SOVEREIGNTY THROUGH STORYTELLING: FINDING A MORAL IN THE HYPOTHETICAL

JANE YU

Hypothetical analogies have never held much credibility as rhetorical devices, and anecdotal evidence cannot usually be trusted as fact. Imagine, for instance, if the suspect in a criminal investigation were to proclaim his innocence using a fable. The jury members would not be likely to exonerate him—in fact, they might even chuckle at the absurdity. As a rule, those who wish to convince others of a certain point should not use imaginary scenarios as evidence. It seems paradoxical, then, that Walker Percy, in "The Loss of the Creature," turns to speculation to prove his position.

In his essay, Percy contends that people can no longer view their experiences purely; he uses hypothetical situations to illustrate the dangers of pre-conceived notions. Percy denounces the way that people have given up their sovereignty, their ability to determine the value of events in their lives, to a select few "experts," resulting in a "loss of the creature"—even though he himself, as the writer of the essay, could be considered one of those experts. And yet, while this contradiction might seem to undermine Percy's reliability, it actually enhances a purposefully self-deprecating essay. Percy designs his narration so that readers can make their own sovereign decisions at its conclusion. "The Loss of the Creature" is not the kind of proof a typical "expert" would use; rather, it presents a series of situations that lead readers into creating their own opinions about Percy's topic.

One such situation describes the hypothetical plight of a hypothetical sightseeing couple. The two experience a unique cultural event, but are unsatisfied until and unless, through it, they gain the approval of an expert in the field—they want an ethnologist to confirm that their experience was indeed special (Percy 2-3). Percy then expands this concept into a wider problem, lamenting the layman's dependence on the expert and the consumer's self-imposed loss of sovereignty. Percy bases his claim on an example made up by none other than himself, a strategy that gives his audience reason to question whether the example is too contrived. Even within his own scenario, Percy seems to lack credibility. He contradicts himself when he questions the sightseer couple: "We wonder if there is not something wrong in their dislike of their compatriots. Does access to the place require the exclusion of others?" (2). This comment is innocent enough on its own, but becomes confounding when we apply to it an earlier statement Percy makes: "If the place is seen by a million sightseers, a single sightseer does not receive value *P* but a millionth part of value *P*" (1). Percy simultaneously claims that "others" make a sight less valuable, but it is wrong to seek their exclusion. Readers can see the hypocrisy in this connection.

© 2020 Jane Yu

And yet, closer examination reveals that Percy sacrifices his ethos for a purpose. Percy later praises the Falkland Islander who finds and examines a dogfish out of curiosity over the student who mechanically dissects a specimen handed to her: "He too could use an instructor and a book and a technique, but he would use them as his subordinates" (4). When Percy allows his own trustworthiness to be scrutinized, he does so to ensure that his readers will not simply follow his doctrine mindlessly. He allows them to use his ideas as their "subordinates" while they "come to [themselves] not as . . . consumer[s] of experience but as . . . sovereign individual[s]" (6). Though Percy could be considered an "expert"—notice how he says that the experts are never to blame—he wants to make sure that he does not cause the very "loss of the creature" that he stands so firmly against.

Percy thus guides us through his thought process instead of forcing us to accept it. He starts his story about the sightseers with the phrase "let us take an example," and continues to use "we" throughout: "we may distinguish," "we see," "we understand," "[w]e have a clue" (2). By grouping the reader with himself, Percy takes the role of a friendly tour guide instead of a cold, all-knowing entity. Each of us is the "layman" of whom Percy speaks, and so he puts his essay in secret layman's terms, conversing with us using scenarios that we can understand. As he writes, "If we look into the ways in which the student can recover the dogfish . . . we will see that they have in common the stratagem of avoiding the educator's direct presentation of the object as a lesson to be learned" (5). It is therefore not strange at all that Percy should use hypothetical analogy, an indirect and subliminal way of teaching, rather than "direct presentation." What looks at first to be speculation reveals itself to be a form through which Percy can express his most powerful points.

Nevertheless, there are times when Percy's rhetoric sounds like the language a scientist might use. He occasionally incorporates terms such as "symbolic complex" (1) and "prototype" (3), which resemble scientific jargon. At these times, he risks sounding like the ethnologist or the biology teacher, like an "expert" who uses complex, unfamiliar vocabulary to educate through intimidation. But because the essay as a whole reads more like a fictional text than a factual one, these moments of seeming pedantry serve as a contrast to his parable rather than as the lesson itself.

And indeed, "The Loss of the Creature" has many moments of whimsy, times when Percy reaches out to the reader in a way that defies the strict formality of scientific writing. He writes with exclamation points, colloquialisms, and drama; in the story of the tourist couple, he transitions from the setup to the action with a phrase typical of storytellers: "Let us see what happens" (2). He inserts dialogue, imagining what his fictional characters might say: ""There we were expecting the chief to bring us a churinga and he shows up with a Sears catalog!"" (3). He even begins his essay with an exceedingly poetic phrase, "Every explorer names his island Formosa, beautiful," thus establishing that what he wants to convey is more sentimental than technical, directed more toward feeling than understanding (1).

Accordingly, Percy spins a story using rhetorical devices that match his purpose; he uses vivid imagery and figurative language that work just as they would in a literary piece. In an extended metaphor commenting on the value of unique experience, he uses words related to money, such as "gold-mine" and "generosity" (3). Through the words' connotations, he shows how the two tourists wrongly quantify the things they've encountered. Instead of appreciating the experience as they experience it, they see it as some kind of bartering chip that they can exchange for approval. They assume that "shar[ing]" it with their ethnologist friend gives them the right to say that they have found authenticity (3). The reality, however, is that the sightseers suffer what Percy views as "impoverishment," the opposite of the riches they perceive themselves to have (3). Percy concludes his conceit with a stark statement: "The caste of layman-expert . . . is due altogether to the eager surrender of sovereignty by the layman so that he may take up the role not of the person but of the consumer" (3). At the end of a series of economic metaphors, Percy criticizes those who treat authenticity as something with a price tag. Experiences cannot be consumed as if they were material goods, and Percy makes that clear by alluding to money without literally stating it.

In addition to its effective use of figurative language, Percy's hypothetical example also contains linguistic precision that serves another purpose: it nudges the reader in the right direction. For example, Percy describes the sightseers' experience as "embalmed in memory and movie film" (3). Embalming is a process performed on the dead for preservation, so the word choice naturally and subtly conveys that the sightseers' unique experience is not *lived*, though it might seem personal. Because the sightseers do not appreciate their experience in the same way that Garcia Lopez de Cárdenas appreciated the Grand Canyon, their stories of adventure are simply empty bodies wrapped with musty "movie film." And the reference to "movie film" here recalls Percy's earlier example of a typical sightseer's sin, a tourist who photographs a view instead of enjoying it in the present. So, by taking a video of the Mexican corn dance, the tourist couple make the same mistake as the aforementioned sightseer, who "waives his right of seeing and knowing" (Percy 1). The two tourists think they have hit on something different from the rest, but with a few understated words, Percy shows us that they are just the same as all the others. Such careful diction and relatable storytelling characterizes Percy's writing, which transcends the usual boundaries of nonfiction. Through the fictional example of the two sightseers, Percy targets those who have felt like the tourists before. He reaches out to an audience, like a performer displaying his art.

Art, after all, is a medium that contains the potential for recovery—that is, Percy believes that the arts can help a person see a sight for what it is, rather than what social constructs have set it up to be. As Percy mentions in one of his suggestions for recovering the Grand Canyon, "The dialectic is not known to objective theorists, psychologists, and the like. Yet it is well known in the fantasy-consciousness of the popular arts" (2). As an example, he notes how a movie can give a genuine view of the

Grand Canyon by directing the main sight of the viewer in a different direction. This calls to mind the aforementioned reference to "movie film," but this time Percy makes the film function differently; it takes on a fresh perspective, just as the person who sees the film attains a fresh perspective on the Grand Canyon. Percy fits form to content, and in fact his whole essay matches the frame of his movie example, which "accomplishes its purpose by concealing it" (Percy 2).

Percy's essay emulates a parable, with a meaning that the reader must extract. It expresses a sentimental view of life and experience, one in which the individual ought to appreciate adventure without consulting another's judgments. Percy structures his argument like a performance so that his critiques don't interfere with the audience's genuine views; he only encourages the reader to derive his or her own moral from the story, just as the first explorer of an island must truly access it to see its beauty. Paraphrasing Mounier, Percy affirms that "unless [the person] also struggles for himself, unless he knows that there is a struggle, he is going to be just what the planners think he is" (6). As the planner, Percy wants us to become more than he can imagine, more than the characters in his tales. In the end, it is up to us whether we choose to trust Percy's fables. If we finally learn to recover our own Formosa, then Percy has succeeded—but it is our sovereign success above all.

WORKS CITED

Percy, Walker. "The Loss of the Creature." The Mercer Reader. Acton: Copely Custom Textbooks, 2006. 1-6. Print.

JANE YU '17CC is a Financial Economics major with a concentration in English. Born in North Carolina and raised in Connecticut, Jane has a wide range of interests, including mentoring, baking, and traveling. Though she plans to go into finance after graduation, she hopes to one day teach as a college professor.

BORN A WOMYN?: LISA VOGEL'S PARADIGM FOR TRANSGENDER EXCLUSION

NADIA KHAYRALLAH

To some feminists, the name "Michigan Womyn's Music Festival" (MWMF) represents female solidarity, empowerment through art, and liberation from the patriarchy. To many transgender activists, it represents an exclusive club of womanhood which enforces gender discrimination by keeping trans women out. For most laypeople, however, the name invokes a seemingly simple question: "Why is 'women' spelled wrong? Why the 'y?'"

Part of it comes down to linguistic autonomy. In her *New York Times Magazine* article "Wears Jump Suit. Sensible Shoes. Uses Husband's Last Name," Deborah Tannen demonstrates the close interconnection between linguistic representation and the social world by claiming that the female, both in language and in life, is always seen as a noticeably "marked" variation on a male neutral. The "unmarked" words, which are "what you think of when you're not thinking anything special," apply to men, while feminine words have added linguistic "markers" like "-ess" that carry additional meanings, often connoting frivolousness or sexiness (Tannen).

While Tannen does not mention it, her theory applies to the word "woman" itself, a prefixed variation on the default base-word "man." While "man," as well as representing males, is a generic term for human beings (think "mankind"), women are defined linguistically not on their own terms, but by their difference from the male standard. Thus, the term "womyn," through its differentiated spelling that removes the word "man," is an attempt to reclaim gender identity outside the framework of male reference. Starting with their gender title, womyn can be defined not by men, but by themselves.

This type of female autonomy is at the core of MWMF's goals. The festival is an annual event located in Michigan's woodlands that is run, staffed, and attended exclusively by women, including many lesbian and queer women. It includes workshops and performances by female artists as well as communal living activities ("Michigan Community"). Founded in 1976, along with other similar festivals across the country, as part of a second-wave feminist separatist movement, it is concerned with creating an "autonomous space" for women to literally be away from the patriarchy and to express their gender as they choose ("Heated Debate").

As a proponent of the right to define one's own gender on one's own terms, MWMF seems, at least on the surface, to be an unlikely opponent of the transgender women community. A key aspect of transgender rights (at least for those who do identify with a gender) is the ability to pick one's own labels, as opposed to what gender theorist Judith Butler, in the introduction to *Undoing Gender*, calls "the unwanted

© 2020 Nadia Khayrallah

legislation of identity" (7). Typically, people are assigned a gender at birth by doctors, based on their physical sex, and carry that label with them for the rest of their lives. Transgender men and women, on the other hand, by claiming a gender identity that differs from what others have assigned to them, assert their right to choose representative words—their gender labels and pronouns—that best translate their internal sense of self into social and linguistic structures.

Given that most self-identified womyn did not grow up being referred to as such, and had to find and claim the term themselves, womyn are, at least in a linguistic sense, technically changing their gender identity, much like transgender women. Yet despite these similarities, the exclusion of transgender women has been a controversial but constant policy at MWMF ("History").

Last year, in response to petitions for the festival to include trans women, festival founder Lisa Vogel released a statement confirming and defending the established policy: "The Festival, for a single precious week, is intended for womyn who at birth were deemed female, who were raised as girls, and who identify as womyn. I believe that womyn-born womyn (WBW) is a lived experience that constitutes its own distinct gender identity" ("Heated Debate").

Most of the opposition to Vogel has focused on her discriminatory actions in excluding trans women, which is an important, valid, and practical focus. Equally significant, however, are the language and mindset that she uses to construct this exclusion, which offers insight into the ideological essence of Vogel's feminism and its place in the contemporary world of intersectional activism. The term "womyn-born womyn" itself is packed with politically charged and seemingly contradictory meanings: "womyn" implies self-determined identity, while "born" implies biological determinism, and Vogel's description emphasizes experience. How can someone at once claim the deliberately self-defined label "womyn" and also claim that she was simply born into it?

In some ways, using the term "womyn-born womyn" to describe the set of women who were determined to be female from birth is actually quite consistent with the idea of self-representation on one's own terms. They could have used the synonymous term "cisgender women," which was not in use at the time of the festival's founding but could have been adopted later on. But that is a term that defines the group in reference to transgender women. While "cisgender" is not literally a marked form of "transgender," and it would be wrong to imply that being transgender means being socially unmarked (in fact, most people regard being cisgender as so unmarked that they don't even need a word for it), "cisgender" came into being specifically to be an opposite to the already existing "transgender," to define people who are *not* trans ("cis" as a prefix is the linguistic opposite of "trans") (Blank). "Womyn-born womyn," not wanting to be defined in reference to transgender people nor to men, made sure that their term was self-defined and self-contained.

Moreover, even in her exclusion of transgender women, Vogel does, at least on the surface of her statement, have some respect for *their* right to self-identification. Unlike the majority of trans-exclusionary groups, the festival leaders never question that trans women are in fact "real" women. Rather than attempt to police the terms used to describe trans women, WBW simply have made a new term to define themselves. Whether this is a valid move to create solidarity among a particular group or a pleasant veil for discrimination is still questionable: constructing an "us" always involves implicitly constructing a "them," and in this case, the "them" created by the invention of the term WBW seems very pointed.

But in reality, this idea of self-determined gender is too simplistic—or, as Butler would call it, a "fantasy of godlike power" (3). While Butler considers gender to be established through a constant performance, or "doing," this does not mean that it is created and controlled only by the performer. Instead, people are "done by norms" (3), or socially conditioned into culturally established gender roles, and from there must practice "improvisation within a scene of constraint" (1), or making choices based on the knowledge of what is expected from their gender. Therefore, the choices that people make about their gender identity or expression are not actually independent, but always made in reference to an external social structure. Agency, within a social context, is real, but autonomy is impossible.

The word "womyn" itself exemplifies this limited freedom. "Womyn" seems less like a radical redefinition of gender labels when we consider that all but one of the letters remain unchanged from the traditional spelling. The "y" can be thought of as a limited improvisation within the constraints of the rest of the established term. Womyn may be reclaiming gender for themselves, but they are hardly redefining it. MWMF may allow members to own and freely express their gender within the context of the festival, but only after using a normative definition of who is a woman to establish membership. Womyn may be rebelling against gender norms, but they cannot be uninfluenced by them.

Tannen, too, recognizes the impossibility—for women specifically—of escaping the frame of reference of restrictive gender norms. The presence of these norms means that women will always be marked, whether they choose to follow the norms or not. She uses female titles, such as Ms., Miss, and Mrs. as an example. Traditionally, women have had no choice but to be marked by their relationships with men: married or unmarried, Mrs. or Miss. Even titles that try to escape that established dichotomy, however, are marked by their rejection of it. "Ms." marks a woman as "either liberated or rebellious," and even "Dr." carries connotations of "uppity" or "an overachiever" (Tannen). (Ironically, her title inherently references the norm of disclosed marital status by drawing attention to her deliberate avoidance of it.)

If independence means being socially unmarked, womyn cannot achieve it. That alternative spelling is certainly not what most people think of when they're "not thinking anything special": for those who recognize it, it marks a particular brand of

radical feminism and a deliberate rejection of male influence. Womyn may voluntarily wear these labels with pride, but they have significance only because pre-existing norms are there for them to reject. Without the "godlike power" to create a world where gender expectations do not exist, womyn are marked by the way they choose to improvise around them.

Vogel is not just aware of the role of social norms in establishing a person's gender: she even uses "lived experience"—or as Butler might call it, the experience of "being done by norms"—as a membership requirement, beyond self-identification. She is interested in assembling women who "at birth were deemed female, who were raised as girls," and therefore have had the same gender done to them. She gives special consideration to the gendering done by norms, as opposed to individuals. While trans women have undone and redone their initial gendering to arrive at womanhood, this is not the same, according to Vogel, as having womanhood done *to* you from the beginning.

It is important to note that Vogel differs from the more common, essentialist views of other trans-exclusionary feminists that Butler describes, who accuse trans women of an "'appropriation' of femininity, as if it belongs properly to a given sex, as if sex is discreetly given, as if gender identity could and should be derived unequivocally from presumed anatomy" (Butler 9). Not only is Vogel opposed to policing feminine qualities, she also never references anatomy and never claims that vaginas or chromosomes are the defining factor for WBW (despite the biological connotations of "born"). She cares about the experiences that result from gender assignment based on sex, not about the sex itself.

Why are gender assignment and upbringing so important to Vogel? One reason is simply that they exist—and, right or wrong, have a very real effect on a person's experience. To use Tannen's terminology, if we consider gender assignment to be a "mark," then it carries numerous additional meanings throughout a woman's life. Even as she argues that discussions of "gender discrimination" must include transgender and intersex issues, Butler cautions against viewing any of these movements as "postfeminist," because female-specific activism is still needed (8-9). She considers it "unacceptable to propound a view of gender discrimination that did not take into account the differential ways in which women suffer from poverty and illiteracy, from employment discrimination, from a gendered division of labor within a global frame, and from violence, sexual and otherwise" (Butler 8-9). Given that most of these women have been involuntarily placed into this disadvantaged female role from birth, it makes sense that Vogel does not want to ignore the significance of assigned female gender, even if she overlooks the additional violence and discrimination that trans women face.

Moreover, while the normative system of gender assignment may be restrictive and oppressive, it is good for organizing groups, and Vogel, who is focused on community-building, needs this. It is understandable that, as someone who has committed her life

to making womynhood a communal experience, Vogel would maintain a mindset that focuses on gender as something social (shaped by external markings and constraints) as opposed to individual and internal (determined by how a person feels and identifies). In a blurry sea of women with varied backgrounds, expressions, and inner feelings, involuntary societal marks seem like an easy way to determine who belongs and a solid point of connection among the community.

For Vogel to accept trans women, she will first have to accept that gender, even on a social level, is not solid, but changeable. Butler describes gender as a "historical category" that is "open to a continual remaking" since conceptions of who and what are masculine and feminine have been redefined over time and space (9-10). This does not, however, mean that gender categories are disappearing or becoming irrelevant anytime soon. An identity does not have to be static to be socially real or meaningful: just ask a woman who has re-marked herself as a womyn or an assigned male who has re-marked herself as a woman. In either case, her life is very much influenced by the social and political meanings that others attach to her new identity. If Vogel's festival needs to exist in reference to a socially imposed scene of constraints, she shouldn't worry; those constraints will still exist, but they can be nudged open a bit to allow room for more women to join in the improvisation.

WORKS CITED

Blank, Paula. "Will 'Cisgender' Survive?" *The Atlantic*. 24 Sept. 2014. Web. 16 Jan. 2015.

Butler, Judith. Introduction. *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge, 2004. 1-16. Print.

"Heated Debate Follows Michigan Fest Boycott Petition." *Windy City Times*. 12 Apr. 2013. Web. 9 Mar. 2014.

"History." *Camp Trans*. Camp Trans, n.d. Web. 1 Mar. 2014.

"The Michigan Community." *Michigan Womyn's Music Festival*. Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, n.d. Web. 1 Mar. 2014.

Tannen, Deborah. "Wears Jump Suit. Sensible Shoes. Uses Husband's Last Name." *New York Times Magazine*, 20 June 1993. Web. 1 Mar. 2014.

NADIA KHAYRALLAH '17CC is majoring in dance and psychology. She is also an active member of Columbia's extracurricular dance community, a contributor for the Columbia Spectator's Arts and Entertainment section, and an academic tutor for elementary through high school students. Nadia grew up in North Carolina and lived in California for most of high school, but is now undeniably in love with New York City.

FASHION'S LATEST TREND: PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF BEAUTY WITH INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES

EMILY LAU

Shaun Ross, an albino African-American male model, confidently struts down the illuminated catwalk in the latest pieces by designers from Alexander McQueen to Monsieur Belange (Hyman). Featured in *Vogue Italia* and New York Fashion Week, Ross has reached the pinnacle of modeling success while defying conventional standards of beauty (Vogue Italia; LeTrent). His popularity in the fashion world demonstrates the way society turns his intersectional identities into a marketable commodity. Then again, is he really transcending the marginalization of intersectionality if his success involves objectifying his differences? Ross's evident achievement in the modeling world reveals intersectional oppression to be not only an explicit form of exclusion, but also a potential means of gaining popularity.

Ross's race and skin disorder seem to put him at a double-disadvantage, directly in the "path" of intersectionality's "collision" (Crenshaw 4). Kimberlé Crenshaw, the creator of the term "intersectionality," comments that it is "the idea that if you're standing in the path of multiple forms of exclusion, you are likely to get hit by both" (4). Using terms such as "accident," "collision," "path" and "hit," Crenshaw strictly focuses on the damaging consequences of an individual's combination of differences. However, Ross's success as a model defies Crenshaw's idea of the inevitable, detrimental crash of exclusion that results from having intersectional identities. While his albinism and race made for a trying childhood of verbal and physical abuse, he turned his obstacles into an advantage. Ross's case shows how Crenshaw's notion of intersectionality only takes into account the negative side of differences, seeing only exclusion and discrimination instead of considering the multiple outcomes that can result from the "collision."

In fact, Ross's success actually relies heavily upon his differences; as a model, he capitalizes on his easily distinguishable appearance. In her article, "Casting the outcast at Fashion Week," CNN reporter Sarah LeTrent attempts to explain his success: "Ross arrived on the scene just as the modeling industry is abuzz about what it means to be beautiful" (LeTrent). As casting directors began hiring models outside the stereotypical mold, Ross appeared and offered them an invaluable chance to hire a spectacularly unique model to become their poster boy for progress and diversity in the world of beauty. He has already achieved a high profile in the entertainment business, not only as a desired model but also as an actor in music videos for Beyoncé and Katy Perry (LeTrent). Recently, when asked if he would ever undergo a color correction treatment, he said, "Nope . . . because if I was to change my color, I'd probably look like you" (Vogue Italia). He has revealed that he is proud of his differences,

© 2020 Emily Lau

acknowledging that they characterize him and contribute to his success. Giving up his intersectional identities would mean giving up a marketable distinctiveness that is currently in high demand.

Can it be that Ross's intersectional identities actually provide him with an unfair advantage over other models? Do his differences place him on another level, where he no longer competes with the majority of typical modeling candidates? Crenshaw discusses the idea that intersectional identities have the potential to elevate an individual over the rest of society, mentioning the "fear" that the legal court has toward black women who may unite many differences under one banner and become "unfairly advantaged as some sort of superclass" (Crenshaw 5). Groups, such as black women, with intersectional identities threaten mainstream society with the potential power of using their disadvantaged state to justify anything. Therefore, in order to maintain the status quo, society tends to suppress the possibility of this "superclass" through discrimination and marginalization. Crenshaw argues that this reflex, caused by an irrational fear, only exacerbates the real problem: the increasing oppression of people with intersectional identities. Ross challenges Crenshaw's viewpoint, however, by capitalizing on the special attention afforded to his differences without dealing with the backlash of society's "fear." The high demand for his "look" and his popularity on social networks have made it clear that society actually promotes Ross as part of this "superclass" (LeTrent).

Yet does the special attention afforded to Ross reveal a move toward diversity and equality, or might it instead reflect society's heightened acuity toward his differences? Even though the fashion world is always trying to push the boundaries of what is beautiful, it is, ironically, notorious for its lack of racial diversity. In his recent article for *The New York Times*, "Fashion's Blind Spot," Eric Wilson reveals how racism is still prevalent in the fashion industry today. He reports that when models go for casting, some companies inform them, "We already have our black girl," revealing how they are simply attempting to appease the critics who accuse them of racism, rather than sincerely moving toward diversity (Wilson). This "tokenism" extends to Ross's situation; however, his albinism complicates his case (Wilson). While he fulfills the requirement of being African-American, his skin is white. Thinking skeptically, the casting directors could even see him as an opportunity to meet their racial diversity quota with a seemingly white model. Yet when criticized, they could easily reply that they are promoting not only his race, but also his skin disorder. Tavia Nyong'o, a New York University professor who writes about performance and race, touches upon the idea of white supremacy in his article "The Unforgivable Transgression of Being Caster Semenya." He identifies Western society's tendency to almost militaristically impose its standards of physical normality upon the rest of the world as a form of "imperialism," arguing that there is a narrow standard of beauty that oppresses all other types and differences (Nyong'o 96). This idea of aesthetic "imperialism" is especially applicable to the fashion world today, as many companies are now under

fire for their discrimination against models of color and for their partiality toward typical white models (LeTrent). While it is impossible to determine the motives behind the people who have enabled Ross's success, his obvious differences make him a convenient token face for diversity during a time when the fashion industry is actively fighting against the stigma of "imperialism."

Ross's achievement does not solely depend on casting directors, however; it also depends on the general public's reception of him. While people might initially seem progressive in pressuring modeling agencies to diversify their models and in supporting Ross, their fascination with him may also reflect a regressive tendency to find entertainment value in exhibiting physical differences. In his article commenting on the controversy surrounding Caster Semenya, Nyong'o compares her case to that of Saartjie Baartman, "the nineteenth-century Khoisan woman who was exhibited throughout Europe as a sexualized monstrosity" (Nyong'o 96). Citing Rachel Holmes' historical study, Nyong'o describes Baartman's humiliating experiences: "White audiences guffawed, prodded and poked at her exposed body, which they laughingly demeaned as that of a 'Hottentot Venus': the inverse of European standards of beauty" (Nyong'o 96). With dehumanizing terms like "exhibited," "guffawed, prodded and poked," Nyong'o highlights the extremely inappropriate and disrespectful manner in which the Western world treated Baartman. By describing the degrading references to Baartman as "a sexualized monstrosity" and "Hottentot Venus," he reveals society's blatant disregard for her as a person and the narrowness of its definitions of what it means to be physically normal and acceptable. Like nineteenth-century Europe, the fashion industry constantly searches for people to showcase for the public. In her article about Ross, LeTrent includes the input of two prominent casting directors, Noah Shelley and Angus Munro: "This season, Munro and Shelley say that personality and quirk appeals because of the intensity of model turnover" (LeTrent). While they "try not to cross the line from quirk into novelty," the fact that they mention "novelty" at all reveals that it is still a relevant issue (LeTrent). When the public grows accustomed to a certain "quirk," the casting directors need to find another, equally shocking model as a replacement. It is almost as if a human being can go 'out of style' after a while. While today's glamorized showcasing of models is far from the degrading exhibition of Baartman, there is still an underlying resemblance between these demeaning entertainments that has transcended time.

Despite the debatable reasons for his fame, Ross uses the attention to promote acceptance of all differences. And yet, ironically, his popularity may also work against his cause. Starting the inspiring campaign "#InMySkinIWin," Ross initially promoted the acceptance of albinism, but has since broadened the scope of his message to "just loving who you are" (LeTrent). While his popularity is encouraging, Ross—even in his exceptional rarity—may overshadow the invisible masses still struggling under the oppression of multiple difference barriers. Crenshaw discusses this problem of public figures whose success does not reflect the success of their people group. She mentions

how celebrities like Beyoncé and Star Jones are not representative of all black women, arguing that "it is a mistake to take a small unrepresentative sample to stand in for the whole group" (Crenshaw 6). Similar to Beyoncé and Star Jones, Ross, with his singular success, cannot accurately reflect the progress of either black or albino people, as he is one anomaly who made it out of two invisible crowds. In fact, the media's special attention to Ross's success reveals how much progress still needs to be made in order for people of his same differences to overcome intersectional marginalization.

While Ross's success in modeling challenges Crenshaw's notion that intersectionality produces only forms of exclusion, there is a sinister underside to his popularity. The gradual diversification of the fashion world that he represents, however, is undeniably encouraging, exhibiting progress toward the elimination of exclusion for people with multiple differences. Visual exposure to models like Ross allows the public to familiarize themselves with the unconventional side of beauty; it helps society become accustomed to, and perhaps even appreciative of, differences. Ross challenges the public to reassess its standards of physical normality, declaring, "I was always the outcast, but a confident outcast . . . I just had to accept it. I'm going to be me; either you're going to accept it or you're not" (LeTrent). Ross models just how beautiful acceptance can be, and it is up to the public to pick up the trend.

WORKS CITED

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Intersectionality: The Double Bind of Race and Gender." Interview by Sheila Thomas. *Perspectives* 12.4 (2004): 4-7, 13. Print.

Hyman, Dan. "Not Your Average Male Model: Shaun Ross Talks Beyoncé and Bullying." *Elle*. 30 Dec. 2013. Web. 7 Nov. 2014.

LeTrent, Sarah. "Casting the Outcast at Fashion Week." CNN. 10 Sept. 2013. Web. 13 Oct 2013.

Nyong'o, Tavia. "The Unforgivable Transgression of Being Caster Semenya." *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 20.1 (2010): 95-100. Print.

Vogue Italia. "Vogue Italia: Shaun Ross." Online video clip. YouTube. YouTube, 15 May 2012. Web. 9 Oct. 2013.

Wilson, Eric. "Fashion's Blind Spot." *The New York Times*. 7 Aug. 2013. Web. 9 Oct. 2013.

EMILY LAU '17CC is majoring in English and Comparative Literature. A New Jersey native, Emily has always had a deep and abiding love of books. Her favorite childhood series is C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and she continues to be a fan of the fantasy genre. At Columbia University, she is a volunteer for Artists Reaching Out, an editor for *Columbia Crown and Cross* (Journal), and a member of Columbia Faith and Action.

BRAINY OR BUSTY? BOTH. SEXUALITY AND INTELLIGENCE IN BBC'S *SHERLOCK*

EMILY MAN

> "And that was how a great scandal threatened to affect the kingdom of Bohemia, and how the best plans of Mr. Sherlock Holmes were beaten by a woman's wit. . . . And when he speaks of Irene Adler, or when he refers to her photograph, it is always under the honourable title of *the* woman."
>
> —Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (40-41)

Irene Adler is *the* woman. She is the only woman—if not the only person—to ever outwit *the* Sherlock Holmes. The hit BBC TV series *Sherlock* reinvents Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's classic detective stories for a modern-day London. Over ten million eager viewers tuned in for the Emmy-nominated series two opener, featuring the infamous Irene Adler. For this episode, writer Steven Moffat was faced with a challenge: he needed a female character whose strength and intelligence would be just as fresh to a modern viewer as the original Irene Adler was to 1891 readers. His solution was a bold, brilliant, and *sexualized* Irene. A high-end professional dominatrix, Moffat's Irene plays to her clients' egos to amass an impressive collection of blackmail materials. When she acquires lewd photographs of a British royal family member, Sherlock is commissioned to retrieve them. Disguised as an assaulted vicar, he shows up at her doorstep hoping to trick her into revealing the location of the photographs. Unlike in the original story, Irene is not fooled for even an instant. Demonstrating that she knows exactly who he is and what he has come for, she confronts him completely nude (Fig. 1).

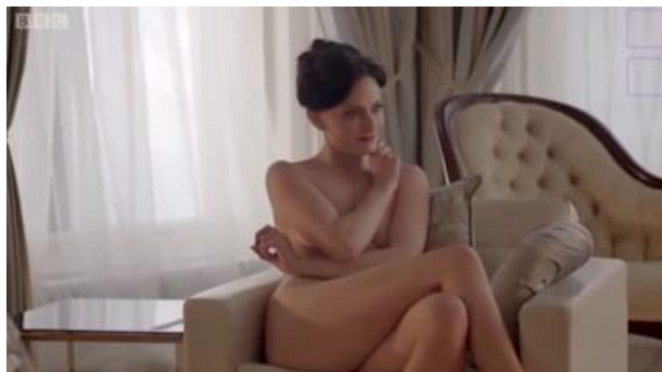

Fig. 1

The feminist community was outraged by this portrayal. As they saw it, Irene Adler had been relegated to a sexual object. The subtitle to a review written by *The Guardian* writer Jane Clare Jones, a doctoral student in philosophy focusing in "feminist ethics,"

© 2020 Emily Man

summarizes her argument: "In Moffat's hands the power of Irene Adler, Sherlock Holmes's female adversary, was sexual, not intellectual. A regressive step" (Jones). Jones argues that Irene's nudity is "regressive" because her power is not "true" intellectual power; instead, it is tainted because it is *sexual*. To these feminists, her nudity constituted a tacit endorsement of the view that women could never overpower men without using their sexuality. However, there is no doubt that through her actions, sexual as they may be, Irene dominates the conversation and reduces Sherlock to an uncharacteristically stunned silence. Is her success to be disregarded simply because it is achieved by amplifying her sexuality? Is Irene Adler barred from being a model of modern female empowerment because she utilizes her sex appeal?

In discussions of the effect of sexuality on identity, one debated issue has been the relationship between sexuality and agency. On one hand, in his groundbreaking book *Ways of Seeing*, art critic John Berger argues, much like the contemporary feminists, that posing nude is an act of submission to the viewer. Through this submission, the nude woman becomes stripped of identity and agency, simply becoming a sexual object for the male spectator. Thus, he argues, the nude subject's bareness is "not . . . an expression of her own feelings; it is a sign of her submission to the owner's feelings or demands" (52). The surveyed woman becomes an empty, homogeneous vessel, a vulnerable sex object, whose sole purpose is to arouse and receive the desires and fantasies of the male viewer.

On the other hand, women's studies professor Susan Bordo contends in her book *The Male Body* that the surveyed party has agency, power, and even influence over his/her spectator. Bordo discusses her dislike of the term "sex object" because it suggests "a body that is inert, depersonalized, flat, a mere thing" (186). Instead, she argues that these so-called "sex objects" have agency. They "*speak* to us, [and] seduce us" by forcing the viewers to focus on their sexuality. They don't submit themselves to the viewers; instead, they "exert considerable power over us—over our psyches, our desires, our self-image" (182). Their nudity thus demonstrates their *choosing* to be sexualized in order to force the viewer to confront personal reactions and what those reactions mean. Irene, by coyly lounging in her chair and gazing silently at Sherlock, manages to offer up her "femininity as the surveyed" (Berger 55) without relinquishing control over the viewers' interpretations. She is objectified but not vulnerable. So where exactly is the balance of power? Is Irene's nudity a surrendering of herself in that she becomes defined by her sexuality, or is it the source of a power over the most fragile recesses of her viewer's psyche?

Irene's character unifies Berger's and Bordo's analyses to suggest that modern women can be both traditionally sexual and radically powerful by achieving power through deliberate self-objectification. Though some may view this as a suggestion that women are limited to sexuality for empowerment, Irene's manipulation of her sexuality demonstrates her brilliance. She manipulates the social stereotype of vulnerable nudity to reveal that she can be bold, brainy, *and* sexy. She embodies a

fusion of the tired tropes of powerful women—nerdy brains, cold-hearted brawn, and sultry temptation—into an original, powerful character truly worthy of besting the great Sherlock Holmes. In no way does she blindly rely on sexuality to ensnare her prey. This version of Irene Adler presents a woman who fully understands the objectifying connotations of nudity and therefore can anticipate men's reactions. She *chooses* to present herself as vulnerable and compliant to confuse her male adversaries. She uses the traditional surveyor-surveyed relationship to distract from her interrogative nature. Though she already controls the location, information, and blackmail materials, her nudity manipulates the male psyche to give her a winning advantage in the verbal battle of wits.

Moreover, Irene's nudity acts as a protective shield of anonymity that also grants her insight into her adversaries' minds. Berger makes a distinction between nakedness and nudity: "To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself" (54). Nudity, according to Berger, "is placed on display," which effectively "is to have the surface of one's own skin, the hairs of one's own body, turned into a disguise" (54). While nakedness is a complete openness of oneself, nudity becomes a method of hiding oneself behind flesh. Irene's bareness is not expressive but concealing. Her nudity becomes a disguise that hides her true vulnerabilities from Sherlock's famous deductive powers. Sherlock's confusion at the lack of readable information from Irene's appearance is demonstrated by the juxtaposition of John and Irene. In *Sherlock*, the detective's deductions are visually denoted by overlaid text. John's appearance and clothing tell Sherlock that John has a "date tonight" and "hasn't phoned sister" (Figs. 2-3). In contrast, when Sherlock studies Irene, all he gets is "???????" (Fig. 4). Her nudity, which in a previous scene she aptly dubs her "battle armor," shields her from his dissecting gaze. When his deductive abilities fail, Sherlock doesn't know how to proceed. Thus, her loss of identity through nudity as Berger defines it is not tragic but deliberate. Without clothing to give him clues, Sherlock must rely on her subsequent actions—something she has complete control over—for information. She uses her nudity to shed her identity, forcing her spectators to try to read and interpret her. This reading is subject to the personal desires, preferences, and personalities of her viewers. By objectifying herself, she becomes a mirror that hides her true self by reflecting the selves of her audience. Irene confronts these men with a blank, homogenous display that forces them to bare their identities—forces them into a nakedness of personality that grants her access into their psyches. This demonstrates that she has taken into consideration Sherlock's talent for deduction and has prepared for their encounter. Given his ability, nudity is her best option. Her self-objectification allows her to outwit Sherlock and achieve control over the situation.

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

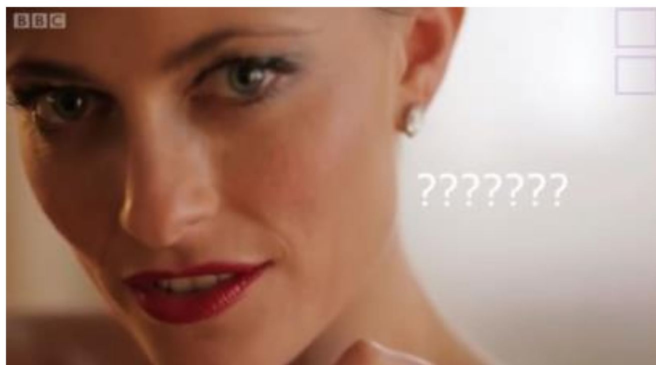

Fig. 4

Furthermore, her actions also demonstrate her understanding of the socially constructed ideals of masculinity. Berger discusses how in the nineteenth century, nude paintings were strategically placed so that men of state could reaffirm their manhood if they needed consolation. Seeing a nude woman "reminded [the spectator] that he was a man," even if he had just been outwitted by other men (Berger 57). This suggests that the power of the surveyor-surveyed relationship is exclusive to men. Seeing vulnerable, objectified women reminds them that no matter what happens in business or politics, their gender still affords them agency. And yet, sociologist Michael Kimmel demonstrates in his essay "Masculinity as Homophobia" that the qualifying qualities

for masculinity are numerous and fickle. First, masculinity depends on the ability of men to relegate women to sex objects. In this system, women are "a kind of currency" which men use to prove their masculinity to each other (24). To prevent any possibility of being perceived as gay, Kimmel explains, men must "[a]lways be prepared to demonstrate sexual interest in women that [they] meet" (26). Passivity becomes the antithesis of masculinity. The fear of being characterized as such "keeps men exaggerating all the traditional rules of masculinity, including sexual predation with women" (26). Too strong a response, however, will characterize the men in question as "hypermasculine, as sexually aggressive, violent rapacious beasts, against whom 'civilized' men must take a decisive stand" (27-8). Barbaric and sexually overzealous men, like the under-responsive (to women, at least) homosexuals, are disqualified from the exclusive club that is true masculinity. Thus, this arbitrarily determined system means that men must constantly consider how others will interpret their actions.

Irene plays off the social system of masculinity to empower herself. Since nudity is commonly interpreted as sexual availability, Irene deliberately invokes the sexual hyper-awareness that the social rules of masculinity dictate. Thus, she uses her nudity to create a conflict between two social expectations: 1) the basic social decorum of being a guest and meeting someone for the first time, and 2) the assumption that a true man must assert his masculinity through sexual responsiveness. How manly can a guy be if he can't assert his sexuality to a woman who is allowing, even *inviting,* objectification? Yet to force the intimacy of sex on someone you just met would be barbaric, even animalistic. Both possible responses lead to the same result: emasculation. Both characterizations—uncivilized brute or potential homosexual—are exactly what masculinity is defined not to be. There is no way that a man operating under the socially constructed definition of masculinity can avoid emasculation when he meets Irene. There is no way that he can demonstrate awareness of her sexuality without seeming overeager. She exploits the internal struggle over how to respond to establish her control. And she succeeds. The hesitation of both John and Sherlock gives her a window to initiate conversation and ask all the questions, thus determining the hierarchy of power within their encounter (Fig. 5). She uses her perceived objectification to disempower her male counterparts and, in turn, gain that power for herself. She not only demonstrates a deep understanding of social conventions, but is able to pinpoint a conflict within those conventions and exploit it to her advantage. Her nudity is a carefully calculated initial sacrifice of perceived agency that allows her to dominate the mental face-off that follows.

Fig. 5

Moffat's Irene Adler demonstrates that sexuality is not inherently disempowering; indeed, her ability to use sexuality to gain power is what makes her truly *modern*, and what demonstrates her acute intellect. Irene deliberately orchestrates her own objectification to protect her own identity and to exploit a weakness in the male psyche. In no way does her wielding of her own sex appeal bar her from empowerment. In fact, her character demonstrates how modern women can use society's existing gender structures to their advantage. Jane Clare Jones and the feminist community were wrong to suggest that this depiction of Irene Adler is "a regression." It is, instead, a progression to the greatest possible degree: that even sexual objectification can no longer put women at an automatic disadvantage. "Brainy is the new sexy," Irene suggests. The combination of intelligence and sexuality, and therein the ability to manipulate and outwit, become advantages in the never-ending struggle for power. Every individual uses all of the resources at their disposal to emerge victorious and modern women keep sexuality close at hand. In Irene's case, her sexiness is brainy.

WORKS CITED

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1977. Print.

Bordo, Susan. *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999. Print.

Doyle, Arthur Conan. *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. London: Electric Book Co., 2001. Web. 8 Dec. 2014.

Jones, Jane Clare. "Steven Moffat's Wanton Women." *The Guardian*. 3 Jan. 2012. Web. 15 Mar. 2014.

Kimmel, Michael S. "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity." *College Men and Masculinities: Theory, Research, and Implications for Practice*. Eds. Shaun R. Harper and Frank Harris III. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010. 23-31. Print.

Sherlock. Dir. Paul McGuigan. Perf. Benedict Cumberbatch. BBC Worldwide, 2012. Television.

EMILY MAN '17CC is majoring in Financial Economics and is involved in CIRCA, the Undergraduate Committee on Global Thought, and the Columbia Mentoring Initiative. She has spent the last eight years living in Beijing and started the library organization Book a Book for underprivileged migrant students. Emily is most interested in issues of cultural identity and economic inequality. Her favorite book growing up was the *His Dark Materials* series by Philip Pullman.

WHO SWIMS WITH THE BLOBFISH?: ANTHROPOMORPHIC BIAS IN CONVERSATION

LUCY JAKUB

The poster animal of the World Wildlife Fund is the giant panda. A lesser-known fact is that the poster animal of the Ugly Animal Preservation Society is the blobfish.

The Ugly Animal Preservation Society is a little-known project of Simon Watts, a biologist and writer who is also the head of Ready, Steady, Science, a company that supplies educational lectures and performances on science to schools in Britain. The UAPS aims to promote awareness of nature's more "aesthetically challenged" species through comedy. It recently held an online poll to select its mascot; in a pageant that included the proboscis monkey, the 'scrotum' water frog and the dromedary jumping slug, the overwhelming victory went to *Psychrolutes marcidus*, better known as the blobfish (*Ugly Animal Preservation Society*).

The rare blobfish lives in the benthic waters of the Southwest Pacific at depths of six hundred to twelve hundred meters. It is adapted to survive under atmospheric pressure several dozen times the pressure on the surface (Froese and Pauly). Great trawling nets, cast to catch crustaceans on the ocean floor, have been scooping up blobfish as bycatch, threatening their survival. The fleshy fish, decompressed, resembles a droopy, cartoonish face—fat, pink, and slimy, with dark little eyes and tiny fins. It resembles a blob.

The blobfish's comical appearance has made it a source of ridicule in the blogosphere and in the news. Its dead visage, blobby and a little sad looking, has become a meme on the Internet, gazing gloomily from many photoshopped online images. It matters little that, in its natural high-pressure conditions, the blobfish possesses a more elegant form; in three inches of water it looks alien, a freak of nature.

David Quammen, a popular science writer who focuses on evolutionary biodiversity, has an affinity for ugly animals. He makes a point of writing about pests, parasites, and weeds. His most recent book is on zoonotic plagues (though of course he has written about Bengal tigers as well). In his essay "Who Swims with the Tuna," he describes the origins of the dolphin-safe tuna movement, an unusually successful campaign to reduce dolphin bycatch in the nets of tuna fishermen as they deliver canned fish to our supermarkets. Quammen asks a pointed question: why is there such outrage over dolphin death, but such ambivalence toward dead tuna (*Boilerplate Rhino* 65)? One might ask a similar question about blobfish. Unlike tuna, we don't justify killing them because of their edibility—we know very little about blobfish, but we are quite sure that they are inedible. Like dolphins, they are dying as bycatch in human fishing activity.

© 2020 Lucy Jakub

We justify our dolphin-preference in a lot of ways. They are mammals, social animals, playful, and purported to be highly intelligent. The outrage that fueled the dolphin-safe tuna movement, as Quammen recounts, was inspired by a particular videotape that depicted dolphins dying, tangled in tuna nets. When they suffer, they thrash and scream. They possess the three characteristics that biologist Alvin Chan deems crucial to anthropomorphism: "1) high cognitive ability, 2) ability to suffer or experience pain, and 3) pro-social behavior" (1890).

Anthropomorphism, the human tendency to ascribe human characteristics to non-human entities, is a powerful factor in our relationship to the natural world. As Chan reminds us, it is a particularly important factor in our efforts to preserve our planet's rapidly dwindling biodiversity. Conservation efforts rely on the public support garnered by our concern for endangered animals. Anthropomorphizing animals allows us to moralize the issue of species loss and habitat destruction.

Steven Pinker's essay "The Moral Instinct" explores moralization in depth, and it's a complex concept. Our moral compass, it seems, is highly subjective, and some suspect it to be inherently self-serving (35, 55). The duplicity of morality is particularly relevant when examining our motives for helping other species. The moralization of conservation depends on our ability to empathize with the species with whom we share our environment. And this empathy is driven, in turn, by our ability to anthropomorphize creatures that are very different from us.

Studies on the effects of anthropomorphism in campaigns for social causes have determined that people are more likely to support a cause if it is given a human face. PSAs encouraging electrical conservation, for example, elicit a greater response when their picture of a light bulb has "humanlike features" and can be anthropomorphized (Ahn, Kim, and Aggarwal 2-3). Additionally, people connect more emotionally to an individual than to a group, or even two individuals. When audiences are shown suffering on a large scale, they become numbed and are less likely to feel that their contribution will make a difference (Kogut and Ritov 159). Confronted with the plight of entire species or ecosystems, one balks. Given a picture of a single baby tiger, one reaches into one's pocket. The active force here is called *anticipatory guilt*: that is, the feeling that if you don't help that baby tiger now, the tigers will go extinct in the future, and you will feel guilty that you did nothing to prevent it (Ahn, Kim, and Aggarwal 2). You anticipate your guilt. Rather than assuage it later, you do something proactive. You donate $20 to World Wildlife Fund (WWF), and are absolved.

Both dolphins and tuna, as it turns out, are on the WWF's protected species list. WWF chooses its projects—mostly animals at the top of their food chain and mostly mammals—based on their roles in their environments ("Species"). Big animals have a big impact on their ecosystems; generally, the higher its trophic level (i.e., position on the food chain), the more impact a species has, the smaller the population is, and the faster that population goes extinct when pressures are put on its habitat. Still, our focus on mammals and vertebrates is creating an imbalance in the research and funding

allocated to different members of the animal kingdom, a menagerie that includes 1,367,555 known species, only 62,305 of which are vertebrates, and only 5,490 of which are mammals ("Table 1"). The existing research and literature available on species reintroduction is overwhelmingly focused on mammals and birds; research published in the *International Journal of Conservation* states that only three percent of reintroduction literature is concerned with invertebrates, though they constitute at least ninety-seven percent of all species (Bajomi, Pullin, and Stewart 360).

Despite the value of its role in facilitating public awareness and the support of species protection, anthropomorphism remains, as ecologist Meredith Root-Bernstein et al. put it, "a double-edged sword." To assign value to a species based on its sociability, intelligence, and suffering is to suggest that species without these qualities "are not worthy of conservation because they are not like humans in the 'right' ways" (Root-Bernstein et al. 1578).

Ecologists Irene Martín-Forés, Berta Martín-López, and Carlos Montes note that conservation programs in Spain did not meet their 2010 biodiversity goal because, on close inspection, it was found that preference was being given to the conservation of vertebrates phylogenetically linked or physically similar to humans. An important factor in the conservation bias was the vertebrates' "Kindchenschema," manifested in the possession of large eyes, large foreheads, and short noses (Martín-Forés, Martín-López and Montes 2)—a factor more commonly known as "cuteness." Spain's amphibian species were left begging.

Some biologists take issue with anthropomorphism because it fundamentally inhibits our research and understanding of nonhuman animals. Zoologist James D. Rose argues that "[h]uman-centered thinking is a prejudice, a bias, a distorting lens between the affected individual and an objective perspective that is essential to accurately understanding other organisms, especially fishes" (140). The only creatures that think and feel like humans do are humans, and to extend the same qualities to other species is extremely misguided. Fish do not experience pain in the way mammals do, nor do they have "feelings" that arise from their emotional states.

The anthropomorphism of fish has led to other negative repercussions. Following the release of the animated film *Finding Nemo*, in which fish are highly anthropomorphized and also very cute, the demand for clownfish in aquariums and pet shops soared. This led directly to the export of hundreds of thousands of fish from coral reefs, specifically in the Vanuatu archipelago in the South Pacific, threatening the species and its ecosystem (Fickling).

Anthropomorphism can prompt us to attribute negative human characteristics to animals just as often as positive ones. Often the qualities attached are merely assumptions of intent, such as bloodthirstiness, malice, and the capacity for evil. Killer whales are a classic example of animals cast as murderous predators. Do they *enjoy* ripping apart cute baby sea lions? Quammen reflects on the octopus's image in popular culture as a tentacled sea monster that grabs beachgoers, an image that serves to justify

a tradition of good-natured underwater octopus-wrestling that leaves many poor animals shaken (*Natural Acts* 37). The blobfish, for obvious reasons, has been negatively anthropomorphized as well—it looks so pathetically humanlike that our first impulse upon seeing it is to laugh, and then to feel horrified pity.

Our so-called "moral instinct" is the force that compels us to donate to wildlife protection organizations; we help because we care. Our concern arises from our love for specific animals, the ones who danced through our picture-books and snuggled with us, velveteen, in our beds. It is too horrible to imagine Babar slain for his ivory tusks. It is heart-wrenching to watch Flipper struggle in the net. And the tigers, those majestic cats, with their gaudy orange stripes—who could condemn the Tiggers of the world to extinction? Our personal and somewhat superficial connection with these animals creates a desire for their conservation that could be construed as selfish. Quammen asks, "Are we concerned with humanity's relationship with nature, or are we merely concerned about Man's Special Friend at Sea, the dolphin? These are two different things" (*Boilerplate Rhino* 67).

Pinker refers to a biologist named Robert Trivers who proposed that altruism is an evolutionarily selected trait (37). We are biologically conditioned, he suggests, to be altruistic not only toward our kin, beings that are like us genetically, but also to members of other species (Trivers 35). In harmonious ecosystems, organisms don't take more than they need, and every species serves as a cog in an infinitely complex machine. There can be no blue whale without plankton, no swallows without gnats, no wolves without field mice. Organisms are engaged in many symbiotic relationships that support not just themselves but their neighbors; thus, an ecosystem thrives and is self-sustaining. Most humans don't buy into this idea—at least, our altruistic camaraderie with dogs doesn't extend naturally to all other members of our habitats. We tend to think of humans as existing independent of a larger system. But it is important to recognize the degree to which healthy biodiversity and the existence of weird species are in humankind's best interest. Simon Watts, with the UK's National Science and Engineering Competition, points out the practical value of keeping the ugly animals alive. The genetic resources of the world's varied species, he explains, including the millions we have not yet identified, could be crucial to the development of new medicines and cures for diseases. Secretions from the skins of frogs have antimicrobial capabilities. Biologists are researching snail venom as a painkiller. Axolotls' ability to regenerate limbs could change the course of medicine. For all we know, the cure for cancer could be derived from the disgusting skin of the blobfish (NSEC UK). We don't know very much about the blobfish, and it could disappear before we get the chance to learn.

But viewing the blobfish in terms of its potential genetic resources seems cold, just as cold as valuing the prolonged existence of bluefin tuna for its meat. We do not wish to save the dolphins because they perform crucial roles in their ecosystems (though they do) or because their DNA might contain lifesaving cures (it's possible) or because

they are tasty (also possible, though few dare confirm it). We want to save the dolphins because we are charmed by them, and because they remind us of ourselves. And because, as Quammen says, "they consent to let us swim with them" (*Boilerplate Rhino* 71). It turns out that we do not need to look for a reason to protect a species beyond simple, misguided, instinctual love. Love, guilt, admiration, compassion—these are the human impulses that drive conservation. Yet they are poor motivators if we reserve them for only a select few of the myriad species endangered by humanity's impact on the environment. How do we generate a genuine, holistic concern for all life on Earth? Can we moralize conservation without inevitably playing favorites?

Pinker cautions, in the heavy conclusion to his survey of morality, that we must be careful relying on our moral instinct when faced with such high-stakes concerns as the fate of the planet. "Nowhere is moralization more of a hazard that in our greatest global challenge. The threat of human-induced climate change has become the occasion for a moralistic revival meeting," he writes (58). Philosopher and vegetarian Peter Singer's moral stance on the treatment of animals, for instance, is only slightly helpful when extended to the environment as a whole. He believes that we should expand our circle of altruism to include "all beings with the capacity to feel pleasure or pain," but as James D. Rose might point out, the line gets blurry when we're defining the sensory experiences of other organisms (120). Plus, the circle excludes most invertebrates. But as much as environmental conservation has been driven by necessity and a fear of impending doom, the degree to which our efforts have been fueled by emotion and a sense of righteousness cannot be denied.

The environmental movement as we know it began in the 1970s and was triggered in part, oddly enough, by a photo taken from space. It was 1968, and Apollo 8 took its first manned flight to the moon. Astronaut William Anders looked out the window and snapped a photo—not of the moon, but of what was behind him, the Earth. In the midst of the cold void, peering over the lifeless surface of the moon, a bright blue marble hovered in the dark ("Apollo Astronaut"). The image struck us with its beauty—and its smallness. It's a planet with finite limits, and it's the only living thing as far as the eye can see. It was so little and blue and lonely-looking, and we suddenly felt responsible for it, like it was our job to protect it. We felt that moral instinct—perhaps along with a little *Kindchenschema*—tug at our heartstrings, and with it came a moment of clarity. Two years later, the Environmental Protection Agency was founded, and April 22 was christened Earth Day. All it took was a little perspective.

Quammen has predictions about the world after mass extinction, perhaps two hundred to four hundred years from now (*Natural Acts* 172). According to him, we won't wipe out life on Earth—even the Permian extinction 245 million years ago only devastated ninety-five percent of species—but we will certainly wipe out the big cats, and the blue whales, and the giant pandas (Quammen, "Planet of Weeds" 58, 67). Gone with them will be the blobfish, the tuna, and the spotted dolphin. The life that will be left will be composed of the roughest, toughest, most opportunistic of

organisms, which Quammen un-pejoratively calls "the weeds" ("Planet of Weeds" 66-7). Your roaches, your rats, your gray pigeons, and your dandelions. Humans, perhaps the weediest species of all, will probably be glad enough for the company.

We are currently undergoing the sixth mass extinction in the history of life on Earth, with species dying out at a rate of up to one thousand times the background rate (Chivian and Bernstein 5). It is true that big mammals—our beloved tigers, whales, and elephants—will be the first to go, due to their precarious perch at the top of unraveling food chains. But conservation must be a comprehensive effort to save as wide a variety of critters as possible. Ecosystems are not expendable—not even the ones that exist out of sight, in the aphotic murk. To assign value to the lives of species based on our own shallow preferences is to discolor our efforts to save the environment with pettiness. It is only through a broader appreciation for life, fostered by people like David Quammen and Simon Watts, that we can generate genuine concern for the well-being of *all* species, not just the pretty, the witty, and the bright. If we can expand our moral circle to include the biting, the barnacled, and the blobby, there may just be hope for biodiversity.

WORKS CITED

Ahn, Hee-Kyung, Hae Joo Kim, and Panjak Aggarwal. "Helping Fellow Beings: Anthropomorphized Social Causes and the Role of Anticipatory Guilt." *Psychological Science* (2013): 1-6. Web. 5 Nov. 2014.

"Apollo Astronaut Shares Story of NASA's Earthrise Photo." *NASA*. NASA. 29 March 2012. Web. 27 Dec 2014.

Bajomi, Bálint, Andrew S. Pullin, Gavin B. Stewart, and András Takács-Sánta. "Bias and Dispersal in the Animal Reintroduction Literature." *Oryx* 44 (2010): 358-365. Web. 5 Nov. 2014.

Chan, Alvin. "Anthropomorphism as a Conservation Tool." *Biodiversity Conservation* 21 (2012): 1889-1892. Web. 5 Nov. 2014.

Chivian, Eric and Aaron Bernstein. "How Our Health Depends on Biodiversity." Boston, MA: Center of Health and the Global Environment, Harvard Medical School, 2010. Web. 15 Dec. 2014.

Fickling, David. "Reefs at Risk after Disney Film." *The Guardian* 20 Nov. 2003. Web. 19 Nov. 2013.

Froese, Rainer and Daniel Pauly, eds. "Psychrolutes marchidus." FishBase. Nov 2014. Web. 23 Dec 2014.

Kogut, Tehila and Iliana Ritov. "The 'Identified Victim' Effect: An Identified Group, or Just a Single Individual?" *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*. 18: 157-167 (2005) Web. 3 Jan 2015.

Martín-Forés, Irene, Berta Martín-López, and Carlos Montes. "Anthropomorphic Factors Influence Spanish Conservation Policies of Vertebrates." *International Journal of Biodiversity* (2013): 1-9. Web. 15 Dec. 2014.

National Science and Engineering Competition UK. "Ugly Cures." Online video clip. YouTube. YouTube, 26 Aug. 2013. Web. 18 Nov. 2013.

Pinker, Steven. "The Moral Instinct." *The New York Times Magazine*. 13 Jan 2008: 32-58. Print.

Quammen, David. *The Boilerplate Rhino: Nature in the Eye of the Beholder*. New York: Scribner, 2000. Print.

---. *Natural Acts: A Sidelong View of Nature.* New York: Scribner, 2008. Print.

---. "Planet of Weeds." *Harper's Magazine* Oct. 1998: 54-69. Print.

Root-Berstein, M. L. Douglas, A. Smith and D. Veríssimo. "Anthropomorphized Species as Tools for Conservation: Utility Beyond Prosocial, Intelligent, and Suffering Species." *Biodiversity Conservation* 22 (2013):1577-1589. Web. 15 Dec. 2014.

Rose, James D. "Anthropomorphism and 'mental welfare' of fishes." Diseases of Aquatic Organisms 75 (2007): 139-154. Web. 5 Nov. 2014.

Singer, Peter. *The Expanding Circle: Ethics and Sociobiology.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981. Print.

"Species." The World Wildlife Fund. n.d. Web. 23 Dec 2014.

"Table 1: Numbers of Threatened Species by Major Group of Organisms (1996-2010)." *IUCN Red List.* International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. 11 Mar. 2010. Web. 15 Dec. 2014.

Trivers, Robert L. "The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism." *The Quarterly Review of Biology* 46.1 (1971): 35-37. Web. 26 Aug. 2008.

Ugly Animal Preservation Society. n.p. n.d. Web. 17 Nov. 2013.

LUCY JAKUB '17CC is a Creative Nonfiction major. She may concentrate in history. Sometimes she illustrates for *Columbia Daily Spectator* and the *Columbia Political Review*. Lucy is a feminist, a cinephile, and writes songs for ukulele in her spare time. She's from Blue Hill, Maine and misses the woods.

BEYOND "THAT'S NOT FUNNY": READING INTO HOW WE READ A PRISON RAPE JOKE

NADIA KHAYRALLAH

Meme of shoplifting warning, posted on Facebook.

Recently, a friend of mine with an edgy (but hardly extreme) sense of humor showed me this joke, obviously referencing the anal rape of a man in prison. It had been floating around the internet and had gotten almost 17,000 likes on a fairly popular humor page called "Breaking News." I understood that I was expected to find the joke funny, or at least acceptable, yet I was taken aback by the presentation of sexual violence amidst silly jokes and smiley emoticons.

Upon further reflection, I wasn't terribly surprised that this meme existed. The internet is full of offensive humor, and prison rape jokes are a staple in this arena (along with other rape jokes and jokes based on race, gender, or sexuality). What did surprise me was the lack of outrage, disapproval, or even questioning of the joke in the commentary attached to it. Most offensive humor generates heated, if intellectually simplistic, online debate; as we see in "The Playful Is Political: The Metapragmatics of Internet Rape-Joke Arguments," a compilation and analysis of rape joke debates from various internet forums, rape humor is generally no exception (Kramer). In the 1325 comments on the above photo, however, only 5 showed some objection to the humor, mentioning that it was "trivializing" rape, "not funny," or "not cool." None of these

© 2020 Nadia Khayrallah

disapproving remarks generated any further response or argument, and the other 99.6% of commenters either expressed amusement, made further jokes on the subject, or tagged friends ("Breaking News"). The disparity in the level of outrage between this joke and other rape jokes suggests that there is sizable set of people who condone prison rape jokes, even if they believe that rape in general is a serious issue and would even speak out against other kinds of rape jokes. The obvious difference is that this joke relates to prisoners, but how exactly does that fact equate to a complete shift in moral standards? The answer may be more complicated than we think.

Of course, many people might question the need for an in-depth analysis of what is "only" a joke, assuming that a joke is not a real indicator or transmitter of beliefs, and does not warrant serious moral critique. Humor philosopher Robin Tapley calls this defense the "speech problem": the belief that joking inherently gives the speaker "moral immunity," regardless of what he or she says (181). Tapley rejects this argument on the premise that particular jokes can spread "socially harmful" beliefs, and therefore should not be told (179, 181). Following the same logic, most of the opposition to rape jokes in popular debates focuses on the harmful effects of telling them, arguing that the creation and repetition of rape jokes perpetuates the notion of actual rape as acceptable or trivial. "That's not funny" is a frequent—and frequently contested—claim (Kramer). The handful of op-eds and blog posts about prison rape jokes in particular also focus on the unethicality of repeating or laughing at the jokes, pointing out that prison rape is a serious issue that should not be taken lightly.[1]

Critics of these jokes are right to point out that they can cause harm, but I am more concerned with an even more significant (and largely neglected) reason to oppose the "speech problem": jokes can be revealing symptoms of problematic underlying beliefs socially ingrained in those who tell and laugh at them. In fact, in their analysis of "Belief and the Basis of Humor," the philosophers Hugh LaFollette and Neil Shanks theorize that particular beliefs are essential to the perception of humor: the individual must be able to access different sets of beliefs about the joke's subject matter and experience a "flickering" between them (333). They use a simple joke as an example: "'What is the difference between men and government bonds?' Answer: 'Bonds mature'" (La Follette and Shanks 334). This joke would only be funny to someone who could see some truth in the alternate belief system presented by the joke (that at least some men do not mature), whereas someone fixed to the idea that all men do mature would be unamused (La Follette and Shanks 334).

Under this theory, we can assume that the joke we are examining also requires that we hold a certain set of beliefs, or at least entertain them, in order to perceive it as humorous. Thus, instead of simply insisting that the joke is not funny, it may be more productive to focus on the fact that it is funny to a great number of people, and unpack the socially ingrained beliefs about prisoners, race, class, masculinity, femininity, and sexuality that lead to the perception of prison rape as funny. Given that these beliefs must extend both wide and high—prison rape jokes appear not just in online memes

and pop culture, but also in the speeches of high-ranking politicians of all parties and officials responsible for actual prison policies—this analysis might have a deeper impact than the simple censorship of a joke (Minogue 116).

It speaks to how overlooked this issue is as a topic for serious examination that few academics have published work that focuses specifically on prison rape jokes (though several do address it peripherally in discussions of prison rape or rape jokes in general). One of the few who does is Craig Minogue, a current inmate and an ethics PhD candidate who has published in the *Alternative Law Journal*, a decidedly non-mainstream Australian law journal focused on critiques of the current legal system and human rights reforms. Minogue's article, "Why Don't I Get the Joke – Prison Rape in the Public Discourse," discusses the prevalence of prison rape jokes that suggest that rape is acceptable as an additional punishment or deterrent for criminals (116). Although, like Tapley and others previously discussed, Minogue is primarily focused on problematizing and arguing against the ubiquity of these jokes, he does also make an assumption about the beliefs underlying them: by arguing against the idea of reciprocal morality presented in these jokes, he assumes that this moral belief system is the reason many consider the jokes acceptable (118).

Minogue's critique of the jokes' eye-for-an-eye logic provides solid reasons that prison rape shouldn't be funny, one of them being that sexual violence is not linked to the severity of the crime committed (Sigler qtd. in Minogue 116). I would argue, however, that the disparity between the severity of the crime and the violent "punishment" is often acknowledged in such jokes, revealing that while reciprocal morality may be presented as a surface-level justification, it is not the true basis of the joke's acceptability and humorous effect. For instance, looking at the shoplifting sign, we can certainly see that it represents rape as a reciprocal punishment; in fact, it explicitly frames rape as a deterrent for shoplifters. The fact that it links prison rape to a petty crime, however, rather than something more severe or violent, shows that the joke makes little effort to establish reciprocal morality as a convincing moral justification for itself. This connection between crime and punishment seems like a very weak explanation for the effectiveness of the joke, unless we consider that other beliefs and prejudices stand behind it.

To begin, we must understand common beliefs about prisoners in particular. Since we have established that these beliefs do not necessarily depend on the severity of the crime, we can assume that some of them are directed at the idea of prisoners as a group, rather than any particular criminal act. Prisoners are often the unquestioned targets of jokes because their lives seem distant to most of those who are laughing. LaFollete and Shanks claim that adequate "psychic distance" from the subject matter is needed to experience humor (332-333). Since the ideal audience for this joke is composed of readers who have had no personal contact with inmates, their psychic distance is already sufficient. But many of these readers also feel socially and ideologically separate from prisoners, due in part to demographic distinctions.

It would be impossible to adequately discuss views of prisoners without mentioning race or class. It is no secret that incarceration is a highly race- and class-based phenomenon, particularly since the sharp increase in prison populations in the last thirty years of the twentieth century (Pettit and Western 151). Statistical meta-analysis of men born between 1965 and 1969 estimates that twenty percent of black men, compared to only three percent of white men, had been incarcerated by 1999, and educational levels reveal an even greater disparity: the rate was sixty percent for black men without a high school diploma (Pettit and Western 151). Yet when it comes to popular perceptions of jokes, the imagined makeup of prisons might be more important than the actual demographics. A wealth of statistical research on televised crime reporting has revealed the overrepresentation of African Americans as perpetrators of crime, white people as victims, instances of white people being victimized by people of color, instances of middle-class individuals being victimized by lower-class individuals, and violent "one-on-one" crimes (Williams 73-5, 78; Pollack and Kubrin 62-3; Dorfman and Schiraldi 8-17).

These skewed representations also bleed into our entertainment and cultural narratives. In a piece of historical pop-culture analysis in the journal *Social Justice*, Vicky Munro-Bjorklund argues that the American media has enforced "we/they polarities" regarding images of prisoners—particularly after the 1970s, when prison demographics became increasingly black and the Attica prison riot captured the public attention (Munro-Bjorklund 48). According to Munro-Bjorklund, both films about prisons and popular cop shows have disproportionately emphasized the image of the street criminal—usually black and lower-class, highly dangerous and violent within prison—as the archetypal "bad guy" who contrasts the narrative hero. To maximize this sense of otherness, she claims, such depictions under-represent nonviolent crimes, white-collar crimes, or crimes more likely to be committed by white people, such as drunk driving. Thus, playing on our prejudices of race and class, as well as established "good guy" vs. "bad guy" narrative structures, our culture has projected a singular, unsympathetic face onto the varied set of people within the prison system (Munro-Bjorklund 56-65).[2]

I would argue that this good guy/bad guy dichotomy is something we project onto the real world almost instinctively, allowing us to conveniently classify people as sympathetic victims or unsympathetic perpetrators. Under this framework, it is impossible to legitimately recognize the inmate as a victim of rape: one cannot be both a perpetrator and a victim, and the inmate has already been typed as the other role. Perhaps that contrast is part of what makes the meme funny—that it requires the reader to flicker between two irreconcilable images, that of the ruthless criminal and the weak, humiliated victim.

The highly related we/them dichotomy is also crucial to the joke's relationship with the reader and its humor effect. The sign actually refers to the reader as a potential imprisoned victim (it's "your" butthole), which could be perceived as offensive or

intimidating, except that the comparison is meant to seem so far-fetched that it's funny. The imagined raped prisoner is so unlike the reader in terms of race, class, and position on the moral dichotomy—or at least in terms of some of these identifiers—that the comparison seems inherently absurd. It requires the reader to "flicker" between two contrasting images of the self: the familiar one, and an almost inconceivable alternative that involves projecting a distant Other onto the reader's own body. This is not to say that a reader who is black or lower-class cannot laugh at the joke; perhaps readers who are more at risk of being equated with the unsympathetic prisoner-victim may feel even more compelled to laugh, in order to establish that there is a distance between themselves and the Other.

Still, the sign's effect comes not just from the target's marginal identity, but also from his position in the violence, which brings us to yet another set of problematic beliefs. We cannot overlook the fact that this humor focuses on the "butthole." The aspect of rape that the reader—particularly the male reader—is supposed to laugh at and desperately want to avoid is a physical mark of anal penetration. (Other medical or psychological effects of rape are not part of the joke; I imagine that a sign that read, "This is your brain with PTSD . . . don't shoplift" would not be perceived as quite so funny.)

Jokes about anal sex between men, both consensual and not, have historically been used in several cultures to attack the masculinity, and therefore social power, of less dominant groups (Davies). While the social shaming at the core of these jokes is not unrelated to homophobia and the stigma of same-sex activity, it is also deeply connected to the idea of "masculine dominance" as it relates to specific sexual roles:

In these jokes there is a dominant party who penetrates and a loser who gets penetrated. Often the victim is the physically weaker party, a servant like the king's jester, the performer of traditionally female tasks such as a cook or laundryman, or belongs to a subordinate ethnic minority such as a Chinese, French Canadian, (Red) Indian, or Chukchi. Thus the direction of sexual domination in the jokes follows patterns of social domination.

The dichotomy of penetrator and penetrated is most stark in jokes set in prisons in which the use of force determines who will play the dominant role of the master and who will be humiliated by being effeminized. (Davies 162)

Clearly, the paradigm described here is very gendered, even as it relates to all-male settings. On one side of the dichotomy is maleness, equated with penetrating, dominating, winning, and socially powerful identities. On the other is femaleness, equated with being penetrated, victimhood, losing, and socially disadvantaged identities. By using images of anal penetration to link a socially stigmatized group with femininity, these jokes translate other forms of prejudice into the language of misogyny.

Thus, we can understand the joke's basis in gendered beliefs by looking at it through the lens of "rape culture" discourse, which emerged from academic feminism

and now serves as the basis for popular activism. A commonly cited online definition of rape culture from Marshall University's Women's Center defines it as "an environment in which rape is prevalent and in which sexual violence against women is normalized and excused in the media and popular culture," but we can clearly see how these same concepts apply to the rape of male prisoners ("Rape Culture"). For instance, the idea of "blaming the victim," usually used to describe the practice of holding female victims responsible for their rapes because of their sexual expression or behavior, applies in multiple ways to the discussion of prison rape jokes—most obviously, to the fact that we literally use an inmate's crime to blame him for being raped. But victim-blaming is also related to the sexual shame attached to rape victims under the belief that "only promiscuous women get raped" (Marshall University). In a "rape culture," getting raped is attached to feminine sexual desire, which is considered inherently transgressive and deserving of violence—perhaps even more so when it is ascribed to a man. In this paradigm, the act of rape both imposes the image of feminine promiscuity on the victim and allows us to assume that it was there from the beginning. We assume that rape is degrading for the prisoner in the joke because we attach the sexual acts committed against him to his sexuality, linking him to both homosexuality and womanhood, traditional sites for further violence and a "step down" from "masculine dominance."

Thus, whether we realize it or not, the joke on the sign is a multilayered translation between different prejudices. The racial and socioeconomic Other is contained in the despised image of the inmate, who is punished and humiliated through associations with homosexuality and femininity, which are viewed as both the target and the result of sexual violence. In a way, this seemingly stupid joke is somewhat brilliant in that it manages to implicitly incorporate prejudices toward several groups without making them the explicit target. This joke is not explicitly about a woman, a gay man, or a lower-class black person, which is convenient: targeting these groups overtly is much less socially acceptable, and might actually seem immoral to the teller or reader. In fact, it technically doesn't even reference an actual prisoner—just an imagined, potential one. But it is upon this imagined prisoner, this alternate, worst-case version of the self, that we project the image of the sexual Other, which is what we most fear becoming. So maybe we laugh at this image because we need an easy, indefensible target for our prejudices. And maybe we laugh to enforce and display our psychic distance from this image, to assure ourselves and others that this is not our reality.

NOTES

1. These authors come from several ideological perspectives, ranging from prison reform-minded individuals (Lash; Jefferson), to feminists with concern over rape culture in general (Silman; "Prison Rape Jokes and Rape Culture"), to anti-feminists accusing feminists of hypocritical silence on the issue (Tuthmosis).

2. It is worth mentioning that since the publication of Munro-Bjorklund's article, recent popular television shows such as *White Collar*, *Breaking Bad*, and *Mad Men* have depicted crime committed by white and middle- to upper-class characters, creating an alternative to the traditional archetype of the criminal (who is also not always the indisputable "bad guy"). Still, it is safe to say that this alternative image has not erased the more established, demonized image of the criminal, which remains race- and class-specific.

WORKS CITED

"Breaking News." Photograph of shoplifting warning sign. Digital image. Facebook. N.p., 24 Mar. 2014. Web. 8 Apr. 2014.

Davies, Christie. *Jokes and Targets*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2011. Ebrary. Web. 7 Apr. 2014.

Dorfman, Lori, and Vincent Schiraldi. "Off Balance: Youth, Race and Crime in the News." *Building Blocks For Youth.* Center for Children's Law and Policy, Apr. 2001. Web. 20 Apr. 2014.

Jefferson, Cord. "Why Prison Rape Jokes Are Really Not Funny." *GOOD Magazine*. GOOD Worldwide Inc, 22 June 2011. Web. 21 Apr. 2014.

Kramer, Elise. "The Playful Is Political: The Metapragmatics of Internet Rape-Joke Arguments." *Language in Society* 40.2 (2011): 137-68. ProQuest. Web. 10 Apr. 2014.

LaFollette, Hugh, and Niall Shanks. "Beliefs and the Basis of Humor." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 30.4 (1993): 329-39. Hughlafollette.com. Hugh LaFollette. Web. 8 Apr. 2014.

Lash, John. "Sorry, Prison Rape Jokes About Justin Bieber Aren't Funny." *Juvenile Justice Information Exchange.* Center for Sustainable Journalism, 31 Jan. 2014. Web. 20 Apr. 2014.

Minogue, Craig. "Why Don't I Get the Joke – Prison Rape in the Public Discourse." *Alternative Law Journal* 36.1 (2011): 116-18. Hein Online. Web. 7 Apr. 2014.

Munro-Bjorklund, Vicky. "Popular Cultural Images of Criminals and Prisoners since Attica." *Social Justice* 18.3 (1991): 48-70. JSTOR. Web. 09 Apr. 2014.

Pettit, B., and B. Western. "Mass Imprisonment and the Life Course: Race and Class Inequality in U.S. Incarceration." *American Sociological Review* 69.2 (2004): 151-69. JSTOR. Web. 8 Apr. 2014.

Pollak, Jessica M., and Charis E. Kubrin. "Crime in the News: How Crimes, Offenders and Victims Are Portrayed in the Media." *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture* 14.1 (2007): 59-81. University at Albany, State University of New York. Web. 20 Apr. 2014.

"Prison Rape Jokes and Rape Culture." Web log post. *Shamelessnavelgazing.* 27 Nov. 2013. Web. 19 Apr. 2014.

"Rape Culture." Marshall University. Marshall University Women's Center. Web. 07 Apr. 2014.

Silman, Sherrie. "Why Your Justin Bieber Prison Jokes Perpetuate Rape Culture." Feminspire. 25 Jan. 2014. Web. 21 Apr. 2014.

Tapley, Robin. "'Just Joking!' The Ethics of Humour." Yeditepe'de Felsefe 1.4 (2005): 172-98. Print.

Tuthmosis. "Rape Jokes About Men Are Okay." Web log post. *Return of Kings*. 10 July 2013. Web. 19 Apr. 2014.

Williams, Dianne. *Race, Ethnicity, and Crime: Alternate Perspectives*. New York: Algora, 2012. Academic Complete. Web. 20 Apr. 2014.

NADYA KHAYRALLAH '17CC is majoring in dance and psychology. She is also an active member of Columbia's extracurricular dance community, a contributor for the *Columbia Spectator's* Arts and Entertainment section, and an academic tutor for elementary through high school students. Nadia grew up in North Carolina and lived in California for most of high school, but is now undeniably in love with New York City.

.

PURE SCIENCE: AN OLD NAME WITH SOME NEW WAYS OF THINKING

SHREYAS VISSAPRAGADA

> "Shall our country be contented to stand by, while other countries lead in the race?"
>
> —H.A. Rowland, "A Plea For Pure Science" (1883)

Over a hundred years ago, in the second-ever issue of *Science*, H.A. Rowland made an impassioned plea on behalf of his field. But he did not define his field with specificity, as scientists usually do—he did not identify as an astronomer, or a chemist, or a physicist. Instead, he identified himself with "pure science": a science, he argued, that was done purely for the sake of learning about the world in which we live (Rowland 242). In its formative stages, pure science was met with heavy opposition. In the 1850s, the influential Senator Stephen A. Douglass, for instance, heavily promoted research into agricultural technology over electromagnetism and optics (Trigilio). So, in the face of arguments for the practical, for the realistic, for the applied, Rowland published a poignant defense of the quixotic. Incredibly, Rowland's hundred-year-old rhetoric echoes across generations—political speeches still rally around getting America "back to the top" of Rowland's implied race of scientific education and research.

Modern as Rowland's ideas may sound, they are outdated, and so too is the status quo understanding of scientific research in the United States today. The idea of science research as a "race" has been a myth for quite some time; scientists have worked together across borders for years and years to learn more about the world. South Korea might always be a step ahead of America in whatever science ranking system the media chooses to publicize, but the reality of science research is that South Koreans and Americans work together in labs and groups quite frequently. And just as this collaboration spans physical space, it spans time as well. As Neil deGrasse Tyson, the popular astrophysicist, put it in *COSMOS: A Spacetime Odyssey*, "Science is a cooperative enterprise, spanning the generations. It's the passing of a torch from teacher to student to teacher, a community of minds reaching back to antiquity and forward to the stars" (Tyson). The nature of science has changed: it isn't competitive; it's collaborative.

The nature of pure science embodies this distinction. Whereas applied scientists must deal with patents, copyrights, and the business of the products they eventually create, all of which inevitably introduces some competition, pure science is almost totally collaborative. And while the method by which pure science researchers obtain money to perform their work—the dreaded grant application process—can be competitive at times, the science itself is not done to push one group of people ahead

© 2020 Shreyas Vissapragada

of the other. It's done to learn more about the world. Pure science as a research field was born against strong opposition, with very few people like Rowland to defend it; yet it grew into a collaborative field across nations that has produced the most brilliant minds of our time and the most novel ways in which we consider our universe.

But this glorious bastion of knowledge and understanding is in danger of being lost—not only in America, but also across the world. The existence of pure science has been under threat from politicians and businessmen almost since its disengagement from engineering and applied science, but never before have these threats warranted extinction. And yet, that's exactly what's happening: new attitudes towards pure science, motivated by politics and economics, have driven pure science to the boundary of a bleak future. And to understand the extent of this dystopian fate, one need only look to the northern border.

Many Canadian politicians believe that the era of pure science has come to a close, with Gary Goodyear, Minister of State for Science and Technology, even going so far as to state that "the day is past when a researcher could hit a home run simply by publishing a paper on some new discovery" (qtd. in Semeniuk). Ironically, announcements about the Higgs boson, the Planck satellite, and cosmic inflation, announcements which began just as papers on new discoveries, have been all over the news in the past two years alone. Clearly, the day is not past.

But unfortunately, Canadian politicians seem to pay no heed to science news. Their government has shifted its focus on science research, only providing funding to specific applied science areas and effectively leaving pure science for dead. The current situation in Canada has painted an austere future for pure science. The new mindset of Prime Minister Stephen Harper's government is perhaps best explained by one of the foremost advocates for science within the Canadian Parliament, Kennedy Stewart: "They see [pure science] as a kind of cash cow which is taking up a lot of money in Canada, and it's not really generating short-term economic benefit, so they think it has to be radically restructured. . . . It's an ill-conceived move" (qtd. in Mancini).

To the Canadian government, "short-term economic benefits" are the only gains to be made from science—nothing more. Indeed, Canada's newfound focus on "research in areas that are in the national interest from a social and economic perspective" shows exactly what they think science should be: a financial asset (qtd. in Mancini). And this mindset is not at all limited to the Canadian government. When I, a first-year student studying chemistry and astrophysics at Columbia, return from my sheltered world of New York City academia to my decidedly non-academic household, I am quickly reminded that "You want to be a . . . researcher . . . why not an engineer?" is a question I can expect once a week. At a large research university, no one seriously questions the motivations behind pure research, and certainly no one pushes for someone to radically rethink their field of study solely because it is pure. The motivations behind the question I must answer back home and behind Canada's new science policy are largely the same: they stem from the assumption that pure science

does not contribute as much as applied science—or at all, for that matter. This status quo mindset is what threatens the continued study of pure science today.

To conserve something that is threatened by societal preconception, we must radically rethink the status quo. So goes the argument made by William Cronon in his environmentalist masterpiece, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." In it, he argues that the public perception of wilderness is so flawed that it prevents environmentalism from achieving its goal of conservation. Rather than defining ourselves as separate from the wilderness, he claims, we must define ourselves with the wilderness. Rather than conserving some "other" entity, we must conserve something with which we coexist. A similar rationale can be used to understand how societal perceptions must change to conserve pure science. As with Cronon's "wilderness," the current perception of pure science is that of an "other"—specifically, that it is something non-human that we use to earn human profit or to benefit human society in some way. This conception of pure science is very much akin to the idea of wilderness as a "pristine sanctuary" that exists only to give humanity access to the untainted (Cronon 7).

But wilderness, as Cronon argues, is not a pristine sanctuary; "instead, it is a product of that civilization" which we fear will "taint" it (Cronon 7). In the same way, to rethink pure science, we must recognize that pure science is not simply an asset or a liability that exists for our gain. It is a collection of fields that captivate the imaginations of the least curious of children and the most brilliant of researchers. It is a mode of thinking that continues to motivate applied science today. And it is done independent of the pockets of corporations; it is done for the sake of learning about the world, of explaining and comprehending the beauty of the universe. Pure science, like Cronon's wilderness, is not distinct from us—it *is* us. Our discovery of subatomic structure was not made with economics in mind; it was made to explain the particles that make us. When pure science is misunderstood as a financial liability, it holds no importance to Harper and his business-minded model for Canadian growth. But pure science is not about business. It is science done for the sake of understanding our world and ourselves, and the worth in that understanding is incompatible with the scales of economic success so often used to judge how much things matter.

At the same time, incredibly, pure science does more than just fostering this understanding. It contributes to the financial growth of a nation just as much as it contributes to the intellectual growth. In his testimony presented to the U. S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, Tyson poignantly made this argument in a defense of the pure science of a national space program:

> Epic space adventures plant seeds of economic growth, because doing what's never been done before is intellectually seductive (whether deemed practical or not), and innovation follows, just as day follows night. When you innovate, you lead the world, you keep your jobs, and concerns over tariffs and trade

> imbalances evaporate. The call for this adventure would echo loudly across society and down the educational pipeline. (Tyson)

Pure science not only promotes long-term economic growth (which is something that Canada will surely lack if it continues to eschew pure science in its entirety), but does so by inspiring the populace to grow together as an intellectual community—as a community of "innovators," in Tyson's words.

Tyson's comments on the worth of pure science are not merely the philosophical musings of an emotional astrophysicist; rather, they are empirical, backed up by the history of the Space Race. One of the most well-studied figures in the history of pure science was the first Secretary of the Smithsonian, Joseph Henry. Henry frequently went head-to-head with the previously mentioned Stephen A. Douglass regarding the worth of pure sciences like electromagnetism and optics (Trigilio). While Douglass championed the seemingly more utilitarian agricultural engineering, Henry was able to convince one of his most important followers to learn all that he could about electromagnetism and pure science—and that follower, Alexander Graham Bell, went on to create the first telephone. The science and technology of electromagnetics would go on to become a hugely important part of intellectual revolutions in America; now, it's impossible to find products that aren't built around the functionality of a computer, which, at the core of its hardware, is based on electromagnetic systems. Even the agricultural technology championed by Douglass has come to depend on computerized processes to optimize output.

My aim is not to dismiss engineering—which was indeed necessary to build new technologies like the telephone and computer, and is still necessary today—but to exalt the pure science that created the intellectual space from which all that success derived. The historical anecdote highlights the immensely important role that pure science has played in the growth of American society—intellectually and, in the long run, financially. History does not side with Harper's model of a future without pure science. In the United States, a new understanding of pure science is of the utmost importance. America is at a crossroads when it comes to science. Historically, America has left her mark on the most pivotal pure science developments of the last few centuries—from the theorization of new systems of kinetics governing chemical reactions to the theorization (and discovery) of new subatomic particles. These discoveries have come from a variety of locations: private universities across the country, national laboratories such as Fermilab and Brookhaven, even private research firms. Regardless of the location, the United States has been intimately involved in funding and perpetuating pure science research. No research—whether through a private or public organization—could sustain itself without the funding of the National Science Foundation. But recent developments in American science policy and public perception have threatened the country's involvement in pure science to an extent almost rivaling Canada. This is not dangerous because it puts us at the bottom of some

hypothetical "science race" between countries; it is dangerous because it removes a crucial collaborator in the global conversation that pure science has become. To understand the extent to which America is being pulled out of the global scientific conversation, we must consider perhaps the most threatened scientific agency that our government has to offer: NASA.

Space science is decidedly pure: it does not seek to offer immediate economic benefit (though it has done so many times—a fact that will be addressed later), and it is done primarily to understand more about the universe. NASA, then, is certainly an organization of pure science—but it's a dying one. NASA has been on a steady decline for years, its fate championed by Michael Gough, author of the 1997 Cato Institute white paper "Don't Lavish Funds on NASA." In the article, Gough urges the government to cut funding to NASA, citing the increasing privatization of science and the high risks without reward of a manned space program as two main reasons to do so (Gough). It's worth noting that the Cato Institute is decidedly Libertarian, and thus holds the view that the government shouldn't really play a role in anything. But it's also worth noting that its calls to action have effectively been realized. Calls for the privatization of science funding have only gotten stronger, and NASA's budget has fallen to about half of what it was in 1997.

But what else has happened since 1997? For one, NASA's output has lessened significantly. And why wouldn't it? As funding decreases, so too should output. This basic consequence is something that Gough understood, but his predicted solution, privatization, has not occurred. Elon Musk's company SpaceX, the frontrunner in the private space industry, has grown over the last decade to the point that it is now valued at over a billion dollars (Wells), yet its research has not amounted to a fundamentally new understanding of rocket science. Furthermore, much of the private space industry (including SpaceX) operates on governmental contracts provided by NASA itself (Stenovec). The private space sector heralded by Gough as the solution to the space science funding problem hasn't amounted to much, and, furthermore, is still inextricably linked to NASA. If NASA, the central cog that drives both governmental and private innovation, loses funding and fails, the American presence in astronomical research will fade into nothingness.

And yet, much of the public still supports Gough's views. Debate.org recently asked the public, "Should America continue spending money on NASA?", and the rationales given for the many "No" votes are telling. Importantly, lurking behind the "No" answers is most often the statement that we cannot afford NASA, or that it doesn't produce tangible benefits to society. First, this statement is guilty of misinformation: NASA, in fact, only takes up a negligible 0.5 percent of the national budget (Tyson). But more than misinformation, this argument reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of the purpose of NASA and the benefits that it provides. To conserve NASA's funding, as with the Crononian conservation of pure wilderness, this perception must change.

Changing this perception requires a fundamental understanding of the facts, and the facts are simple. NASA is certainly a microcosm of pure science in America—it is an organization based first and foremost on the principle of research for the sake of understanding and learning—but it has had an incredible amount of side impacts, from the education of the American public to spinoff products that have bolstered the American economy. NASA not only hosts many different space exploration and research projects, ranging from theoretical astrophysics research on pulsars to the practicalities of actually sending humans into space, but also plays a pivotal role in both inspiring America's youth and granting them access to tools that will help fulfill that inspiration. And while NASA does all of these things with the genuine purpose of helping the world learn more about the universe in which we live, one of the nicer side effects is that technological spinoffs of NASA's research can—according to one conservative estimate in *Nature*—multiply the money put into the program by a factor of at least two: every dollar put into NASA has historically returned, on average, around two dollars and ten cents (Bezdek and Wendling 106). While the short-term economic benefits of NASA are admittedly small, the long-term benefits are verifiably enormous.

The critique is that we cannot afford NASA, but the reality is that no one can put a price tag on that kind of research, that kind of education, that kind of intellectual inspiration that drives innovation for generations to come. Just as pure science has worth both in the understanding that research brings and in the long-term financial stability that comes with it, NASA drives American society toward a greater state of knowing while simultaneously paving a road to a more educated, economically secure future.

This trend of pure science uncovering knowledge while providing economic and intellectual security is the reason why, fifty or a hundred years down the line, Canada will not be able to realize the long-term economic benefits of pure science while any other country currently invested in that research will; instead, it will realize the folly of Harper's business-minded science regime so many years before. The trend is exemplified by how nineteenth-century research into electromagnetism produced incredible new markets and technologies and economies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. And it's a trend that American lawmakers must understand both for the sake of the continued existence of pure science and for the sake of the economic vitality of our nation.

Science and society have always been at odds with each other; as John F. Kennedy once said, "Scientists alone can establish the objectives of their research, but society, in extending support to science, must take account of its own needs" (Kennedy). But when we redefine pure science as an intellectual restoration of the creativity and vitality of the human spirit as well as a serendipitous economic investment with a guaranteed payoff, we bridge the gap between science and society. We solve the age-old question of why we should choose to fund this endeavor at all. Policymakers must understand

and accept a refined definition of pure science in the context of society to ensure the intellectual progress of our society as a whole. When we recognize that we perform pure science to understand our surroundings and ourselves, that fiscal gain is not an end goal but a fortunate consequence of this important field of research, we can transform our nation—as Tyson so eloquently put it in his Congressional address—"from a sullen, dispirited nation, weary of economic struggle, to one where it has reclaimed its twentieth-century birthright to dream of tomorrow."

WORKS CITED

Bezdek, Roger H., and Robert M. Wendling. "Sharing Out NASA's Spoils." *Nature* 355 (1992): 105–106. Print.

Cronon, William. "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." *Environmental History* 1.1 (1996): 7–28. Print.

Gough, Michael. "Don't Lavish Funds on NASA." *Cato Institute*. Text. N. p., 14 Dec. 2012. Web. 17 Apr. 2014.

Greenberg, Daniel S. *The Politics of Pure Science*. New York: New American Library, 1968. Print.

Kennedy, John F. "Address at the Anniversary Convocation of the National Academy of Sciences." October 22, 1963. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. *The American Presidency Project*. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9488. 11 Nov. 2014.

Mancini, Melissa. "Science Cuts: Ottawa Views Pure Science As 'Cash Cow,' Critics Say." *The Huffington Post Canada*. N. p., 7 May 2013. Web. 1 Apr. 2014.

Rowland, H. A. "A Plea for Pure Science." *Science* 2.29 (1883): 242–250. Print.

Semeniuk, Barrie. "Research Council's Makeover Leaves Canadian Industry Setting the Agenda." *The Globe and Mail*. News. N. p., 7 May 2013. Web. 31 Mar. 2014.

"Should America Continue Spending Money on NASA?" *Debate.org*. N. p., n.d. Web. 17 Apr. 2014.

Stenovec, Timothy. "NASA Awards Boeing, SpaceX & Sierra Nevada Corp. With Contracts For Space Shuttle Replacements." *Huffington Post*. N. p., 3 Aug. 2012. Web. 17 Apr. 2014.

Trigilio, Merri Lisa. "A Smithsonian Dilemma: Pure Scientific Research, 'A Thousand Applications,' or Both? – O Say Can You See?" N. p., n.d. Web. 17 Apr. 2014.

Tyson, Neil deGrasse. *Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey.* FOX Network, 9 Mar. 2014. Television. r. 2014.

---. "Past, Present, and Future of NASA – U. S. Senate Testimony." (Date 3/7/2012). *HaydenPlanetarium.com*. N.p. Web. 17 Apr. 2012.

Wells, Jane. "Elon Musk on Why SpaceX Has the Right Stuff to Win the Space Race." CNBC.com. N. p., n.d. Web. 27 Apr. 2012.

SHREYAS VISSAPRAGADA '17CC is majoring in Astrophysics with a concentration in either Computer Science or Chemistry. He is originally from Aurora, Illinois, and is very active with Columbia University Quiz Bowl. Additionally, Shreyas is a member of the Undergraduate Recruitment Committee, and he is interested in academic research on campus. In the future, he hopes to become a professor, a science writer, or a NASA researcher.

TURNING IT UP TO ELEVEN:
THE PERILS OF THE LOUDNESS WAR

DAN SINGER

Cocky British rock star Nigel Tufnel (Christopher Guest) and fictitious producer Marty DiBergi (Rob Reiner) are standing in a room filled with expensive musical equipment. The camera shot switches to a close-up of an amp as the celebrity gloats over its custom volume knob, featuring settings, he emphasizes, that range from one to—not ten, but *eleven*. The producer is struggling to understand his enthusiasm. "Does that mean it's…louder? Is it any louder?" he asks. "Well it's *one* louder, *innit*?" declares Tufnel, his British accent dripping with dumb satisfaction. Still not convinced, DiBergi poses the obvious question: "Why don't you just make ten louder and make ten be the top number?" Tufnel's smirk evaporates. He pauses, then looks up at the producer: "These go to eleven."

One of the most well-known scenes from the faux-documentary *This Is Spinal Tap*, this dialogue appeals to us as a classic example of a pop icon so blinded by fame that he is oblivious to his own idiocy. Consumers of pop-culture find it easy to scoff at Tufnel's enthusiasm and dismiss him as a fame-addled dimwit.

But while viewers are busy laughing, what they don't realize is that they are essentially buying into the same fallacy Tufnel falls victim to through his custom-made amp. Since the decade of the film's release, the recording industry has been increasingly cranking up its own volume knob on the music it releases. The result is what consumers and industry professionals refer to as the "loudness war," a conflict fought between record labels at the expense of consumers.

There's no doubt that the volume of recorded music has been increasing over the past thirty years, and it's not because musicians have been playing their instruments any differently. The culprits are audio engineers and record executives who want to make their products stand out to audiences. The effects of this practice are subliminal. A certain single seems to pop out from the steady stream of Hot 100 artists crooning through your car stereo. It sticks in your head, and a few clicks later, the tune is on your iPod, the royalty check is in the mail to the artist, and most importantly, your money is in the record company's wallet.

But what's the big deal about loud music? After all, every stereo, iPod, computer, CD player, or other playback device comes furnished with its own volume knob, to be adjusted to suit the listener's preference. The real problem with loudness is that it comes at the expense of sound quality. While the analog era relied on media with a strict threshold for volume, digital techniques eliminate this restriction, a phenomenon that engineers have exploited to increase the commercial value of their work.

One of these techniques is referred to as compression. Imagine the intro to a rock song. The guitar player lets a soft chord ring out, then the drummer cracks the snare

© 2020 Dan Singer

drum twice, suddenly the whole band makes a forceful entrance, and we're off. The variations in volume are what make this musical sequence interesting, effective, and, well, musical.

Compression reduces the range between quiet and loud sounds, either by making the quiet louder, or the loud quieter. What was once a curve with plenty of peaks and valleys becomes squished down to a pancake. Engineers are now free to turn up the overall volume of the song without worrying about the loud parts blowing out your speakers.

The product of this technique is music that catches your attention, but lacks substance. Think of an overenthusiastic TV salesman. He screams at you to buy his fertilizer, or shoe insert, or super-absorbent cloth. Then when it arrives, you realize it's just a towel. The same marketing tactic is being applied to music. And it's working.

Since the 1950s, audiences have experienced music primarily through recorded media instead of concerts. But when these media are being exploited to line the pockets of their distributors, to what degree do they continue to convey the musician's artistic intent? Perhaps the real tragedy of the loudness war is not that it dilutes the dynamics of audio or dupes consumers into settling for less, but that it perverts musical meaning in the name of profit. When it comes to music, the ethical choice is to leave the industry volume knob at ten, and let the listeners turn it up to eleven if they are so inclined.

WORKS CITED

Jones, Sarah. "The Big Squeeze: Mastering Engineers Debate Music's Loudness Wars." *Mix Magazine* 1 Dec. 2005. MixOnline. NewBay Media. Web.

"The Loudness Wars: Why Music Sounds Worse." Interview by Robert Siegel. *All Things Considered*. National Public Radio. 1 Aug. 2012. Radio.

"The Loudness Wars: Why Music Sounds Worse." *NPR Music*. National Public Radio, 31 Dec. 2012. Web.

This is Spinal Tap. Dir. Rob Reiner. Embassy Pictures, 1984. Film.

Vickers, Earl. "The Loudness War: Background, Speculation, and Recommendations." *129th Audio Engineering Society Convention*, 4-7 Nov. 2010. 2010. 1-27. Web.

DAN SINGER '17CC is considering a major in Creative Writing or Anthropology. He hosts a bi-weekly radio show at WKCR where he works as Program Director. He also contributes regularly to Columbia's undergraduate magazine, *The Blue and White*. In his free time, Dan enjoys playing his instrument, the vibraphone. Before coming to Columbia, he grew up just across the river in northern New Jersey.