colonial period of the U.S. and the twenty-first century. Vampires, once upon a time, disrupted human nature, which stated that the dead should stay dead. However, in recent decades, a shift in understanding and use of vampires has led to their representation as tragic creatures, lovers, heroes, or simply as beings with as much humanity as humans possess.

Monstrous Things finishes its recollection of things that go bump in the night by addressing, in a more general and broad approach, the diverse academic and theoretical inquiries monsters have had throughout human history and their connections to social developments of otherness (global pandemics, terrorism, and mass shootings among others). Weinstock addresses how monsters have been categorized, understood, and labeled to thereby make sense of their purposes, aims, and significance within cultural and social development. This final section of *Monstrous Things* revolves around the more traditional exploration of monsters by addressing the intersections between the human psyche, history, folklore, and cultures, contributing to the increasing scholarship on monster theory. Furthermore, by addressing the shifts in theorizations of monsters and evolution, *Monstrous Things* illustrates the new kinds of monsters appearing out of the inheritance of old fears and contemporary anxieties. Weinstock calls this a mindset related to 21st-century American culture that marks monsters with invisibility, and he makes his

case by analyzing the horror films that form part of contemporary American popular culture, *It* (2017), *It Follows* (2014), and *It Comes at Night* (2017).

Monstrous Things aims to share an overview of these monsters in American culture and then provide specific case studies to provide evidence of the monster's presence in American culture and its effect on the people. Furthermore, Weinstock's research is supported by addressing both scholars in monster theory, such as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Stacy Abbott, as well as scholars from literary theories, such as Jacques Derrida, Sigmund Freud, and Hélène Cixous. To complement his scholarly sources, Weinstock creates connections across a wide range of film and literary works that serve to further inquire about the depictions and portrayals of monsters in American culture and literature.

While not fully encompassing all monsters and monster theory discussion, *Monstrous Things* provides a strong and invigorating overview of American culture through the eyes of monsters. By addressing how literature and film portends the human experiences of past, present, and future, Weinstock reveals how the invisible, undead, and wispy bodies of these monsters showcase the social fears and failures of American culture. As such, *Monstrous Things* will undoubtedly appeal to audiences from academic spaces across various fields as well as to monster aficionados outside academia.

Adrielys Calderon Ortiz
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Film and Television Reviews

Barbie. Dir. Greta Gerwig. Screenplay by Greta Gerwig and Noah Baumbach. Perf. Margot Robbie, Ryan Gosling, and America Ferrera. Warner Bros., 2023.

Barbie may hold a special place in the hearts of those of us who grew up with her, and just like the doll, the blockbuster *Barbie* is for everyone. The film, a bona fide cultural phenomenon, begins in Barbie Land, where everything is perfect for Margot Robbie's Stereotypical Barbie. Because every woman is Barbie, we can do anything, and we have all the power. This all changes, however, when Robbie's Barbie starts fixating on her imperfections and experiencing thoughts of death, something familiar to everyone. These dark thoughts lead Robbie's Barbie on a journey to the real world that brings her face-to-face with a new patriarchal problem: Kendom. Underneath all the pink and plastic, the *Barbie* movie provides a complicated look at feminism that many will appreciate.

While I, a younger millennial, geeked out about seeing a childhood toy come to life, I was not sure how my father, a baby boomer, would react. To my surprise, he enjoyed the film as much as I did. He did not grow up playing with Barbie dolls, so he did not understand the nostalgia, but he enjoyed the story and how it was neither woke nor anti-male like he feared it would be. He did think Gloria's (America Ferrera) monologue was a bit much, but he recognized that her words were not directed toward him, and he was able to understand her feelings. His resonance aligns with director Greta Gerwig's goals, stated in an interview with the *New York Times* promoting the film:

> I was crying. Then I looked around, and everyone was crying – even the men were tearing up. I suddenly thought that this tightrope she's explaining is something that is present for women in the way that she's describing it, but it's also present for everybody. Everybody is afraid they're going to put a foot wrong and it's all going to come crashing down, and in that moment of doing that monologue, she was giving people permission to step off that tightrope. I don't think I realized until then that's what that moment was for. (Buchanan)

Gerwig also said she hopes *Barbie* is "an invitation for everybody to be part of the party and let go of the things that aren't necessarily serving us as either women or men," (Buchanan).

After seeing *Barbie*, my father and I had a conversation about the topics of the film which reminded me of bell hooks' scholarship on feminism. In her book, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, hooks discusses the need to educate people on feminism by creating examples that everyone can access. Initially, *Barbie* juxtaposes the real world and Barbie Land to show how different these two worlds are, one ruled by the patriarchy and the other by "Barbiarchy," but by the end of the film, this juxtaposition ends up highlighting the similarities between the two worlds. Barbie Land reflects the real world, just with the dominant gender swapped. By creating this "Barbiarchy," *Barbie* becomes an accessible example of feminism by putting men in Ken's shoes while giving women a feel for what it'd be like if we were to live in Barbie Land. To use Ken's own words, "it is not fun, is it?"

While the film did not spend much time talking about why the Kens created Kendom, nor does it offer a solution to gender disparities, it does make the audience reimagine feminism as not just something women struggle with, but something men struggle with too (hooks, 2000). In the end, *Barbie* is an inspirational comedy that reminds us that we all have struggles, but that we also have value, and we are all "Kenough."

Elizabeth Shiller
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The Glory. Dir. Ahn Gil-ho. Screenplay by Kim Eun-sook. Perf. Song Hye-Kyo, Lee Do-hyun, Lim Ji-yeon, and Park Sung-hoon. Hwa and Dam Pictures, 2022.

The Netflix series *The Glory* is based on a true crime that happened in 2006 in the city of Cheong Ju, South Korea (Rath). Yet the show's entire plot has been fictionalized by screenwriter Kim Eun-sook. In an interview, Kim states she drew from a conversation she had with her daughter about school bullying and violence, which are hot button issues in South Korea (Rath). Affected by the #MeToo movement that started in the United States, South Koreans started to openly discuss and fight back against social injustice such as sexual harassment, assault, school violence, and political corruption, all issues that Koreans had a cultural tendency to hide from the public. For this reason, *The Glory* garnered the attention of Korean viewers who are deeply concerned about the topic of school violence.

International audiences who are sensitive to social injustice also paid keen attention to the show. According to a review in *New York Times*, "[As of May 7th, 2023,] *The Glory*…is now Netflix's fifth most popular non-English television offering ever…it reached the top-10 non-English TV list in 91 countries for 13 weeks" (Jin et al.). Don Kang, Netflix's vice president of content for Korea, explains why audiences are invested in this drama: "*The Glory* is a great example of a story that resonates authentically with local audiences, but also depicts themes of human psychology and social issues which audiences everywhere can relate to" (Jin et al.). The psychological and social issues that *The Glory* portrays are school violence, anger, and justice, themes that resonate with younger generations.

This review contains spoilers for *The Glory*, so please proceed with caution if you are unfamiliar with the show, which depicts the abuse and sexual assault of 17-year-old high school student Moon Dong-eun without any filtration. Early in the show, five bullies – Park Yeon-jin, Jeon Jae-joon, Lee Sa-ra, Choi Hye-Jeong, and Son Myeong-oh – graphically burn Dong-eun with a curling iron in the school gym. When Dong-eun cries for help, Myeong-oh forcefully kisses her to muffle her screams. These acts will no doubt provoke shock and even disgust in some viewers, but the unfiltered depiction of school violence compels audiences to sympathize with Dong-eun because they come to fully understand the source of her trauma.

More harrowing, perhaps, adults routinely fail to protect Dong-eun, making her an even more tragic and sympathetic character. At one point, Dong-eun visits a

school nurse who tries to help the injured teenager. However, the parents of the five perpetrators are wealthy and powerful enough to cover up their children's wrongdoings and they force the school nurse to quit her job. Meanwhile, Dong-eun's homeroom teacher only cares about securing promotion and thus he stands up for five perpetrators instead of Dong-eun. Even Dong-eun's mother accepts bribes from Yeon-jin's mother and abandons her daughter. Ultimately, Dong-eun ends up alone with no possibility of help from anyone. For this reason, she drops out of school while her five assailants remain unpunished.

In the ensuing years, vengeance becomes Dong-eun's *raison d'être* (Vognar). After graduating from college, she coerces the director of an exclusive private elementary school into giving her a job as a homeroom teacher. One of her students is Ha Ye-sol, daughter of Yeon-jin and Jeon Jae-joon, who conceived the child during an adulterous affair. Dong-eun sets out to ruin Yeon-jin's glorious life, which involves revealing the truth about Ha Ye-sol's origins to Yeon-jin's husband, Ha Do-yeong. Upon completing her vendetta, Dong-eun intends to commit suicide but is stopped thanks to the timely intervention of Park Sang-im, the mother of Dong-eun's boyfriend, Joo Yeo-jeong. *The Glory* ends with Dong-eun and Yeo-jeong together and plotting further acts of vengeance.

The audio-visual catharsis provided by the show results from Kim's careful crafting of Dong-eun's scheme, which differs from the outwardly violent actions of her tormenters. While Yeon-jin and others inflicted pain in a crude and direct way, Dong-eun's revenge takes years to enact and is at once shocking yet poetic. Throughout the series, Kim refuses to fully reveal Dong-eun's plan, meaning audiences must pay close attention to the narrative. Chris Vognar interprets Dong-eun's vengeance as "intricate and perhaps even a little too subtle, featuring blink-and-you'll-miss-it moments that offer clues to Moon Dong-eun's master plan." When someone reads a poem, they tend to study the text meticulously by focusing on things like punctuation marks, blanks, and even page margins. Similarly, audiences watching *The Glory* must pay keen attention to elements such as mise-en-scène, pauses, and even the actors' breath to understand events onscreen. Kim's meticulous script creates Dong-eun's poem of revenge against her abusers.

The frequent use of long takes and close-up shots increases the viewer's catharsis. When Yeon-jin and the other perpetrators beg for mercy after realizing Dong-eun's revenge plans, the camera captures their facial expressions closely, and audiences can taste the sweet bitterness of Dong-eun's revenge. There are stark contrasts between Dong-eun and her perpetrators, reinforced through techniques

such as costume and makeup; Dong-eun (played as an adult by Song Hye-Kyo) usually wears monotone or black clothes and rarely applies makeup, accentuating her dark past and her decision to seek vengeance against those who harmed her. Dong-eun's attackers, meanwhile, often wear expensive, beautiful, and colorful clothes as well as garish makeup to show off their wealth and social status, suggesting they live their lives without any remorse or guilt for their past actions.

Thanks to a carefully crafted script, masterful cinematography, and determined mise-en-scène, audiences enjoy watching how Dong-eun brings justice. Yet the reason why viewers truly root for Dong-eun is that they may have witnessed another real-life "Dong-eun" at least once, whether in school, at a job, or in society itself. However, viewers may not have had enough courage to stand up for their Dong-eun even though they recognized the unfairness and injustice of the situation. In *The Glory*, Dong-eun attains justice through her vendetta against Yeon-jin and the other perpetrators, thus providing viewers with a sense of closure and solace.

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POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES JOURNAL

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The *Popular Culture Studies Journal* is an academic, peer-reviewed, refereed journal for scholars, academics, and students from the many disciplines that study popular culture. The journal serves the MPCA/ACA membership, as well as scholars globally who recognize and support its mission based on expanding the way we view popular culture as a fundamental component within the contemporary world. To learn more, visit www.mpcaaca.org/popular-culture-studies-journal.

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The *Popular Culture Studies Journal* is an academic, peer-reviewed, refereed journal for scholars, academics, and students from the many disciplines that study popular culture. The journal serves the MPCA/ACA membership, as well as scholars globally who recognize and support its mission based on expanding the way we view popular culture as a fundamental component within the contemporary world.

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