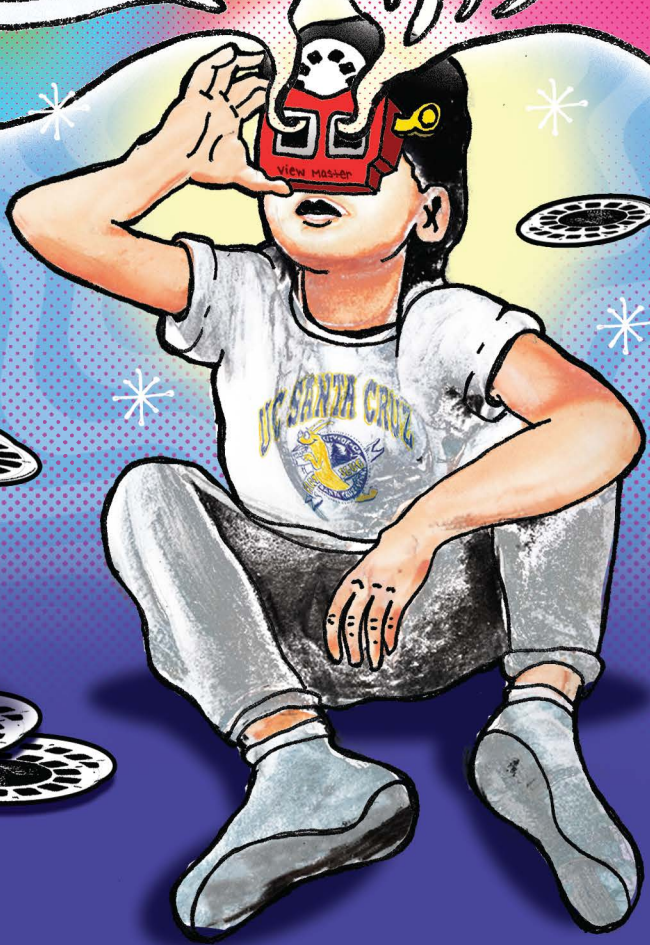


FLUZZY



VOL. 33

EDITOR'S NOTE

It is with great excitement and pride that I present to you this year's publication of the Eyecandy Film Journal. As an organization, we have slowly acclimated ourselves to the printing process, re-learning the knowledge we had lost since the pandemic struck. Despite the many challenges we faced—from receiving enough funding to understanding the printing process—we have stuck through thick and thin, working hard to produce this year's volume.

When I first joined Eyecandy, I knew close to nothing about creating a magazine, much less leading an organization. My first year was confusing and chaotic—from learning editorial jargon to helping out in a process we barely knew—to say the least. But I found myself working alongside amazing people, who encouraged me to go far beyond what I could see myself doing. I had never once imagined that I could be Editor-in-Chief, but looking back, I've come a long way. I'm far from being perfect, but so I'm grateful for this opportunity.

Creating volume 33 was an enormous responsibility that all of our staff members stepped up to, and I want to take a moment to acknowledge and appreciate their efforts. They are the backbone of this magazine, from meticulously going through each of the articles and layouts to bringing the whole magazine together. Their dedication, passion, and drive are embodied within the pages of this magazine, and I couldn't be more proud to be a part of this organization and work alongside these talented individuals.

So, without further ado, all of us invite you to embark on this reading journey. Happy reading!

—*Isha Chury*
Editor-in-Chief

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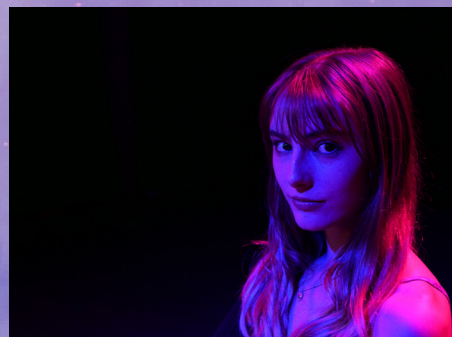
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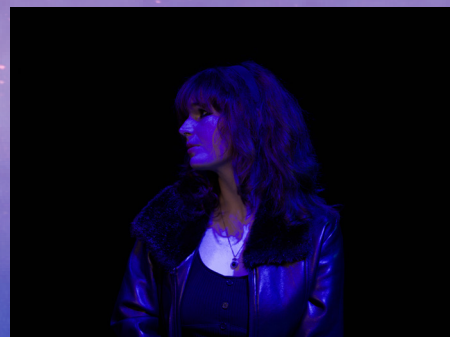
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THE POWER OF RYAN GOSLING

Written by Amelia York

Designed by Alyssa Flores

Upon looking up “sigma male” on the social media app TikTok, users will find edits of men running down hallways with chainsaws after women, smashing mirrors, and perpetrating violence. One will hear the suave voice of Christian Bale reminding us that, “You can always be thinner, look better,”¹ or the snarl of a bloodied Brad Pitt stating, “We’re a generation of men raised by women.”² One might see Ryan Gosling drive down lonely roads in lonely cities after committing the most desolate crimes.

The “sigma grind set” refers to intense ideals of self-efficiency, independence, and assertiveness. In online spheres, disillusioned men have turned this lifestyle for “success” into an excuse to idolize violent, antisocial fictional characters to justify their social ostracization. **This online idolization can lead to toxic behaviors that harm the “sigma” and those around them.**

To alleviate this toxicity, we must deconstruct the sigma mythos and find fictional characters that serve as better role models for positive expressions of masculinity. There is an iridescent, shining light that captures one solution to breaking the sigma cycle - and that light is Ryan Gosling.

For those not chronically online, a definition of “sigma male” might be beneficial. No official research journals or scholarly sources have published reports on this topic because **sigma isn’t real.**

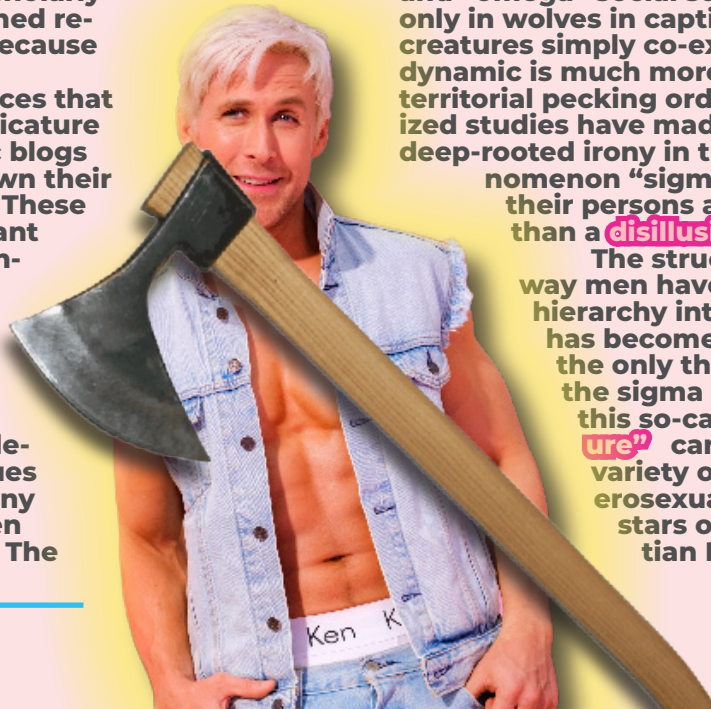
The only sources that subscribe to this caricature are pseudoscientific blogs forcing products down their consumer’s throats. These articles may be blatant patriarchal propaganda to most, but to fully digest the sigma grind set, place yourself in the shoes of the disenfranchised man. Estrangement and depression are not issues to be minimized in any group of people, even the most privileged. The

problem is that these men take a machiavelian approach to amending their hollowness, prioritizing respect over love. The Adult Man, a self-proclaimed “no BS guide to adulthood for men” (a product and personal empowerment website), preaches, **“A sigma male is a man within the socio-sexual hierarchy who chooses to live his life outside of the normal social dominance hierarchy structures of society.”** Sigma males share many traits in common with the alpha archetype, though their tendency to walk outside of the lines of traditional social dominance hierarchies sets them apart and makes them different.”³

According to the manliest man website to ever man, sigmas are assertive (aggressive), leader-like (selfish) figures who, due to their self-sufficient and nonconforming tendencies (lack of social skills), tend to take on a “mystery man” persona. This sigma model takes from a larger structure used to categorize men and limit their expressions of masculinity, known as the “socio-sexual hierarchy”⁴. There are two significant takeaways from this paradigm; First, the “inventor” who proposed this philosophy is Vox Day, a known alt-right activist.

Secondly, the hierarchical wolf pack structure that influenced this concept is non-existent. Professor Barbara Zimmerman has clarified that wolf packs’ mythic “alpha” and “omega” social structure is detectable only in wolves in captivity. In the wild, these creatures simply co-exist as families. Their dynamic is much more empathetic than the territorial pecking order that uncontextualized studies have made it out to be. There is deep-rooted irony in the fact that the phenomenon “sigma men” have crafted their persons around nothing more than a **disillusioned dream.**

The structure isn’t real, but the way men have turned this wolf-pack hierarchy into a lifestyle manifesto has become reality. Wolves aren’t the only things used to represent the sigma grind. The mascot for this so-called **“subversive figure”** can take the form of a variety of white, cisgender, heterosexual fictional men. Some stars on this list include Christian Bale’s Patrick Bateman

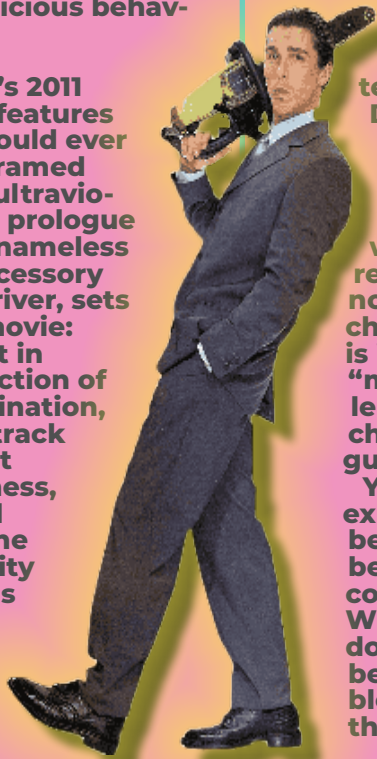


from American Psycho, Jake Gyllenhaal's Lou Bloom from Nightcrawler, Brad Pitt and Edward Norton's Tyler Durden/Narrator from Fight Club, Joaquin Phoenix's Joker, and Ryan Gosling's Officer K from Blade Runner or the unnamed protagonist from Drive.

Underneath their physical characteristics is a more nuanced trait essential to becoming a sigma mythos martyr. While we absorb the demented thoughts of Patrick Bateman and the anarchistic schemes of Tyler Durden through narration, most of these men seldom express their emotions through calm and collected communication. Lou Bloom's frustration with failing in the journalism industry is demonstrated via guttural screaming and mirror shattering (self-destructive tendencies, much?). The fracturing of Joker's psyche after committing murder is portrayed via slow-motion interpretative dance, with no one but his reflection to react. The Drive protagonist spends more of the film's runtime driving and beating than speaking. He serves as the epitome of what makes the male sigma trope so dangerous.

Overemphasis on violence and lack of healthy expression on the screen leads to silent repression and aggressive impulses in reality. Men idolize this internal harboring of emotions, believing it will give them the same mysterious aura of their favorite lone wolves. Instead of sharing their feelings, they're locked in a self-inflicted cycle of bottling up their resentment of the world, which can lead to malicious behavior.

Nicolas Winding Refn's 2011 neo-noir crime thriller *Drive* features everything a sigma-seeker could ever want: social incompetence framed as suaveness, aestheticized ultraviolence, and Ryan Gosling. The prologue to the film, featuring Refn's nameless protagonist serving as an accessory to robbery as the getaway driver, sets the tone for the rest of the movie: lowlighting covering the cast in shadows with the neon reflection of streetlights as the only illumination, a dreamy synth wave soundtrack washing over everything that occurs with a wave of sleekness, Gosling's bad boy gloves and iconic scorpion jacket, and the winding streets of L.A. The city he weaves through during his crimes is so expansive and devoid of non-artificial light that the driver is shrouded in a sense of anonymity.



This mysterious nature makes the character appeal to men who feel outcasts from society. Aside from his illicit activities, the driver's day job performs vehicular stunts for the movies ("I drive...for the movies," Gosling explains in his charming yet detached voice), literally putting on masks imitating actors and then crashing or cruising⁶. He has no sense of self, meaning others can easily attach their identities to the driver.

The disillusioned male can picture themselves winning over their dream girl (Carey Mulligan's submissive character Irene, in this case) from their more alpha counterparts (Oscar Isaac's troubled yet cocky character Standard), beating gangsters bloody in between cruising the dark streets of the big city. Their standoffish nature is perceivable as slick as opposed to strange. Gosling's white skin, blonde hair, blue eyes, and youthful facial features are impossible to overlook when analyzing how privileged men who feel as though they have been scorned by society connect with his performance. Research reviewed by Emily Mazzurco suggests that "media of pop culture has played a part in the crimes of 25% of offenders"⁷ and that "People are more likely to imitate someone similar to themselves... Age, gender, social status, and competency level are all traits people imitate from others" when it comes to committing a crime.

Despite his wrongdoings, the *Drive* protagonist stands out from other sigma mascots because, unlike more blatant psychotic characters such as Patrick Bateman or Tyler Durden, the driver has moments of tenderness and empathy that justify his actions (abuse, burglary, homicide, etc.) for film bros. His caring nature towards Irene and her son is wholesome when isolated from the rest of the movie's events. Capturing non-conventional yet "bad-ass" male characters displaying acts of kindness is important because it encourages "misfit" men to emulate this benevolence. That said, there are much better characters to emulate than the *Drive* guy.

Years of research have led to the explanation for why portraying poor behavior on the screen results in poor behavior off the screen as well as the consequences of toxic masculinity. While this work helps give those who do not trust common sense as to why behaving in isolating behavior is terrible for the individual and those around them, the downfall of all this studying

is that it has minimized research exploring positive expressions of masculinity.

According to doctors in Counseling Psychology Matt Englar-Carlson and Mark Kiselica, "Positive masculinity emphasizes the adaptive character strengths, emotions, and virtues of men that promote well-being and resiliency in self and others (Isacco et al., 2012),"⁹ The hope that men can channel their emotions towards more significant change in them and their communities lies on Ryan Gosling's shoulders. Encouraging **positive masculinity** revolves around shifting from asking men questions such as "What is wrong with you?" to "What kind of man do you want to be?"

Now that the perpetrators of the sigma grind set in cinema have been identified and deconstructed, one must examine the male characters that could spark virtuous masculinity. It is principal to search for characters who maintain a quiet, independent demeanor but in healthier ways. Two characters currently in the cinematic sphere who embody these traits are Robert Pattinson's Bruce Wayne and Pedro Pascal's Mandalorian. While both characters initially struggle with reaching out for help or showcasing their affection towards their loved ones, their developmental arcs tackle these exact problems. The Mandalorian ultimately forgoes his mission for loot to protect an infant-like alien he has traveled across the universe with, illustrating how to put others before yourself in a caring way instead of a self-destructive one. The Batman demonstrates endearment to Alfred in his personal life and fondness towards his community when he helps those in need in Gotham in a civil manner at the end of the film.

The Mandalorian and Mr. Wayne balance the mysterious nature that makes the sigma lifestyle appealing alongside genuine tenderness and compassion for others. While these two lone but loving wolves make great additions to the Positive Masculinity Cinematic Canon, a character from a film that has not even been released

could shatter the Sigmasphere forever. His name? Ken. A tsunami of memes and media expressing excitement over Gosling's brief appearance in the trailer for and behind-the-scenes photos of Greta Gerwig's upcoming Barbie film has infiltrated online spaces previously dedicated to praising Joker and Travis the taxi driver. Gerwig's rendition of Ken, in his sleeveless denim vest, fluorescent roller-skating fit, and pink-ascot-cowboy-hat campy combo, embraces strength and charm in a positive light unfamiliar from that shown in American Psycho or Fight Club. Only fleeting seconds and shots have emerged, but those shown depict Gosling expressing his emotions visually (although not violently) and grinning while enjoying healthy hobbies such as rollerskating with his iconic friend Barbie. If these snippets alone have gathered the attention of current sigma-worshippers, one can only imagine the idolization that will spawn once the film comes out in the summer of 2023. In all of his Drive Guy glory, Ryan Gosling might be able to drive these film bros away from the kind of man they are to the type of man they should want to be.

Ryan Gosling makes an excellent lighthouse for guiding lonely men away from the darker depths of the sigma grindset, but the waves are monstrous. More positive role models in media that harbor desirable "masculine" traits while spurning antisocial, harmful behaviors are necessary to channel the toxic masculinity pool that has grown in online spaces into positive masculinity. More importantly, one should look off the screen and at the reality around them. How can you maintain the persona you want to portray while practicing kindness? What is more valuable to me, my image or the happiness of myself and those around me? Who can I look to for inspiration in this dark, cruel world? The answer is still probably

Ryan Gosling.



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¹American Psycho, directed by Mary Harron (2000).

²Fight Club, directed by David Fincher (1999).

³Joshua Sigafus, "The Sigma Male Explained: Understanding the Lone Wolf," last modified February 23, 2023

⁴Joshua Sigafus, "The Socio Sexual Hierarchy Explained: Where Do You Rank?," last modified September 18, 2022

⁵Elise Kjørstad, "Wolf packs don't have alpha males and alpha females

⁶Drive, directed by Nicolas Winding Refn (2011).

⁷Emily R. Mazzurco, "Copycat Mass Killings: How Personality Might Moderate Identification with Antisocial Characters," Kean Quest 4, no. 1 (2021): Accessed February 28, 2023

⁸Mazzurco, "Copycat Mass Killings."



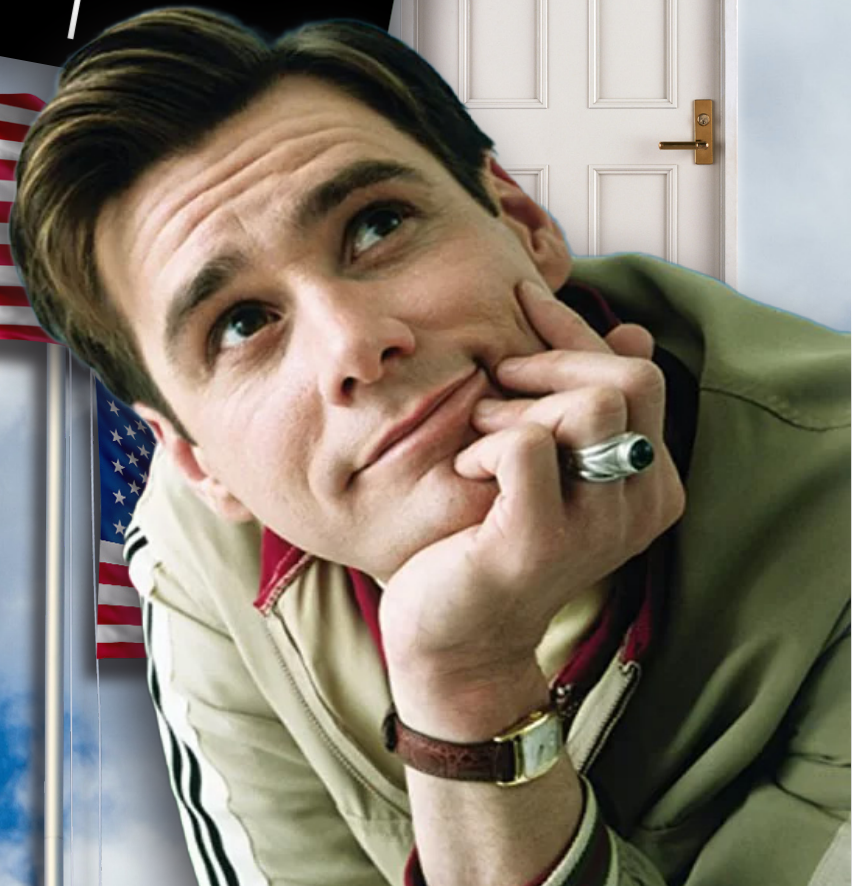
Through the Exit Door:

A Rejection of Modern Success

Written by Nicholas Nygard

Designed by:

*John Mccarthy
Alyssa Flores*



Rejection of the American Dream

The Truman Show was always one of my favorite films as a kid, mainly because the idea that the guy from *The Mask* was playing 'an average joe' was hilarious. On my first watch as a kid, I had no understanding of the film's themes. Basically, any scene without Jim Carrey's pearly white teeth on the screen didn't catch my attention. But while rewatching this movie through the lens of a young adult in America, the significant themes of capitalism, consumerist culture, and the disillusioned idea of the American Dream, started to shine through.

This film would not have had the impact it had if not for Carrey's performance as Truman. With the tragic character Truman, no other actor could have added so much humanity to the role as Jim Carrey did. From 1998 to 2023, *The Truman Show* has retained its immense relevance. I understand this film to be an example of how people can feel disillusioned when they finally reach certain standards of success. Part of the reason I feel that Truman's character arc has become more relevant is because many popular drama shows today include main characters with completely opposite arcs. Despite their large differences, they continue to tell similar messages of how to live a good life.

One character arc that shares a similar message but with a completely different character arc is *Breaking Bad's*, Walter White. *The Truman Show* and *Breaking Bad* both tackle what it means to strive for superficial goals like money, versus more important things like relationships, yet their main characters have opposite arcs. Both pieces of media reject the American Dream and superficial ideals of success.

As a basic plot summary, *The Truman Show* takes place on Seahaven Island, a completely manufactured town that functions as a studio set, disguised to Truman as a regular town.

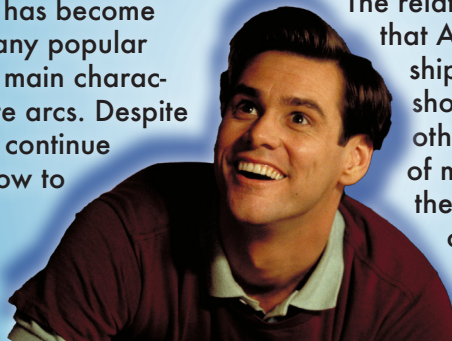
Truman is our everyday man who is living in a world he is convinced is real, when in reality, every person he sees, his neighbors, colleagues, acquaintances, best friend, and even his wife, are

all actors. Every aspect of his life is designed to be broadcasted to millions of people, done by having thousands of cameras placed everywhere, recording his every move. The main drama of the film is that the seams of this false reality are starting to fall apart. He goes against the entire 1000-plus crew in search of truth and freedom.

An important aspect is that Truman – at least at the beginning of the film – is a very happy because he has fulfilled nearly every facet of the American dream. He has a stable desk job, a decent relationship with his wife and best friend, a home that he owns, and complete safety within the confines of the suburbs. However, we learn later in the film that one of Truman's passions is to travel, despite never being able to do so. I think this dream of traveling shows how he wants to escape from a "perfect life".

What is important to realize here is that despite having what many people would define as a great life, Truman still wishes to escape. The relationships he has are shallow, showing that America idolizes superficial relationships over true, vulnerable affection. The showrunners were able to fulfil every other aspect of his life with the exception of meaningful relationships. To summarize the final decision, Truman is given a final choice by the creator of the show, Christof; he can enter the real world and face the harsh realities of everyday life or live in an artificial world built for him. In one of the most iconic climatic moments of the film, Truman leaves through the exit of the TV set, and we lose sight of him as he has escaped the eyes of the viewer. What does Truman's final decision inform us about the American dream?

Truman's choice to leave everything behind could be interpreted as simply being dissatisfied with the things that he had. Alternatively, I view his dreams of escape as something else. Truman is more concerned with chasing what is real than what is commercialized or artificial. I believe in the theoretical real world, Truman would have liked all the things that he had, but the tragedy of Truman's life does not come from the suffering he faces day-to-day



"It doesn't matter how safe or happy something might seem, if it isn't real, it cannot fulfill you."



suffering he faces day-to-day. In reality, Truman lives a prosperous, healthy life. The tragedy stems from the fact that it doesn't matter how safe or happy something might seem, if it isn't real, it cannot fulfill you.

Truman's ending choice brings me back to how the film is relevant today. The "American Dream" is the idea that anyone from anywhere in America, can pull themselves up by their bootstraps and attain wealth. Our modern idea of success goes hand and hand with the American Dream because it typically refers to your career, wealth, and the value of the material possessions that you own (clothes, cars, jewelry, etc). The more of these things you have, the more "successful" you are considered and the closer you are to achieving the American Dream. Success rarely refers to the state of your health, relationships, or passions. The issue is that, while being a hopeful sentiment, the American Dream clearly isn't the whole truth as it conveniently leaves out the part about everybody having different difficulties, and fewer/more opportunities to attain wealth based on race, class, gender, etc. A study published by Crystal L. et al., titled *Believing in the American Dream Sustains Negative Attitudes toward Those in Poverty*, examined how often participants agreed with statements that put more or less blame on poor people for their class positions. They concluded that because of a large belief in meritocracy, the widely held idea of the American dream (or in other words, "upholding the principle that status in society is earned") led people to have more negative attitudes towards people in poverty. They found a correlation between those who believed in meritocracy and those who put blame on people in poverty. While the idea that anyone can come to our country and succeed with an equal shot is a hopeful vision for our system, it simply isn't true. Meritocracy and the American Dream, should not be believed in because of how they can change your outlook on people who aren't succeeding. We should strive for a version of success that doesn't view those who are impoverished as solely responsible for their position. The film's last scene is a rejection of the American dream

and a message urging the viewers in both the film and the real audience to leave behind what's fake and strive for what's real.

"I Won", Walter White's Portrayal of Success.

"A message urging the viewers in both the film and the real audience to leave behind what's fake and strive

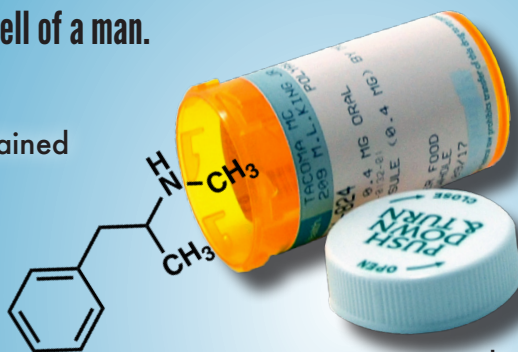
When thinking of pieces of media that portray an opposite arc compared to that of Truman's, I immediately thought of Breaking Bad. Truman at the start of his arc is completely sustained by his material possession but isn't fulfilled by passions or meaningful/real relationships. I would summarize Truman's arc in the film as a man who thinks he has everything until he drops everything for what is real rather than what is pleasurable but artificial. At the end of the movie, he willingly leaves everything behind, exiting the TV set with nothing. On the other hand, Walter White, the lead of Breaking Bad, is not sustained financially but fulfilled by real relationships. The difference between the two characters is that Walter lacked a job that sustained him but had meaningful relationships while Truman was sustained by his job and the systems around him but wasn't fulfilled by any real relationships.



Walter White's arc throughout the show is a journey looking at a man willing to throw away the little he has for things he has convinced himself he wants – like power, money, and respect. Walter White is an overqualified, underpaid chemistry teacher who, after a cancer diagnosis, turns to a life of crime in the drug business to make a lot of money before he dies. By the end of the show, Walter has successfully climbed the criminal empire ladder; other criminals respect him, police are obsessed with/or fear him, and he has more money than he could've ever imagined. Yet by the end, he is a shell of a man. Walter has nothing of substance. The relationship between his family and friends is shattered, and anyone who even remotely cared about him had clearly severed

“Yet by the end, he is a shell of a man. He has nothing.”

Many people have explained to me that they believe Walter White is a man who has nothing and because of this, decides to make a change in his life and rise in power regardless of what's



against him. Some people think Breaking Bad is an underdog story. Now, you're probably thinking, how does this relate to Truman and the American Dream? Both pieces of media address what success really is and how shallow things like money and power are ultimately worthless. Current trending shows and movies feature characters who lead self-destructive lives.

Yet this doesn't stop anyone from glorifying these actions and sympathizing with the man who "keeps getting kicked down". I believe these interpretations of character arcs like Walt's lead to harmful mindsets like that of the American Dream. I believe these interpretations of character arcs like Walt's lead to harmful mindsets like that of the American Dream.

Our society makes judgments about people's worth based mostly on their wealth and job. While most of these judgments are harmless, it shows just how much we equate success with money and status. These judgments affect the way we view media. Relating it back to Breaking Bad, beliefs like the American Dream or meritocracy are why people

view Walter White's journey through wealth as an admirable journey regardless of what he loses in the process.

Overall, certain media interpretations that are informed by meritocracy or the American Dream can be especially harmful. Adopting ideals that prioritize health, meaningful relationships, and passion will lead you to chase things that actually matter. Truman taught us always to follow what is real and fulfilling over what is superficial and pleasurable. Making health, meaningful relationships, and passions a priority of your desire, is the first step to walking through the door, just as Truman did.

“Making health, meaningful relationships, and passion a priority of your desire, is the first step to walking through the door, just as Truman did.”

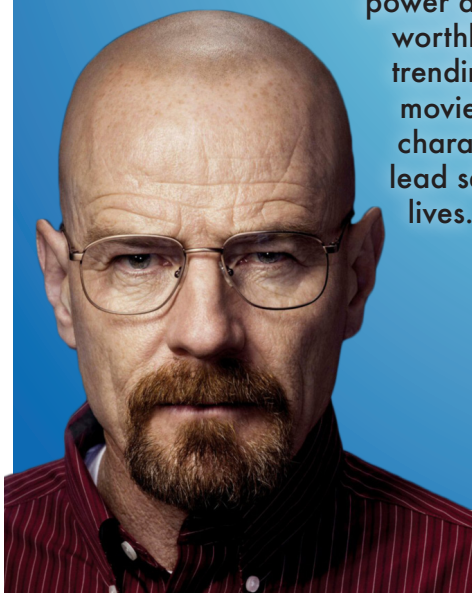
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Little Miss Sunshine

Seeing Beauty in Dysfunction

Written By: Alexandra Tineo

Designed By: Chloe Brown



Who would have anticipated that a family in a 1971 yellow Volkswagen traveling to California would reveal the truth about beauty pageants, dysfunctional relationships, and loser-winner mentalities? Yet what the family didn't anticipate was that the van would break down mid-700 miles, and they would have to push it the rest of the way to California! Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris's *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006) showcased the complex dynamics of family relationships, the struggles of losing, and the power of acceptance to move forward. The film was able to tackle these themes in an honest, yet comedic way, providing an unexpected and powerful message to its viewers. Since its release, the matters surrounding untenable beauty standards, economic hardships, mental health struggles, and

life. As society changes, this film ages with it. Many can see themselves in the shoes of these characters. For instance, Olive, a little girl aged 7, is fixated to win a beauty pageant. For a child, getting applause, a crown, and prize money for her beauty is immensely appealing. Or Dwayne, who is tired of his family's constant bickering, and if given the chance, would leave to be anywhere else than home. In another case, Frank got lost amid a romantic affair, and once his lover found someone else, his mental state began to plummet. Each of these characters represents a real struggle as they try to gain a valuable lesson through their paths. Despite their difficulties, these characters' stories remind us that beauty, security, and love are worth striving for.

The Hoovers: Who Are They?

Olive, who is 7, is drawn to beauty pageants. However, she's unaware of the realities and expectations surrounding these events. She cannot grasp the fact Little Miss Sunshine praises beauty standards. Considering the fact that every pageant awards girls opposite of her as the winner, she is unprepared for this cold truth. Olive doesn't realize how harshly a competition based on appearance will judge her, so her innocence creates a sense of naivety.

As a symbol of purity, Olive represents wonder, curiosity, and excitement about the world. She sees Little Miss Sunshine as a fun and exciting experience unlike her older brother, Dwayne, who views beauty as shallow and irrelevant to be judged and awarded for. She has this one-sided view of having fun without knowing or experiencing the superficiality of people. Olive embraces her true self, focusing on the joy of the moment rather than worrying about her appearance, fitting in, and the pressure of being admired. This outlook on life provides her with a sense of liveliness and enthusiasm her teenage brother and the adults around her have yet to experience.

Dwayne embodies what everyone makes out "your teenage years" to be like. Moodiness and lack of affection are at a peak, but so is Dwayne's silence. He chooses to be mute and only communicate through written messages, all the while displaying a cold, stone-faced expression. Compared to Olive he has the opposite of a bubbly personality he lacks any form of physical and verbal affection.

Dwayne maintains that if one thing is terrible, then everything is terrible and so is life. When asked about who he hangs out with he wrote "I Hate Everyone," and meant everyone, even his family. When he is surrounded by his family as they argue, he doesn't react or comment on the chaos he sees happening, he just nonchalantly sits there.

Sheryl is the mom to Olive and Dwayne. It has been her role to make things right in their household and to make rational decisions to balance the disorder. Often, she clashes with her husband due to their differing personalities and views. Sheryl shows more sympathy for her family due to her motherly instincts, while her husband sees things as either good and bad with no other perspective.

Sheryl exemplifies hope and connection. Without Sheryl, the Hoovers would not be together because the mom is the mediator, also known as the glue of the family. She keeps everyone in check including her husband when he comments offensive and inconsiderate words to his family. As a result, her family developed closer bonds due to her ability to see how differences can work together.

Richard is the dad to Olive and Dwayne, in addition to being the husband to Sheryl. He has a one-dimensional view of becoming a winner in life which he applies to every situation, including his brother-in-law's dilemma. Richard was fast to consider Frank a loser because he, in Richard's view, gave up on himself.

Richard illustrates a need and obsession to always be a winner because he believes that in every person there is "a winner waiting to be awaked and unleashed upon the world." His "Refuse to Lose" program creates a destructive mentality that there is no room to be a loser. Chances to be high to lose but Richard's household would be riddled with criticism for not being the winner he praises if this were to happen.

Edwin Hoover is Richard's dad and the grandpa to Olive and Dwayne. He is the most irrational and blunt out of all the Hoovers. He lived through many experiences and his words of advice to Dwayne went along the lines of, "F**k a lot of women. Not just one woman. A lot of women." He has a foul mouth and doesn't hold back, especially around his grandchildren.



Edwin embodies the carelessness of living without any limitations. Due to his age, he has nothing to lose. However, this does not affect the deep love he has for his family, as he is willing to do anything for them. With his mentality, he teaches Olive a valuable lesson of so be it if the world turns its back against you. It doesn't matter who doesn't like you; what matters is the effort you make to put yourself out there. This gives Olive confidence from a source other than her parents.

As an uncle, Frank is typically a distant family member. In some cases, uncles may be closely involved and in others, they may be present only occasionally. However, Frank was not given the choice whether or not to re-establish close relationships with his family. His sister Sherly took him in after he tried to commit suicide. He had no other person than his sister after he lost everything in a one-sided relationship.

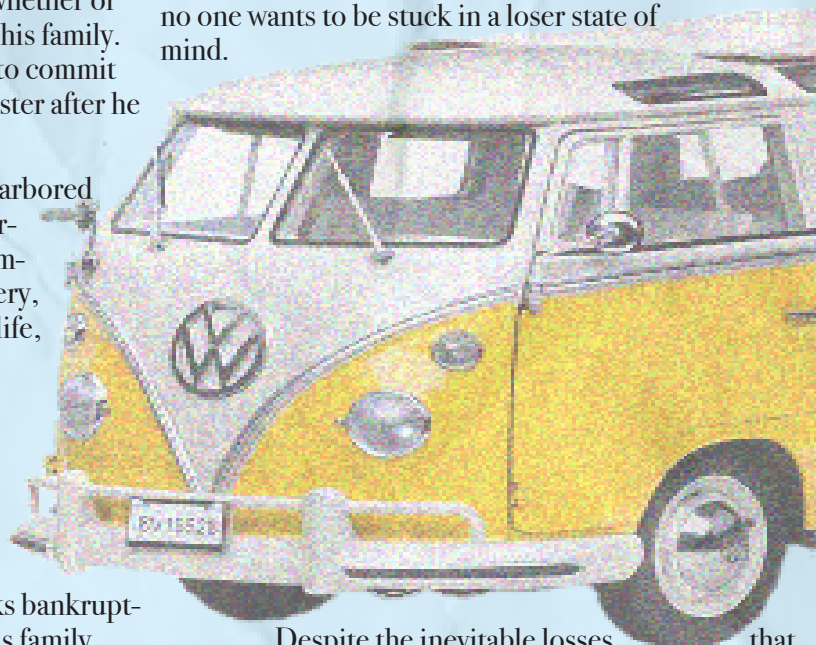
Even at the lowest point in his life, Frank harbored hope. Since he proved that anyone can overcome any obstacle and be content with themselves again. Through his journey of recovery, he showed that no matter what happens in life, there will always be the love of family.

Does A Loser Really Lose?

There is one thing Richard cannot stand: a loser. You cannot be a loser under any circumstances. This is quite hypocritical coming from a man who lost a job deal, risks bankruptcy, and makes judgemental comments to his family. Although his kids were taught the loser/winner mentality firsthand, the harsh result of this ideology is that his kids think less of themselves since their dad only accepts winners.

The Little Miss Sunshine pageant, for example, gave his daughter a chance. He told her that if she wins, only then will she be able to participate. Along the way through California, her dad begins to make her feel guilty. During a family outing to eat, Olive ordered breakfast with ice cream on the side. However,

he emphasized that the women competing for Miss America should remain slim by not eating ice cream. Olive's mood turned cold and she felt self-conscious about gaining weight. Her dad was oblivious to the impact his words had on her, and it wasn't until her mother interjected that he understood the implications of his words. In life, we're constantly losing personal relationships, opportunities, or friendships. It's common to struggle through hardships and never see the positive side. As a result, when things are bad, everything is a disaster. Then we start to get into a negative mindset and outlook on life that nothing turns out our way. I see how Richards' perspective on being a winner is encouraged within America because no one wants to be stuck in a loser state of mind.



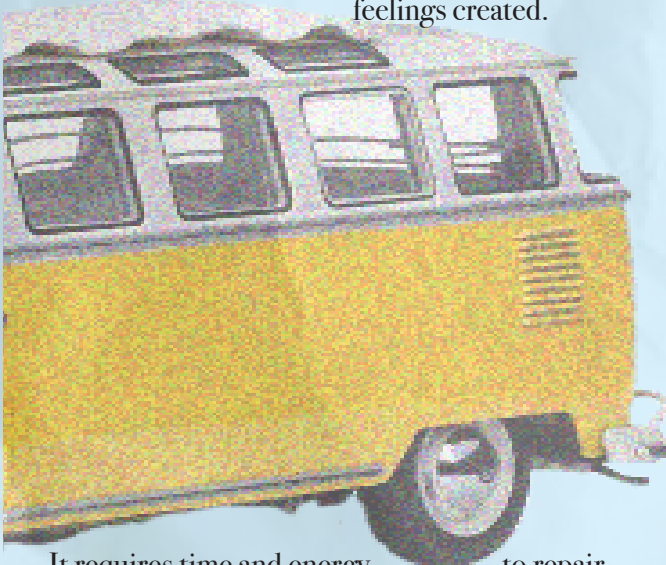
Despite the inevitable losses that occur in life, it isn't necessarily true that we don't gain anything from these negative moments. As shown in the film, Frank lost everything in Richard's eyes; he's a loser. But Frank realized he was better off once he became more connected to his family. He had his family's unconditional love which he never received in his romantic relationship. Because the man he was dating left him for someone else, he might have been considered a loser, but in reality, he was a winner since he won something more valuable. Losing people who have never recognized your value is the biggest win. It shows you something you never would have seen before. In Frank's case, this was his family because if those situations hadn't happened, he would not have formed a close relationship with his family. His family bond was the greatest love he could receive.

"A REAL LOSER IS SOMEBODY THAT'S SO AFRAID OF NOT WINNING, THEY DON'T EVEN TRY."

The Beauty In Dysfunction

If someone asked me if I would want a functional family, I would answer no. Perfect families are far from reality because each individual has flaws. A perfect family cannot exist when considering the barriers of communication and inevitability of death. When it comes to defining family, there are many reasons why it is ambiguous.

All families face heated arguments, financial burdens, and personal differences. Nevertheless, in most families, there is not an overnight turnaround where everyone makes up for their arguments and the hard feelings created.



It requires time and energy to repair bonds after what was said and done during disagreements. I have been through conflicts with each of my family members, and each of them had their own personal problems and perspectives. However, I have learned from those experiences that every relationship has its downsides. Sticking through and growing together taught me that every dysfunction is worth working through because we grow closer to each other.

Every person can learn a valuable lesson from the dysfunctional setting we're placed in. Olive learned from being a part of a beauty pageant that slowly became more hectic the more she performed on stage. Amid girls showing their talent in a provocative way, Olive dresses in her everyday attire and performs true to herself. She dances to "Super Freak" which drops any chance of winning. But when everyone in the room was filled with confusion and shame, her family

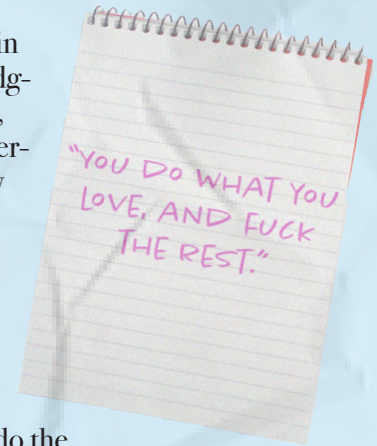
stepped on stage to join her. In the midst of judgment, they didn't care, all they saw was a vulnerable loved one, so they stepped in.

Just as Olive's family placed themselves in the picture when problems arose in her life. My family would do the same for me. As a result of the difficult situations I've faced, my parents have taught me what not to accept and how I deserve more. Being away from home to attend college, I struggled with housing. I wanted to feel comfortable about where I would be calling my "home" while I was separated from my family. Unfortunately, I received the opposite of a home away from home, and I paid a considerable amount to feel this way. I didn't know that I deserved more out of housing, until speaking with my parents, who advocated for me in ways I would not have done myself. My parents helped me realize that I should not have to sacrifice my comfort and sense of security in order to attend college.

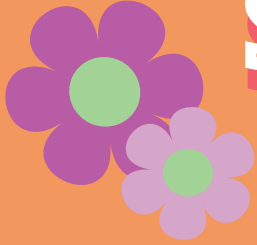
Seeing movies about families puts into perspective that we have seen each other at our happiest and saddest moments. In a family, values are derived from hardships and failures experienced individually or collectively. The family continues to move forward with a positive relationship with one another regardless of the difficulties encountered. Like the Hoovers and Tineos, there will always be someone who is super energetic, emotional, strong-willed, foul-mouthed, or empathic. These traits can make road trips, dinners, errands, and quality time more hectic. Although our personalities clash at times, we bring out different types of energy that make us a family.

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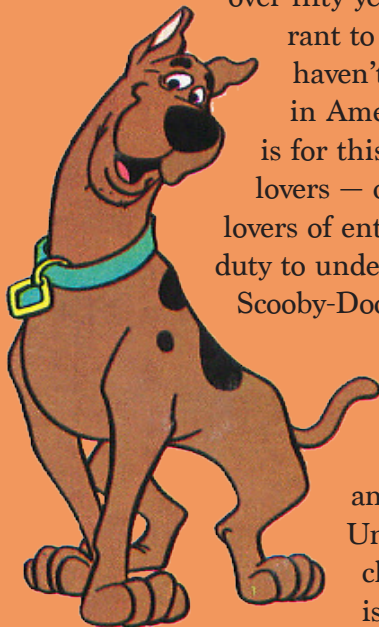
DON'T MESS WITH SCOOBY-DOO



WRITTEN BY: LAUREN PRETTO
LAYOUT BY: KAZARINA LIAO

The year 1969 is widely recognized as the year when American heroes Neil Armstrong and Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin took humanity’s first steps on the moon, but I would argue that only a few months later, an equally significant moment in American history happened — the very first episode of *Scooby-Doo*, *Where Are You!* One may believe the previous sentence would not only be a stretch but possibly blasphemy to compare the two. However, seeing as the characters of *Scooby-Doo* would continue in programming of all ages for

over fifty years, it would be ignorant to say that the two events haven’t had equal significance in American pop culture. It is for this reason that as film lovers — or at the very least, as lovers of entertainment — it is our duty to understand what makes Scooby-Doo and the Mystery Gang so successful as characters in order to prevent a horrific downfall of this animated masterpiece. Understanding these characters and the show is vital right now, as



some adaptations have begun to disregard the show’s fans and history in an attempt to ruin its reputation, including HBO Max’s *Velma* released just this year.

In 1968, the Hanna-Barbera company faced adversity when parents started to complain about “excessive violence” in their cartoons, resulting in many of the company’s shows (like *Space Ghost* and *The Herculoids*) being canceled.¹ With a lack of popular programs, the company looked for a new family friendly hit. After seeing the success of *The Archie Show*, Hanna-Barbera took to their writers Joe Ruby and Ken Spears to write a show about a teenage rock group that solved mysteries between gigs. They created *Mysteries Five* which featured five teenagers and their bon-go-playing dog named “Too Much.” Spears and Ruby took another pass at the show and decided to change their original five characters into four teens based on characters from *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*.² Though the second pass of the characters impressed the company, they became worried that the show would be too scary, possibly causing another controversy. In its third run, Spears and Ruby removed the rock band aspect of the group to further emphasize the comedy of the show, with specific emphasis on Shaggy and Scooby-Doo.

Finally, it was approved and sent off to production.

On September 13, 1969, the first episode of *Scooby-Doo, Where Are You!* (titled “What a Night for a Knight”) flashed onto screens all around the country on the CBS network.³ The show would go on to produce three seasons, totaling forty-one episodes. After the show was recognized as a success, Hanna-Barbera didn’t want to limit themselves to their short TV format and created *The New Scooby Doo Movies*, producing 40 minute episodes instead of their usual 20.⁴

Hanna-Barbera eventually moved from CBS to ABC where they collaborated on a third season of *Scooby-Doo, Where Are You!* on the new network. By 1977, when the show saw some slipping ratings a year later, Scooby’s nephew, Scrappy-Doo, was added to the character list to spark new attraction.⁵ Despite this generation’s distaste towards Scrappy-Doo, adding him into the show did the job. The *Scooby-Doo and Scrappy-Doo* show ran with some minor changes until it was renamed again to *The New Scooby-Doo Mysteries* to bring back

the familiar presence of Fred, Velma, and Daphne. In the final years on ABC, *A Pup Named Scooby-Doo* was produced, taking the characters back to elementary school, a common trope for the 1980s.⁶ Around this time, Hanna-Barbera also produced television films for these characters including *Scooby-Doo Meets the Boo Brothers*, *Scooby-Doo and the Ghoul School*, and *Scooby-Doo and the Reluctant Werewolf*.

As Scooby-Doo’s popularity continued to thrive from Cartoon Network reruns,


“WHERE ARE YOU SCOOBY DOO?”

Hanna-Barbera and Warner Bros started to produce direct-to-video films like *Scooby-Doo*

on Zombie Island, *Scooby-Doo! and the Witch’s Ghost*, and *Scooby-Doo! And the Monster of Mexico*, among others. These movies were the first versions of the plot that featured the Scooby characters with darker tones, fighting against actual supernatural forces. *The Witch’s Ghost* also introduced The Hex Girls, who not only became recurring characters in the franchise, but possibly the most beloved side characters of the show’s history.

In their first live-action release, *Scooby-Doo*, director Raja Gosnell took the mystery solvers into great consideration when casting, landing on Freddie Prinze Jr. (Fred), Sarah Michelle Gellar (Daphne), Matthew Lillard (Shaggy), and Linda Cardellini (Velma).⁷ The cast’s famous chemistry demonstrated an iconic comedic, yet loving relationship. Victoria Rose Caister from *GAMERANT* remarks, “Ev-





en though 2002's Scooby-Doo has fundamental filmmaking issues, its iconic cast is not one of them".⁸ In an interview on *Meet The Stars*, interviewer Rachael Fedder asked the cast why they all thought Scooby-Doo was so popular, and Gellar easily had the best response, saying, "It offered so much more than every other cartoon. It was so ahead of its time... and it wasn't gender specific. It wasn't a boys' cartoon or a girls' cartoon..." followed up by Freddie Prinze Jr.'s memorable response, "it was a talking dog...".⁹ The cast was so loved that the sequel, *Scooby-Doo 2: Monsters Unleashed*, came only two years later in the March of 2004. This response from the cast confirmed exactly how the fans had felt about the show for so long. It also proved that when the filmmakers made this movie, they honored the most iconic parts of the original cartoon—whilst adding a deeper plot and science-fiction element to make it more intriguing for new fans.

It wasn't until the new millennium that the characters would be picked up again for TV by Warner Brothers, creating *What's New, Scooby-Doo?* This modernized version of the show was the first to feature modern technology, alongside reimagined characters and art style.

Cartoon Network and Boomerang picked up the crew again creating *Scooby-Doo! Mystery Incorporated* (2010-13), marking the first Scooby-Doo series made for cable television. This

series fostered a major boost in the Scooby-Doo fanbase, as it re-established important character details while simultaneously expanding the universe.¹⁰ This show was the first to truly recognize the long running history of the characters, borrowing many pieces from its past. The series called back to characters like Vincent Van Ghoul and also sister shows like *Josie and The Pussycats*, *Dynomutt*, and *Captain Caveman and the Teen Angels*. Not only did this show expand the universe, but it expanded the plot as well. *Scooby-Doo! Mystery Incorporated* featured the decade's old, regular mystery solving format—while also transforming into a televised novel as the team searched for the underlying secret of their town, Crystal Cove.

“THEY HONORED THE MOST ICONIC PARTS OF THE ORIGINAL CARTOON...”

by-Doo feature film called *Scoob!* The film, like shows previous, paid homage to its origins and based its plot line around other cartoon characters like Dynomutt, the Blue Falcon, and Dee Dee Sykes — while once again featuring celebrities like Simon Cowell. This was the last we saw of the characters until HBO Max took over to create *Velma*.

Throughout the decades, people loved Scooby-Doo, even if characters, plot, or supernatural elements were altered, and

there's a good reason for it. Ian Moriarty from *Atom* wrote, "The characters are archetypal and unchanging... The characters balance each other out... It's formulaic in a comforting way"¹³. Christopher Orr of *The Atlantic* wrote, "Indeed, over the past 50 years, the Scooby-Doo characters have become almost archetypal, Joseph Campbell-worthy portraits of teenagerdom"¹⁴. Everyone seemed to have a

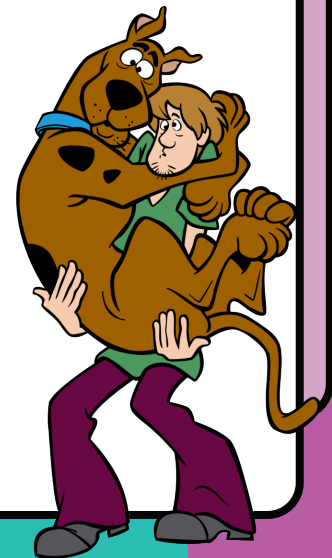
"the show feels like it's trying to annoy anyone that watches it, and the Scooby-Doo IP almost seems secondary to the entire concept."¹⁴ Rotten Tomatoes critics' consensus resulted in a generous 42% approval critics score. Though audiences are a bit stronger in their beliefs, giving the show a poor 7% approval rating with comments like, "Simply put, destroyed a classic show..."¹⁵. Clearly, the show took a wrong direc-

"WHEN WE CAN ABSORB A MOMENT THAT BRINGS US BACK TO THAT INNOCENCE, IT SPEAKS TO OUR CORE"

consensus on why the show was so great. It was family friendly, and flawlessly combined comedy and mystery, and the cowardly talking dog was both the perfect loveable mascot. Together, these characteristics created a show that would be reimagined and adored for decades, being one of the few shows that generations could love together.

Therefore, this show and the people that love it alike would be disrespected if one were to strip away these elements — such as creating a raunchy show with explicit material, character relationships negatively altered, and without the loveable Scooby-Doo. A show like *Velma* (2023) which had unfavorable reviews even before the show came out.¹³ *Forbes Magazine* wrote,

tion somewhere — the question is, how could they possibly make it this bad? Produced and voiced by Mindy Kaling, the show takes an R-rated turn on these characters while stripping them of their most valuable asset, Scooby-Doo himself. That's right, the show that plans on carrying on the legacy of the Mystery Gang left out arguably the most important member of the cast. Another vital aspect omitted in this series is the Mystery Gang's relationship with one another. What has made these characters so loveable throughout the years is their connection to one another — unchanged whether

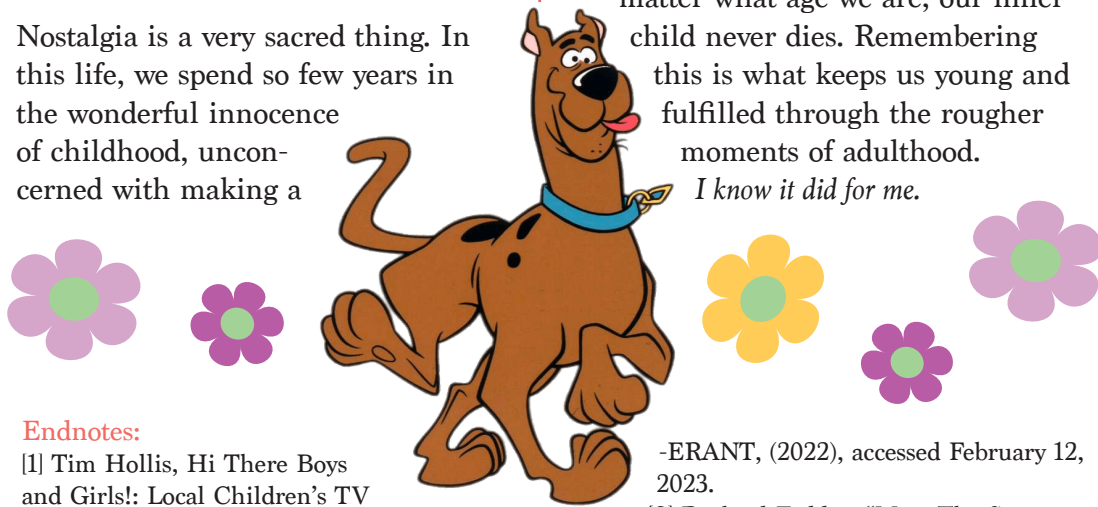


it was a lighthearted short or more complex plotline. *Velma* disregarded what made the show so entertaining for decades for the sake of sarcastic, vulgar, and brash humor. By making these sacrifices, this new show not only disrespects Scooby-Doo fans but also defames these beloved characters.

Nostalgia is a very sacred thing. In this life, we spend so few years in the wonderful innocence of childhood, unconcerned with making a

legacy of our lives and using our time wisely. When we can absorb a moment that brings us back to that innocence, to that untainted happiness and entertainment — it speaks to our core. This is exactly why preserving the essence of Scooby-Doo and the Mystery Gang is so important and why shows like *Velma* offend us so fiercely. Deep down, no matter what age we are, our inner child never dies. Remembering this is what keeps us young and fulfilled through the rougher moments of adulthood.

I know it did for me.



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Cutting Into The Cutaway

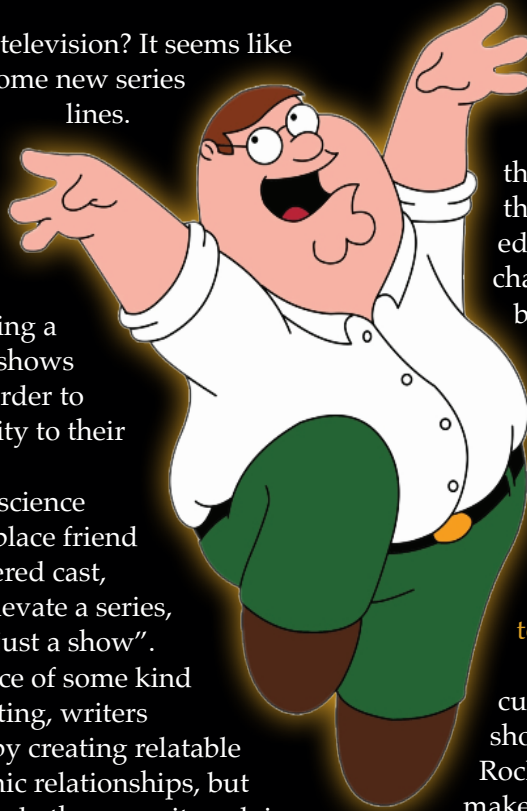
Written by Alexer Asuncion

Design by Alyssa Flores

What's the deal with television? It seems like every month, there's some new series that takes over head-lines. Logging onto any streaming services, it's immediately apparent just how overwhelming your options are when picking a show to watch. Many shows have a "gimmick" in order to provide a unique quality to their narrative.

Whether it's a science fiction setting, a workplace friend group, or a superpowered cast, there's something to elevate a series, making it more than "just a show". And even in the absence of some kind of interesting story setting, writers capture our attention by creating relatable characters with dynamic relationships, but what if a show were to do the opposite, relying on a gimmick that actually takes away from the main narrative? namely; Family Guy and the Cutaway Gag. Is this really a great strategy to help define your show, or does relying on a "low brow" form of comedy bar your show from the discussion of "good television"?

Before we dive into the use of cutaways, let's take a closer look at this narrative tool. The Cutaway can be defined as an interruption from the main narrative to a different scene, at least according to Wikipedia. In Seth MacFarlane's Family Guy, if you haven't already seen the



show (I recommend Seasons 4 and 5 to start), throughout each episode, we see many characters set up a joke, i.e. "This is worse than the time I..." or "This is better than...". The scene is then interrupted and we cut to whatever joke the character had proposed. In the most basic sense, cutaways can just be seen as the follow through to a joke that was set up previously. This style of writing finds a nice home in animated television shows.

It makes sense, as animation allows for gags that aren't as easily accessible, or even possible, to take place.

However, that doesn't mean that cutaways aren't used in live-action shows. Everybody Hates Chris, 30 Rock, and Brooklyn Nine-Nine all make great use of this writing convention. They each are also written by comedians, which is where we can find the origin of this style of joke.

Before television writers were ever coming up with cutaways, stand-up comedians already were performing them. Take legendary actor and comedian Robin Williams for example. He had great impressions, but these impressions usually came out in the form of cutaways from his main joke. A situation would be described, he would compare it to something or someone ridiculous, and then he would impersonate the

person he mentioned in the comparison. This was essentially the birth of the cutaway, because at the time this style of comedy wasn't named. Other comedians would eventually end up adopting and popularizing this style, and later many of these comedians would find themselves in the **writers room**.

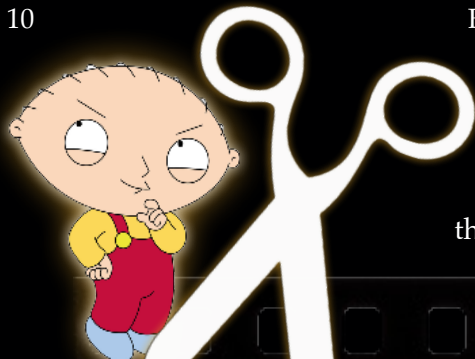
So how exactly does Family Guy rely on these cutaways? While we see this technique utilized sparingly in some sitcoms, Family Guy makes the main narrative feel almost secondary, treating the cutaways like a trademark of the show. Taking a look at some numbers, in earlier seasons of the show we saw about 10-12 cutaways per episode, meaning they occur quite often. And with how ridiculous some of the setups are, like a National Geographic special on Firetrucks in the wild or Popeye's large biceps being tumors, it's hard not to associate the two.

So what could other writers possibly have to say about this technique? Sadly, not everyone is a fan. While you see cutaways used in plenty of shows, many writers have critiqued Family Guy's writing team for their insistent use on them. Just take a look at South Park's Season 10

Episode 3 titled "Cartoon Wars Part I," in which they compare

the writers of Family Guy to a group of manatees jumbling words together to form these cutaways. Matt Stone and Trey Parker weren't alone in this sentiment, as the writers of The Simpsons sent flowers and a "Thank You" letter after the episode aired. Through this, it's clear that some people aren't very supportive of the direction Seth MacFarlane takes his work. You hate to see such great minds tear each other down; however, it's hard to really disagree with them.

To a degree, they aren't entirely wrong. Family Guy isn't really praised for its quality narrative structures, with most episodes going in totally random directions. While some may find this style of storytelling unique and interesting, it does ultimately feel like an almost random sequence of events by the end of the episode. Even the more memorable episodes struggle to feel like "a real episode of television" instead of a one-off gag. On top of that, the random nature of the jokes and how quickly they're dropped can make the show feel pretty stop-go at times. Especially if the writer's decide to employ an infamous "long cutaway gag", in which we're stuck with the joke for a full minute or two. Many of these gags (i.e. the Conway Twitty songs, the Chicken Fights, the "Wolf" cutaway) can be considered some of the worst cutaways in the show, as they make the show stop entirely in its tracks. These problems all prevent the audience from really spending time with the characters and understanding them to their core. And if you aren't able to invest into the narrative



and really connect to the characters' cores, then what's the point?

Other than it being a unique style of writing that helps set the show apart from other adult animated comedies, it's a way to explore more jokes than just those that the main narrative calls for. In a larger sense, that's just the concept of sitcoms as a whole.

Even the most well-received of sitcoms boil down to the same formula. *Three's Company*, *Malcolm in the Middle*, *The Boondocks*, in each of them, the cast finds themselves in some hijinks, they reach a conclusion, and then they find a way to return things to normal by the time the next episode rolls around. The entire genre is built off of a system that relies on a non-committal narrative that persists between episodes. Of course, writing conventions are broken all the time and we see many shows experiment and introduce an episodic element to their characters' stories; however, this begins to take away from

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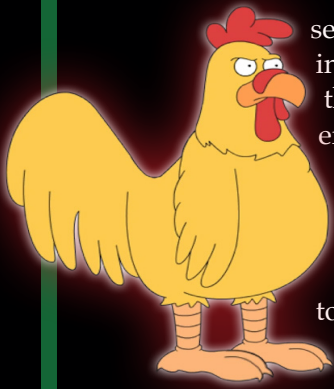


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see many shows experiment and introduce an episodic element to their characters' stories; however, this begins to take away from one aspect of sitcoms that often is underappreciated, non-commitment.

The sitcom invites anyone to enjoy any episode, without having to be aware of any previous plotlines. The viewer is not asked to understand the episode within the context of a larger narrative, but rather to enjoy the moment and have a good time watching what's in front of you. Family Guy takes this concept and cranks it to the max by relying on these self contained jokes to provide a bulk of the entertainment, with a general narrative to act as a vessel for the setups. It is a show designed for the common man, a show that dares invite anyone and everyone to sit along for the ride and enjoy (assuming you can stomach some of the more vulgar moments). It is the "Sunday Funnies" of the boring, old Newspaper, **the only-slightly-regrettable one-night-stand of your 12 year, dead-bedroom relationship**. It's everything you'd want from television, without the commitment. But does that make the content itself any good?

What exactly is "Good Television"? If we were to take a look at some critically acclaimed television series', many shows follow long, drawn out narratives that reward viewers to dive into the world of the show and understand the complicated motivations behind the characters, but not everybody has the time for that.

Not everyone can live comfortably and have the free time that many longer and "greater" shows demand. We live in a world where single mothers are working two jobs to keep their kids in school and where people aren't paying other people back on Venmo for the Jack-in-the-Box you bought them last week, which is equally as bad. People have jobs to do and families to feed, so it's not possible for everyone to invest themselves into television series' if they aren't being paid for it. And if these people aren't able to watch these shows, how can they rate and discuss them with other watchers

and critics?

This is the problem with more pretentious television discussion. Either the reviews are made by people who are being paid by the show to put one out or by someone who has managed to monetize their time spent watching. Even general discussion is often headed and filled with fans who have spent a significant amount of time watching the show. This creates an echo chamber, in which all discussion generated about the show is just by those who are dedicated to it, inflating reviews and ratings until it's considered "Good Television" no matter how mediocre it may be.

Do I believe that Family Guy is an underlooked show that deserves a spot in the discussion of "Good Television"? No, but I believe that the concept of "Good Television" ought to be defined by yourself, the viewer. If a show is enjoyable to an individual, its reception is no reason to invalidate the enjoyment in that moment. Hour-long intimate episodes aren't the only way for shows to reach a viewer's heart, a simple 11-minute quarter hour short could be just as enjoyable. If you aren't able to commit enough of your schedule to watching T.V., you should still be able to find something you like. Before reading reviews and discussion regarding your favorite shows, ask yourself, **"Why should I care?"**

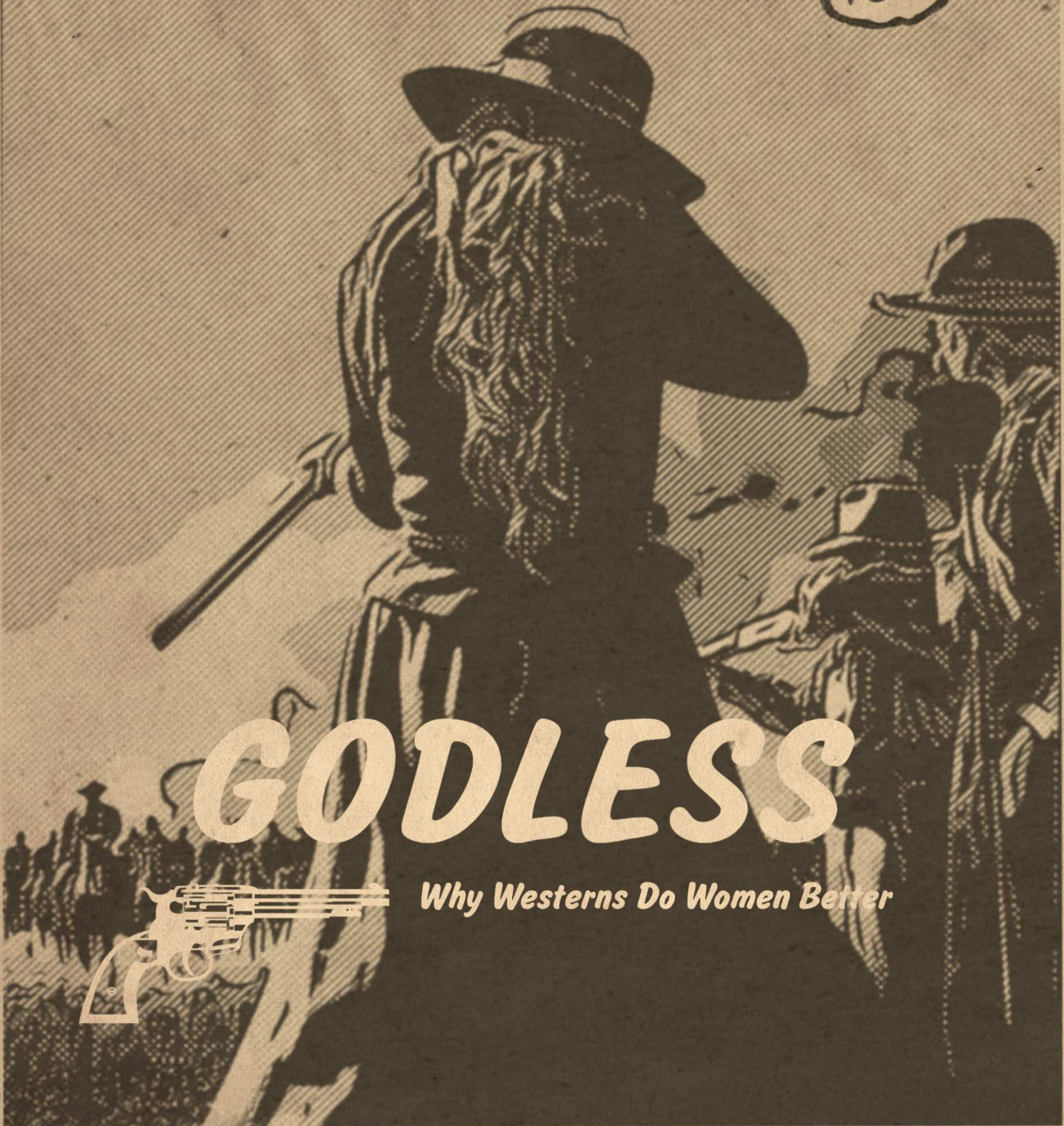
Some shows aren't for everyone, and Family Guy just so happens to be for an audience that can't dedicate entire days just to television. Television discussion can get pretty pretentious, and asking people to dedicate entire hours of their time to enjoy the full context of episodes is kind of ridiculous. Critics can hate the show all they want, but there's no denying that there's beauty in everything, even the fruit you forgot about in the back of the fridge.

Endnotes

¹Family Guy (FOX Broadcasting Company January 31, 1999-Present).

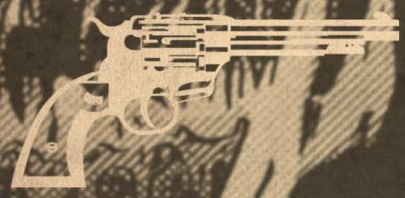


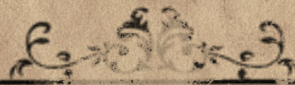
Paige Kelleher
Sophia Tillman



GODLESS

Why Westerns Do Women Better





Godless, the Netflix TV show, might not know it, but it is a show about women. Within its promotional material, the show's male characters are featured heavily: "A ruthless outlaw terrorizes the West in search of a former member of his gang, who's found a new life in a quiet town populated only by women." The two characters mentioned here are both male, and the first listed cast members are male and play male characters. But Godless' real power comes from its depictions of women, specifically the women of LaBelle, New Mexico, which has been transformed by a mining accident that killed all the men within the town.

Like most genres (with the exception of romance), Westerns traditionally lean towards male stories. Whether a story is gendered has more to do with the story and the themes being told rather than anything else; in the past, Westerns have relied so heavily on tropes featuring strong male characters and the perception of masculinity, and as a result, created stories that are almost always male. 2020's Godless, made by Scott Frank and starring Jeff Daniels, Jack O'Connell, and Michelle Dockery, is an example of how modern exploration of the Western has uncovered one of its greatest purposes: to tell female stories. As a genre, Westerns are uniquely suited to reflect realities of the female experience.

The women of La Belle, through their experiences and hardships, mirror traditional masculine themes of Westerns to the female experience. Alice, the main character of Godless (played by Michelle Dockery), demonstrates a nuanced yet realistic theme common among the Western genre; disillusionment coming from dreams of the West. Settlers coming to the West often imagined the roads there were paved in gold, and this is a common motif throughout many films set there.

A male character must decide to leave to make a new life for himself, and inevitably, conflict comes from their being forced to cope with the consequences: their dreams were a lie. Because Alice came to the West through an arranged marriage – with her husband dying less than a day after her arrival – the destruction and tragedy that befalls her later had nothing to do with her own decisions or fallacies, but rather the decisions of the men around her, proving a very common fate for women. When facing these consequences, it is a requirement that the character's ability to overcome comes from an inner power; this power and moment of self-realization in Godless comes from Mary-Agnes.

But that would be true if this were a traditional Western, led by a traditional man, and because this is a story of women (and the subplot could arguably belong to Louise) love does not defeat, nor even last. Whitey is one of the first lives lost in the battle to defend LaBelle, and their relationship ends there. This brings me to the next common theme of Westerns: the power of young love. It's almost inevitable that any Western movie with an attractive male lead (or even an attractive male side character) will end in some kind of love match, and the same could be said for the few female-led Westerns that exist. While love isn't central to this plot – far from it – it is central to the story of Louise Hobbs, who is introduced alongside Whitey Winn, the boy-sheriff of LaBelle.

It's heavily suggested that Mary Agnes only married her husband because she knew it was her way in life, and upon her husband's death, she depends on her own inner strength in order to follow it. Like her male character counterparts, this opportunity and her ability to take it opens up an entirely new world for Mary-Agnes: a loving relationship with Callie Dunne, power and influence on the town, and the ability to dress and act how she wants. Of course, all of this only came to her after her husband died, instead of when she found one. Louise Hobbs becomes one of the most featured characters of the town of Blackdom, a town inhabited by the families of Black Buffalo soldiers who hunted Native Americans after the Civil War. The romance between Winn and Hobbs is set very early on, and continues through most of the story, usually as a way to break tension. It is most common and easily expected that, in the end, it is the power of love that breaks the spell, defeats the bad guy, and allows for a happily ever after.





Additionally, religion is a common motif in Westerns, to represent civility and the coming to grace. But in *Godless*, religion is not portrayed as a saving grace but as a balm to uneasy minds – a fruitless one at that. Said in episode 1, Sadie Rose believes that God was at her side as she gave birth, on the same day of the mine collapse, and therefore, did not watch over the men in the mine. As a result, she becomes a religious fanatic and can be seen, throughout the entire series building the church, an unfinished wooden structure made entirely of beams, by hand. The salvation of LaBelle, she believes, will come with the arrival of the pastor. Sadie Rose represents the inclination to believe that religion is deliverance, even in the face of harsh realities. Faced with an unfaceable idea – that the mine collapse and subsequent deaths were her fault – Sadie Rose turns to religion to save her, despite the fact that a crew of violent criminals are on their way to attack her town and livelihood. To further this, the pastor, who at that point may very well be a figment of Sadie Rose’s imagination, arrives after the battle at LaBelle. There was no deliverance from God and no saving grace. He arrived too late, further proving that while religion may be a saving grace for men, it is simply the illusion of grace for women.



Godless presents themes that are unique to the Western genre and specific to the female experience. Callie Dunne (as this writer’s personal favorite) represents perhaps the most noteworthy take on a common motif in Westerns: prostitution. With the collapse of the mine and the death of the men within it, prostitution became an obviously unnecessary trade in LaBelle. When most workers of Magdalena’s, including Magdalena, left town, Callie converted the whorehouse into a school and began teaching the children of the town. We find out later on that Callie is not only literate but also extremely wealthy, having a large sum of money from her days as an active sex worker. Typical prostitutes within Westerns are religious converts, or sidekicks of the male protagonist, meant to represent the wild and lawless ways of the West. But Callie doesn’t

represent that at all – she represents the freedom that comes from sexual liberation, as well as the power that comes from sex work. “Don’t you know? Whores are always the richest people in town,” she says in episode three, but this isn’t hyperbole; Callie is the wealthiest, and therefore most powerful, resident of the entirety of LaBelle, even after the investors enter town. Her lifestyle shows this: she can have a deeply happy and loving relationship with Mary-Agnes, provide for them both, and live in a place she enjoys, all while having a job that fulfills her. Callie is a side character to no one’s story, but a character all to her own, whose sex work and therefore gender is not a footnote to her life, but a major factor to her character.

In Charlotte Temple, however, almost the exact opposite is mirrored. Little is known or introduced about her, and she has arguably the least screen time of the characters listed above. However, her story is no less important because it is arguably the most common place for women: the need to conform for survival. It is important for viewers and readers to understand that not all women are as rich as Callie, as clever as Alice, or as young as Louise. Charlotte represents the women left destitute by a world that expects very specific things from her



of which she must follow to survive. In many situations where Alice, Mary-Agnes, or other characters rebel, individualize, and resist male expectations, Charlotte is a pragmatist. Whether it is a deeply ingrained social tradition or, more likely, a survival instinct, Charlotte chooses the path of least resistance, usually by siding with the men. This, however is never belittled nor turly mocked by the writers.

Instead, incredibly, the men are criticized, killed, or face consequences for the situations they put her and the other women in, properly laying the blame. Here, there is no judgment of, yet representation for, women in impossible circumstances who don’t have the resources to be unabashed. She represents that there is feminine strength in choosing the safest of two evils, even when doing so takes the power out of your hands.





Some women choose safety over individualization, like Charlotte; and some women, like her fellow resident Martha, get a chance to make the decision twice. Martha is an admittedly bizarre side character of the town of LaBelle. Martha is seen throughout the first few episodes riding horses naked and acting bizarrely. Her story is much debated, but it isn't until a later episode that it is revealed that she is actually quite intelligent, just unable to speak English.

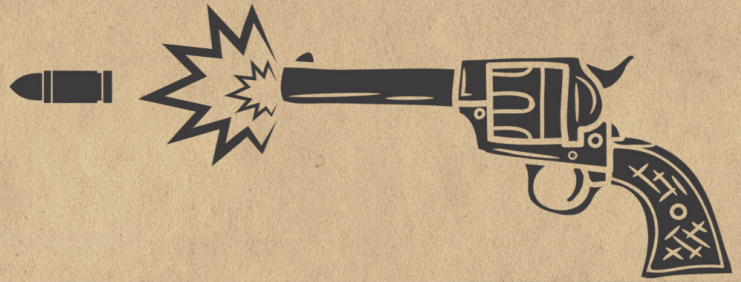


When a private investigator comes to LaBelle, looking for her, Mary-Agnes learns more about her; she is a German immigrant, a beautiful portraitist, and she's prepared a painting of Callie as a gift to Mary-Agnes. Similarly to Alice, Martha was brought to the West against her own intentions, but while Alice's life was forcibly changed by her husband's death, Martha made a life for herself, by running away from her husband. She then begins to live as she wants: naked, painting, and mysterious to the town. Martha represents the undeniable human spirit – to be free and autonomous – and how it manifests within women.

The stories of these women are not just fictional existences, but rather the composites of reality for many women throughout history, in the West and beyond. Like most media, whether film, TV, or literature, viewers may not be able to directly relate, but can understand the real truths that apply to many women and humans across the globe. Narratives like *Godless* tell stories of motherhood, misogyny, independence, and objectification, but they also touch upon such universal basics as race, religion, love, and survival. Going forward, the Western is ideal for the most significant of women's stories, perhaps more so than any other period piece available, and there are already many great options to choose from. Interested viewers may find other female-driven movies and stories within such films as *Meek's Cutoff* (2010), *True Grit* (2010), or shows such as HBO's *Deadwood* and Paramount's *1883*.



**BANG
BANG!**



Music Break

A journey through dreams and
disillusionment



We here at EyeCandy Film Journal have attempted to capture (in words) the elusive dynamics between media (film, shows, music, games, etc.), the human subconscious, and reality. After months of extremely conscious effort, we are delighted to present to you a concoction of mystifying articles and designs that we hope will delight you all.

Sweet dreams and even sweeter readings,
The EyeCandy Film Journal Staff

Seeing the Idol Industry Through

WHITE AND PERFECT BLUE

It is not an exaggeration to say that at one point we have dreamed of a life in the limelight. Red carpets, elaborate photoshoots, exclusive events, world tours, etc. When conjuring up your superstar alternate universe, a life where the sound of camera shutters tracing your steps and billboards with your face following your daily route is often what we envision. Our minds are immediately drawn to the idea of public validation, but what people often tend to neglect in these fantasies are the evident perils a public career entails.

In Asia, this seemingly glamorous lifestyle is attached to the occupation of an “idol” — a term used to refer to performing artists (of ten pop music) managed by an entertainment label.

“Idol” in a Western context is used in reference to religious and cult-like worship of a figure. This is no coincidence, as Asian “idols” adhere to both definitions. Idols

live a life far detached from the rest of reality, yet our only separation from these almost holy figures are the stage and cameras. Fans of idols often fail to remember this, fans expect more from idols than just a three-minute performance onstage.

Intense fan culture coupled with pressure to succeed makes danger inevitable, yet it is considered a taboo topic. Cautionary tales of the idol industry are conveyed through an unexpected loophole — horror films. Two exemplary films are Satoshi Kon’s 1997 animated film, *Perfect Blue*, alongside Kim Goksun and Kim Sun’s 2011 live-action film, *White: Melody of the Curse*. Despite being outwardly presented as fictional events with apparitions and disillusionment, both films present very real challenges that idols face. *Perfect Blue* deals with the anxieties of being in the public eye and the mental toll it takes on you far after leaving the stage in pursuit of a different lifestyle. *White* covers how detrimental a lack of success is in the idol industry — causing rifts between members,

Written By Jade Diones

Designed By Madeleine Lingad

leading severe sacrifices, and dealing with public scrutiny. These films reveal how being put on a pedestal creates a vicious cycle of idols' safety and health being put in jeopardy, yet these hopeful starlets risk it all for a chance at fame.

Unsurprisingly, fans of Asian pop music are often referred to as "stans" instead, attributed to American rapper Eminem's track of the same name [1]. Merriam Webster defines "stan" as "an extremely or excessively enthusiastic and devoted fan [2]," with many netizens contending that the word is derived from a combination of the words "fan" and "stalker." This term has become normalized online, but many obsessed idol fans still meet the criteria. Their level of devotion — rooted in a parasocial connection — drives stans to perceive their favorite idols as properties. Parasocial relationships refer to the case where fans become invested in a dedicated, one-sided relationship whilst the idol is unknowing of their existence. The fan and idol dynamic transcends simply enjoying the music they perform, with extreme cases leading fans to spend their daily lives in pursuit of their idol.

Intense idol fans are known as a "sasaeng," a Korean term which translates to "private life." Their extreme behavior includes, but is not limited to, "serial stalking, technical surveillance and snooping, and attendance at all public events" [3]. Sasaengs feel inclined to pursue this unhealthy lifestyle often due to the parasocial relationship that is accentuated as a marketing ploy. Idols are in a sort of "exclusive" relationship with their fans, as they must

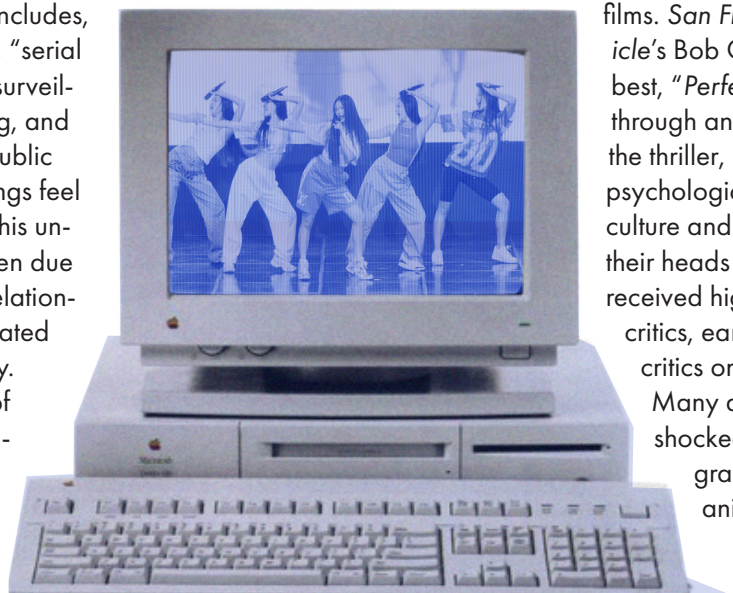
not date anyone out of respect and loyalty to the fans cultivating their careers. Sasaeng fans go to extremes just to receive any form of acknowledgement, even if it is negative. Korean news outlet, tVn eNEWS, interviewed a self-proclaimed saesang as part of an in-depth study on this incomprehensible lifestyle. This obsessed fan explained,

I feel like I get to know more about and get closer to the idol I love. If I go to a concert, there are thousands of people attending, so the idol would not know who I am. But if I become sasaeng, they will recognize me. If I keep telling them, 'I am so-and-so. I saw you at that place before,' they will start to take note of me and ask, 'Did you come again today?' To sasaeng fans, being recognized by idols is a good thing [4].

When browsing media related to the Sasaeng phenomenon, a certain animated film often comes up in conversation. This unhealthy parasocial dynamic would influence the underlooming threat of the film *Perfect Blue*.

Perfect Blue marked Satoshi Kon's directorial, full-length feature debut; further bolstering his career as a successful director for his highly surrealist films. *San Francisco Chronicle's* Bob Graham puts it best, "*Perfect Blue* manages, through animation, to take the thriller, media fascination, psychological insight and pop culture and stand them all on their heads [5]." *Perfect Blue* received high praise from critics, earning an 83% from critics on Rotten Tomatoes. Many audiences were shocked by this film's graphic content for an animated film, but its

HOW MUCH WOULD YOU SACRIFICE FOR A TASTE OF FAME?



Idols are dancers, singers, rappers, entertainers, comedians, emcees...

strong execution would leave a lasting impact on pop culture.

Kon's directorial debut would defy the boundaries of what brightly-colored animation is able to depict, as a clever double-entendre of the facade the entertainment industry maintains despite its dark reality. Kon outwardly scrutinizes fan culture — from stalking like the behavior of *sasaeng* fans, to fans feeling entitled to controlling what a public figure pursues in both their occupation and personal life. *Perfect Blue* concentrates on the protagonist, Mima Kirigoe, who graduates from her idol life as a member of the Japanese pop girl-group, "CHAM!," to pursue a career as an actress. This transition is not easy, and her difficulty to conform to this new lifestyle further complicates her ability to discern reality from illusion. Her paranoia is rooted from two cases of her private life being invaded — she discovers an online publication titled, "Mima's Room," which contains extremely personal diary entries written from her perspective, and is stalked by Me-Mania who



disagrees with her endeavors as an actress. The complaints surrounding her life as an actress revolve around her breaking the idol fantasy she pursued in a girl-group, as she plays a mature role in a television series, even partaking in an explicit rape scene. Her manager, Rumi — who we later find to be the culprit behind "Mima's Room" — is also driven into psychosis out of her desire to vicariously live out her idol dream through Mima. Between Mima, Me-Mania, and Rumi; "the key emotional contest is over the command of Mima's identity, where each character attempts to exert their power and influence to control and exploit her [6]." The collective struggle between these three characters is evocative of the potential dangers the idol industry possesses. Mima is the centerpiece of it all, yet she has little to no authority over her own life.

At the end of *Perfect Blue*, there is no clear resolution — Mima still hesitates to recognize herself as the "Real Mima." Even when Mima is removed from the imminent dangers in her life, she is conditioned to believe that her life remains in constant jeopardy. Dedicating your well-being, privacy, and essentially your whole life to the idol industry is no easy sacrifice. Even long after your retirement; the scars from your promotional period still struggle to heal, and the trauma lingers.

But, it is important to note that sacrifices aren't confined to *after* becoming a public figure, it also begins during the start of the process.

Although we like to believe that stars are born, many stars are intricately manufactured. For those who dream of becoming the slim "5%" of

***...models, actors, influencers,
even therapists, or your
parasocial significant other.***



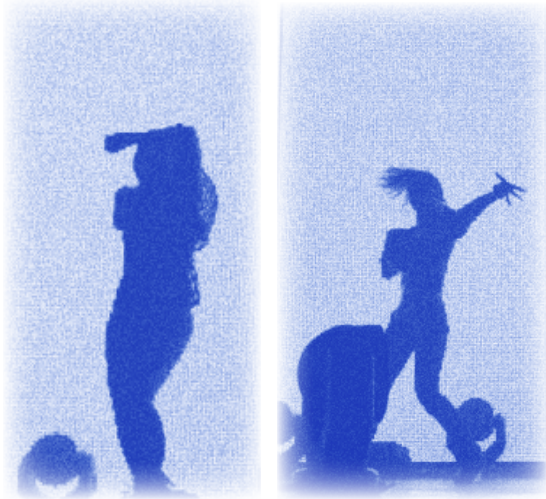
The flashy life you envisioned at the start is riddled with danger that the industry refrains from speaking up about.

the [idol] groups [that] reach superstardom, [7]" one must undergo a rigorous training program. This training program has been compared to the military, with the exception that instead of mostly adults, it is adolescent youths. According to South Korean culture critic Kim Heon Sik, "the country's three major entertainment agencies begin recruiting potential stars from as young as 12 and 13 [8]" — an age not old enough to buy a lottery ticket, but apparently old enough to gamble on the trajectory of their future career path. Far away from home, and often no longer enrolled in school, these teenagers spend the most crucial time of their youth going in and out of the practice studio. Despite how highly sacrificial being a trainee is, success is not even guaranteed.

Kim Gok and Kim Sun's 2011 horror film, *White: Melody of the Curse*, convey the lengths that trainees and companies alike will go to succeed in this highly competitive field. Contrasted to Perfect Blue's depiction of leaving the idol industry, *White* illustrates the trials and tribula-

tions finding success in the idol industry. *White* focuses on Eun Ju, a member of the fictional girl-group Pink Dolls — whose bubbly and feminine debut concept fails to strike a chord with the general public. Despite Eun Ju's attempts to motivate and console her fellow members, they ostracize her. Eun Ju's late start in the industry, history as a back-up dancer, and decision to work with a "sponsor" all fuel the fire in their struggling group synergy.

The term "sponsor" refers to a wealthy individual who provides monetary support to struggling hopefuls in exchange for sexual favors. Former K-pop girl-group member, Serri of Dal Shabet, says in a YouTube Q&A: "That depends on the company. Sometimes the company CEO offers that, or the sponsor contacts them individually [9]." For some idol groups to have the mere opportunity to release a song, they take the desperate decision of "sponsorship." Unfortunately, most idols do not possess the authority to deny "sponsorship," as rejecting their advances presents the possibility of their debut



project being entirely canceled. Eun Ju's compliance to sponsorship would allow the company to move into a newly renovated studio, where she uncovers a dusty VHS tape labeled, "WHITE." After playing the tape, she becomes enamored with its contents: a music video for an unreleased girl-group song. Pink Dolls re-releases this track, and we witness a drastic image change for the girl-group: the once innocent girl-group in fluttering pastel skirts is now adorned with tight, black leather outfits. Pink Dolls is finally receiving the public recognition they strived for, but we quickly discover that it comes with a price.

Pink Dolls is struck by a curse where whoever is given the center position for the song stands in the face of death. Driven by desire, Eun Ju proceeds to promote the track as a solo artist under the new moniker, "White," despite cautionary warnings. After Eun Ju receives first place for her song on a musical program, she prepares for an encore stage — and unbeknownst to the characters, her final stage. This sequence is intense, the scene becomes violent with a multitude of fatal technical difficulties. Eun Ju meets the same inevitable fate as her members, proving the curse to be indestructible.

In my viewing of the film, I found that the horror lay within the company's tactics rather than the curse itself. The company enabled a competitive and immoral work environment, with everyone's collective greed to succeed culminating in the deaths of nearly everyone involved. One of the most haunting scenes for me in the film is where Pink Dolls' manager approaches Eun Ju in the dormitory and asks her to reflect on her sponsorship which made this company move possible:

"Eun Ju, you want to make your dreams come true, too, right? Don't think too hard. You hit rock bottom, now you need to slowly climb back up. [10]"

Eun Ju outwardly expresses her distaste for the sponsorship, yet her manager tempts her with the dream she has slaved away years of her young life to pursue. The manager recognizes her power within the company, and what she must do to ensure that the group succeeds in the

It is impossible to return to the life you pursued before the moment you stepped onstage.



competitive industry — unfortunately, she decides to exploit the members' vulnerability. The film effectively touches upon a multitude of sensitive subjects within the industry: bullying, sponsorships, abuse of power, ageism, sexualization, manufactured public personas, false marketing, etc. *White* manages to cover subjects that are rarely covered in mainstream media as the industry seeks to promote the fantasy of the occupation, albeit the inclusion of sensationalized horror elements.

Similarly to *Perfect Blue*, *White* offers a scathing critique on the facade presented by the pop idol image through horror. Using the explicit and fictional nature the genre presents, directors are able to convey their perspectives on these issues without facing the same critical backlash as documentary coverage. Although both films are fictional, and present outlandish imagery like apparitions, they do not shy away from presenting very real issues. The start of each film is realistic in their depictions of what goes on offstage and behind cameras for these starlets, but as the film progresses, there are more stereotypical horror elements such as jump-scares, eerie music, and a "monster" which disturbs the normalcy in the diegetic characters' lives. We are witnesses to the exploitation of these young, impressionable girls in this toxic industry who tirelessly work without the support system they desperately need — yet this is obstructed in both our viewing of the films and reality.

Neither of these films end with closure for the characters, nor the audience. Mima still fails to discern hallucinations from reality. The curse of "White" still lingers within the company building.

Closure is not an option for those who devote their lives to becoming attributed to the title of "idol." The way the industry operates is much like a haunted curse. As long as these issues in the industry fail to be addressed for the future generations of performing aspirants, this harmful cycle will prevail.

Endnotes

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10. *White*, directed by Kim Gok and Kim Sun (DOO Entertainment, 2011), 8:25.



The Obsessed Artist: What Passion Destroys

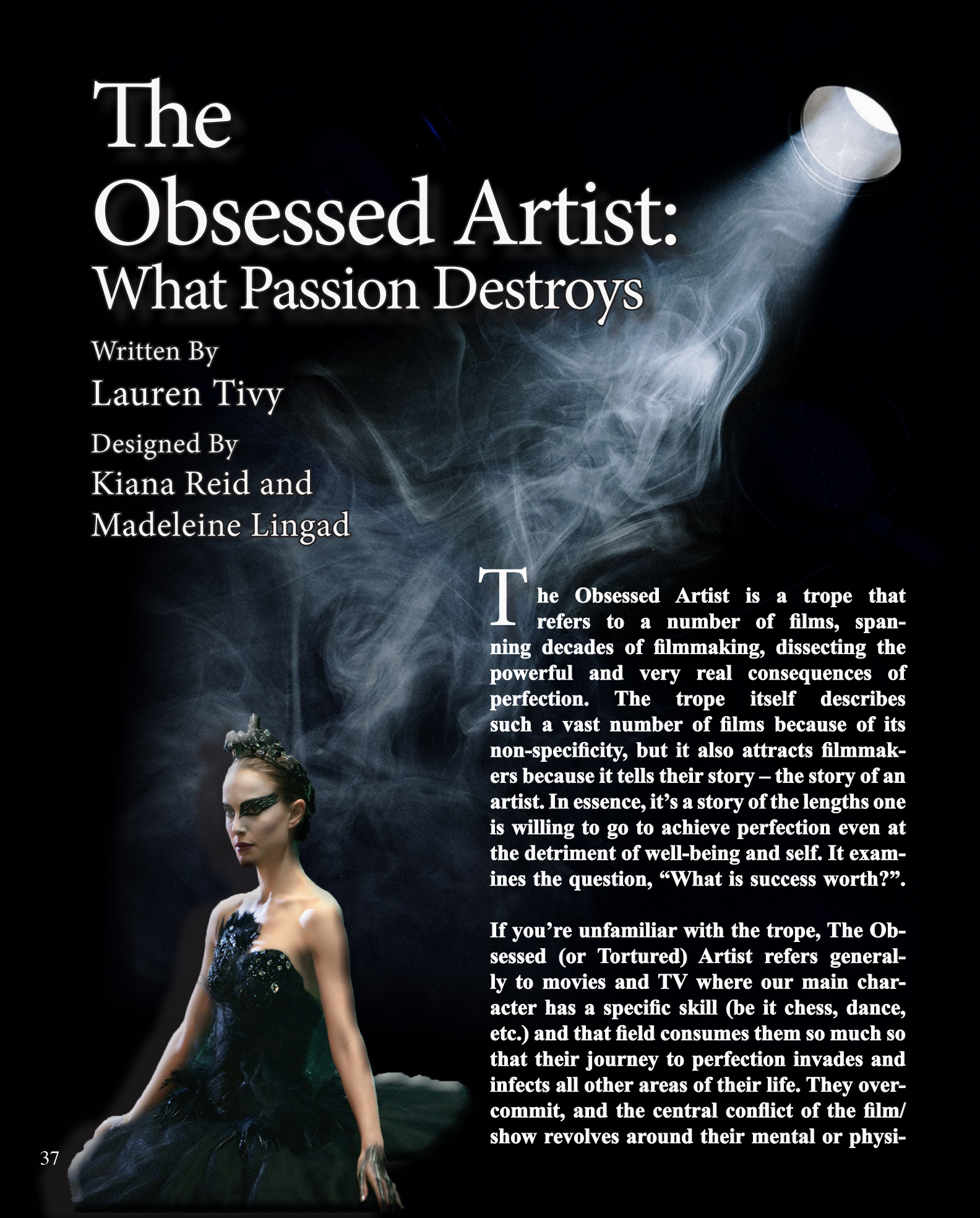
Written By

Lauren Tivy

Designed By

Kiana Reid and

Madeleine Lingad



The Obsessed Artist is a trope that refers to a number of films, spanning decades of filmmaking, dissecting the powerful and very real consequences of perfection. The trope itself describes such a vast number of films because of its non-specificity, but it also attracts filmmakers because it tells their story – the story of an artist. In essence, it’s a story of the lengths one is willing to go to achieve perfection even at the detriment of well-being and self. It examines the question, “What is success worth?”.

If you’re unfamiliar with the trope, The Obsessed (or Tortured) Artist refers generally to movies and TV where our main character has a specific skill (be it chess, dance, etc.) and that field consumes them so much so that their journey to perfection invades and infects all other areas of their life. They overcommit, and the central conflict of the film/show revolves around their mental or physi-

cal downfall as well as the pain inflicted on those close to them. Think of shows like *The Queen's Gambit* or movies like *Black Swan*, *Nightcrawler*, *Whiplash*, or *I, Tonya*. To better understand what the genre aims to do, it'd be helpful to look through some of the most popular adaptations to study how they vary from one another while still holding the same central theme.

The 2010 film *Black Swan*¹, directed by Darren Aronofsky, is one of the most apt and faithful adaptations of the genre. In the film, Nina (Natalie Portman) aspires to play the lead role in her ballet company's production of *Swan Lake*. Combining elements of drama, thriller, and horror, the movie showcases Nina's obsession with her craft and how it leads to the rapid and dramatic decline of her personal life and well-being. This film in particular leans heavily into themes of horror and obsession, dramatizing these themes by featuring elements of pain and Nina's physical transformation into the Black Swan.

• • • • •
• **WHAT IS SUCCESS** •
• **WORTH?** •
• • • • •

Another popular plotline in the trope is the introduction of a rival who acts in competition with our main character. In *Whiplash*² (Dir. Chazelle, 2014), Andrew (played by Miles Teller) is under constant threat of replacement by the conservatory's alternate drummer, who is pitted against Andrew by his authoritarian teacher (J.K. Simmons). In *Black Swan*, a new dancer in the company represents everything Nina is lacking in her

performance and now threatens to replace her. In both movies, these characters are a manifestation of the artists' self-conscious and doubt. Under the pressure of losing all they've worked for, the characters are on a forced path of self-improvement, usually exceeding their current boundaries and pushing them to the edge of what is physically and



mentally possible. Almost every movie under this trope contains some sort of propelling intimidation, in different respects, person or otherwise, that acts as a catalyst, forcing the character to move forward even when it creates an unhealthy situation for themselves.

These themes represent a very American ideal of success, inspired by stories of the 'greats' who claim there is no way to the top that doesn't include intense sacrifice. The films act almost as a satire of this mindset; they push their characters further than real-world success stories would tend to go. The characters are pushed so far, in fact, that another popular theme included in this genre is delusions, both visible manifestations (like in *Black Swan*) or logically disillusioned choices in judgment (like Teller's character in *Whiplash*). In evaluation of this particular mindset, I would say it's not central to our character motivations, but-

work, even when it's brilliant, is never enough. They must be the best at what they do in a global context and they also must be awarded by an outside gaze in the forms of parental approvable, audience approval, or financial gain. A further example in conjunction with the American Dream is the film *Nightcrawler*

• • • • •
• **HE FURTHER**
• **BLURS THE LINE**
• **OF MORALITY.**
• • • • •

(Dir. Gilroy, 2014).³ Lou Bloom (Jake Gyllenhaal) becomes a video journalist in the sphere of Los Angeles' crime newscasts. At the beginning of the film, he's been moving from job to job, but he finally finds money and acclaim in "nightcrawling" or the filming of late-night street crime and vehicular accidents for broadcast. Attempting to perfect his craft, he further blurs the line of morality and exploits the pain of strangers and also the people close to him. Here, Lou, who is arguably unhinged from the beginning, doesn't work at the detriment of himself in a typical sense, but rather to the detriment of others, inadvertently furthering his own personal ethical decline. And, as a result of this obsession, he further degrades his ability to connect with others as a whole. We watch his decline as he becomes more and more disconnected as the film continues. Another common theme in these films involves mirrors and moments of personal self-evaluation the main characters make through their mirror reflection. In *I, Tonya*

(Dir. Gillespie, 2017),⁴ a story based on the real-life Olympic medalist Tonya Harding, there is a scene toward the end of the film where she's looking at her reflection in a dressing room mirror and finalizing her makeup before one of her final performances. She starts to cry subtly to herself but quickly stops and puts on a performative smile. In this moment, she feels punished by the world as she continues to face outward challenges which take away from her skill, hard work, and dedication. The audience is let in on this intimate scene and we sympathize with her while also



being given time to reflect on her experiences during these quiet moments. In this sequence, the film poses the essential question to the audience, "Was it worth it all?"

In *Nightcrawler*, Lou stares at his reflection before violently shaking and slamming the bathroom mirror. This takes place after his first major setback in the

Written by
Roman
Hernandez

Xavier

Designed by
Jack McCarthy,
Alyssa Flores

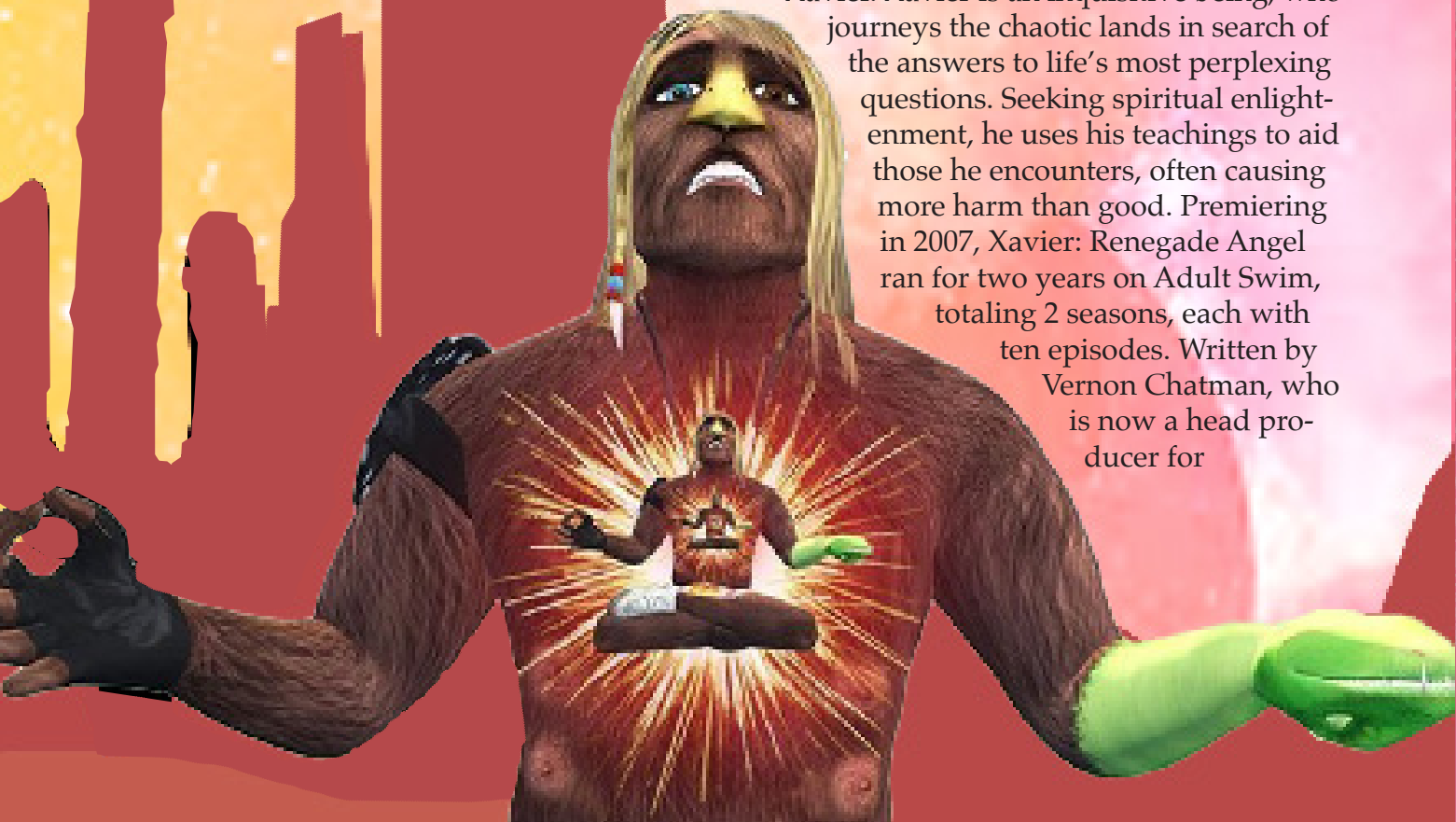
Renegade Angel

Picture yourself as a young child, staying up past your bedtime to watch your favorite Cartoon Network shows. Your favorite episode of Adventure Time just finished and Cartoon Network just told you good-night. You're about to shut off the TV when the screen goes black, displaying the message, "Adult Swim may contain mature material some viewers might not find suitable." Your curiosity gets the better of you, and you stay up a little longer to see what Adult Swim is about to present. It is then when your young mind is exposed to some of the most surreal, absurd, television shows ever created.

Programs like Aqua Teen Hunger Force, SquidBillies, and Robot Chicken are a few examples that may be responsible for young trauma. The show that sat at the mountaintop of this absurdism was Xavier: Renegade Angel, perhaps the most scarring of Adult Swim's lineup. The show is visually concerning, featuring obscure and crude animation, but is layered with intricate writing and creative comedy. Subverting initial expectations, Xavier: Renegade Angel will have you hooked in a genre you may not have expected to love.

"What doth life?"

This a commonly asked question among philosophers, but more commonly asked by the protagonist of the series, Xavier. Xavier is an inquisitive being, who journeys the chaotic lands in search of the answers to life's most perplexing questions. Seeking spiritual enlightenment, he uses his teachings to aid those he encounters, often causing more harm than good. Premiering in 2007, Xavier: Renegade Angel ran for two years on Adult Swim, totaling 2 seasons, each with ten episodes. Written by Vernon Chatman, who is now a head producer for



South Park. Xavier: Renegade Angel went relatively unnoticed upon its release. Many critics called the show puzzling and incoherent, stating that the show is too random and humor incomprehensible. Others found those “flaws” to be charms instead and over the years the show has garnered a cult following. These fans adored the series’s dark and subversive humor, addicted to Xavier’s clever but incredibly stupid nature. The fanbase continues to grow, with many looking back at the show claiming it was ahead of its time.

The show’s crude and peculiar art style and animation can be concerning to first-time viewers, but rest assured this is one of the best qualities of Xavier: Renegade Angel. The series features a mix of 2D and 3D graphics, with glitchy and bizarre animation. Characters’ designs are often odd and lack detail. A great way to describe it is to picture Shrek’s style of animation and design, with a fraction of the budget.

Although it may not appear intentional, this artistic style enhances the chaotic nature of the series, using its’ crudeness to enhance the absurd comedy. The oddest design of the show goes to the protagonist, whose appearance is almost impossible to explain. Xavier above all is a humanoid being. He has two legs, two arms, and a head. However, his features go beyond that, possessing some peculiar characteristics. He’s got long

blonde hair, with a duck beak for a nose, accentuated with a brown left eye and blue right eye. Instead of a left hand, he has a snake hand, which is a literal snake that lives alongside Xavier. Instead of normal human legs, he has horse legs that bend backward as a horse does. His entire body and head are covered in dark hair and his chest has six nipples where his abs are. On top of it all, he has the mannerisms of a shaman, wearing only a small loincloth as he wanders the lands. Despite his jumbled mess of a design, Xavier is a ridiculously charismatic and iconic protagonist, using his freakish appearance to unintentionally freak out those he meets.

On top of the extremely peculiar visuals of the show, the show has some hilariously brilliant writing. Jokes in this comedy series fly at you at insane speeds. The tempo of the dialogue is very fast-paced, and on first watch, jokes will fly right over your head. The writing is intricately layered with jokes having subliminal and psychological meanings.



Much of the humor of course rely on Xavier, with his aloof and oxymoronic personality. His intentions, while good, often result in catastrophe for those he tries to help.

Jokes in this comedy series fly at you at insane speeds. The tempo of the dialogue is very fast-paced, and on first watch, jokes will fly right over your head. The writing is intricately layered with jokes having subliminal and psychological meanings. Much of the humor of course rely on Xavier, with his aloof and oxymoronic personality. His intentions, while good, often result in catastrophe for those he tries to help.

This leads to episodes containing some hilarious scenarios. Xavier's mannerisms are best described as a man who is so stupid, that he sounds intelligent. Using big, scholarly words in the most incorrect manner, he develops his persona of a spiritual seeker. Xavier, despite his puzzling appearance, is incredibly charming. The show also mocks real-world ideals and societal problems, like other animated shows such as South Park. Ideologies such as religion, politics, class structure, and more are not safe from Xavier. Being a show where the protagonist seeks psychological enlightenment, he often questions everything. Religion is often his main target as one of

the episodes follows Xavier meeting a child who attempts to play god. To give some context, this child uses real science, to help his father with his "Christian" science. His dad finds out that Christian science doesn't actually do anything, and forsakes god. This is just one example where the writing utilizes comedy to talk about complex ideologies.

Within other episodes, the show tackles themes of Colonialism, Reaganism, Utilitarianism, domestic violence, worker exploitation, wealth disparity, and so much more. Every line of dialogue is so creatively

thought out, that every joke hits its mark, even if you don't understand it on the first watch. It'll crack you up, and make you ponder higher meaning at the same time.

Spiritualism is the core theme in Xavier: Renegade Angel. Xavier, being a shaman, often tries to solve problems through spirituality. The show often presents these in exaggerated and satirical ways.

As a child, Xavier's father was murdered in a house fire. He vowed to find his father's killer, and "slay him, to death." Turns out he is his Father's killer, and it's made extremely obvious to Xavier, but he just never catches on. Xavier's quests will lead him to ask philosophical questions in comical



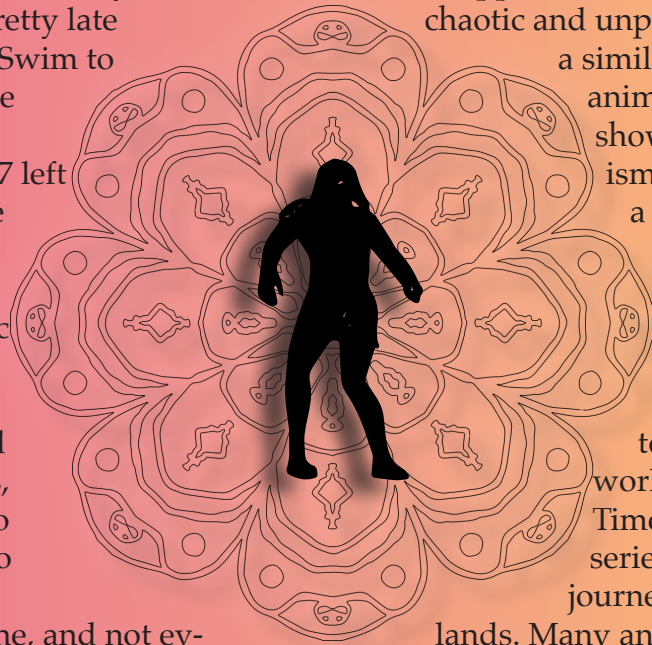
The show only featured Ten 12-minute episodes for its first season, so you have had to have been up pretty late binge-watching Adult Swim to stumble across it. Those who were fortunate enough to do so in 2007 left mixed reviews. On one side, there were the series' die-hard fans, who adored the chaotic yet hilarious tone of the show. For others, they didn't understand the appeal of the series, claiming that it was too chaotic and difficult to follow.

The show is niche, and not everyone who watches it will enjoy it. Over the years, as new platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Tik-Tok were developed, clips from the series began to circulate. Thanks to the show's style, no matter where you start watching, clips without context are always funny. Nowadays, the devoted fanbase creates artwork and promotes the show on their social media. One fan even created a remaster of one of the scenes of the show, using up-to-date computer-generated graphics.

The series has been a pioneer for the surrealist and absurdist genres. The show's use of non-linear storytelling, uncanny style, and ridiculous animation have been inspirational to adult-animated comedies that have come along in the past decade. A prime example would be The Eric Andre show, which took the absurdist style comedy to the real

world. Smiling Friends, which uses a more linear approach to storytelling, built on a chaotic and unpredictable world, using a similar blend of 2D and 3D animation. Both of these shows fall into the surrealism and absurdism genre, a genre that Xavier: Renegade Angel helped popularize. There was truly no other show like it on release. It inspires show writers to approach bizarre worldbuilding. Adventure Time, although not an adult series, features protagonists journeying through peculiar lands. Many animated productions take inspiration from the series whether they know it or not.

Xavier: Renegade Angel is an underrated gem. It has everything you could want in an adult-animated comedy. Dark humor that's creatively written, animation that is unique, and how the show makes full use of its' absurd art style. You might find yourself confused, shocked, and even disturbed at times watching this show, but will be filled with laughter. The series has a charm no other show has, with one of the weirdest but most entertaining protagonists in all of Adult Swim's lineup. Using spirituality as the base theme of the series, Xavier: Renegade Angel constantly builds off itself, using the protagonist as the center point of a unique universe. Thus proving that taking creative risks can pay off.



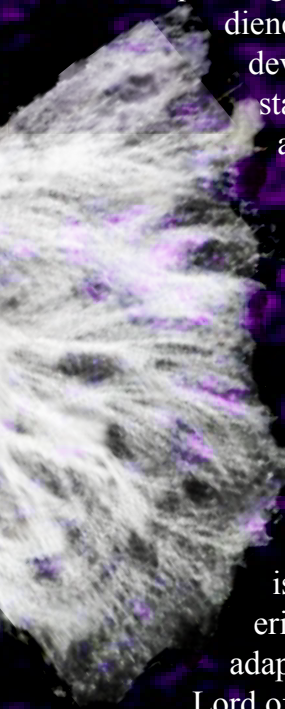
Endnotes

¹ Chatman, Vernon, and John Lee, creators. Xavier: Renegade Angel. PFFR, 2007-2009.



Video Game Adaptation: HBO's The Last of Us

BY EAMON RAFTERY



Whether or not an adaptation is successful varies depending on the power of the audience's imagination. Readers develop a subjective understanding of the author's world and the characters inhabiting it. However, a spectator is visually presented with these elements — hence the unidirectional movement of adaptations from literature to film and television. Today, everyone wants the world built and characters envisioned for them materially, which isn't inherently bad considering the incredible success of adaptation franchises like *The Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter*. The audience receives a face to the diegetic characters (Daniel Radcliffe is Harry Potter), and the world these characters inhabit is brought to life thanks to visual effects. Adaptation allows the media's original form to thrive in ways it previously couldn't, simultaneously expanding the work's creative universe. Another alternative purpose for the adaptation, is to extend the media's coverage to broader audiences — as fans and newcomers alike get to see beloved stories materialized on the big screen. Not everyone may enjoy or approach a story in its original literary form, but films may be a more digestible medium for general audiences.

Video games are a realm of media with equally

capable storytelling that can translate to movies and television. However, *Resident Evil* and *Tomb Raider*'s video game to film adaptations are subpar compared to the aforementioned literary adaptations. The only caveat of adapting a source already cherished by dedicated fans is the set of strict expectations held for the new form that the old audience comes with. This can be much harder considering videogame characters, unlike most literary ones, have a predefined face and voice. But so far, no video game adaptation surfacing in the last few decades have come close to the success of HBO's most recent attempt: *The Last of Us*.

As a diehard fan of the 2013 video game, I must admit that coming into the first few episodes has felt somewhat like walking on a tightrope. Unsure of how accurate or committed to the source material the writing and acting would be, one holds their breath when judging if Joel, Ellie, or other beloved characters are justly portrayed, and if the moments that makes the game such a masterpiece will hold up in live-action. These aren't unjustified concerns for video game fans either, especially with this visual format. Take *Sonic the Hedgehog*'s film adaptation for example. The first trailer received overwhelming amounts of backlash over the weirdly uncanny valley design of Sonic with human teeth. The *Guardian* writer, Keith Stuart, compared the film to a "200-mph slap in the face."¹ The negative reaction was so unanimous that the movie was delayed almost a full year to reimagine Sonic's CGI. The difficulty there was in the translatability between the original cartoon form

to its live-action adaptation; also because he's an anthropomorphic, blue hedgehog. Casting directors likely have a much easier time when the source material has human characters and is based in reality.

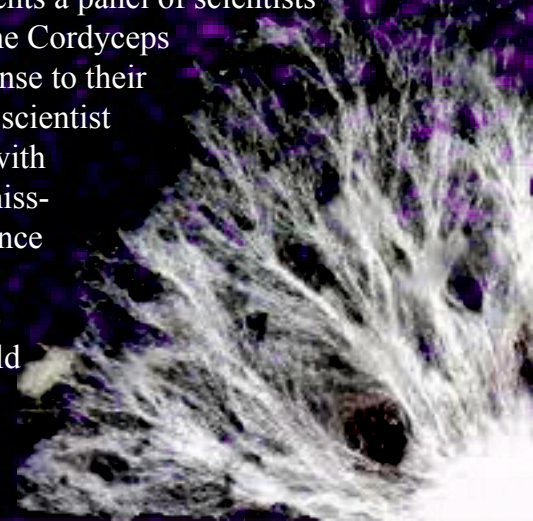
But how can video games be fun while also attempting to be realistic? Surprisingly, *The Last of Us* (2013) is. Rather than hyperbolic hacking and slashing through hordes of zombies, you play as a middle-aged man transporting a 14-year-old girl across the country. They aren't exactly killing machines or ideal video game protagonists. This makes for an effective transition to live-action, where the quality of a scene is much more dependent on the tension and drama as opposed to over-the-top CGI action. Additionally, this series is one of the first video game adaptations to be done for television rather than film, a key decision. Most pieces of literature adapted for feature-length films undergo a process of compression for the two-hour film format, losing out on a lot of content. Video games are similar. *The Last of Us* (2013) has a 15-20 hour story that would be impossible to adapt in two hours justly. From the very first scene, you want to reflect the pacing and execution of a video game that at times feels like a cinematic experience itself.

The opening moment of the game is described by *Wired Magazine's* Will Bedingford as a technical miracle. By using real actors with motion capture, the faces of the game characters express real fear, and the player experiences what feels like a live-action film covering the first day of the apocalypse, with every angle explorable to the player as you rotate the camera.² As Joel carries his daughter Sarah through the chaotic streets, the player not only observes his adrenaline and fear, they embody him. Conversely, in the first episode of the adaptation, the sequence of Joel carrying Sarah is less immersive to the viewer but equally as tense. This is thanks to the expansion of Joel and Sarah's story



provided in the show that wouldn't have been necessarily possible in the game. We spend much more time getting to know Sarah in the first episode, as she takes Joel's broken watch to be repaired as a birthday gift while the impending doom is foreshadowed ominously. The creators of the adaptation, Neil Druckmann and Craig Mazin, established three tenets when adapting a screenplay from the game. This is demonstrated through the contrasting opening sequences of the game and the show: action into drama, dramatize the mundane, and dump the gameplay.³

The Chicago School of Media Theory evokes a fascinating point regarding media adaptation: "Like the biological organism that thrives in its new environment, successful adaptations change over time, adapting to new conditions, migrating to new areas, and⁴ ultimately, doing their best to perpetuate their existence."⁵ The first scene in *The Last of Us* pilot episode presents a panel of scientists decades prior to the Cordyceps outbreak. In response to their biggest worries, a scientist mentions fungus with chuckles and dismissals from the audience and host. As he entertains the possibility of the world



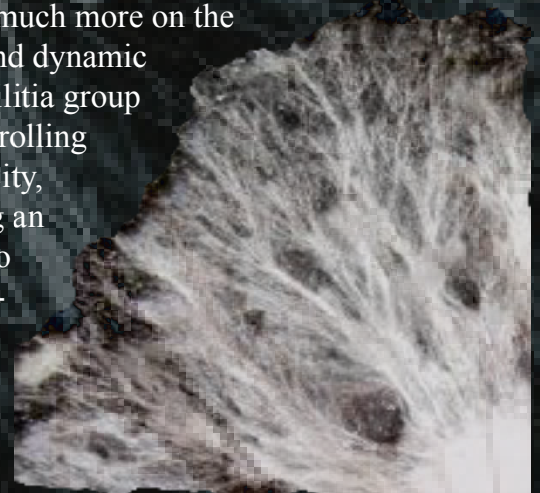


getting warmer, of a fungal species adapting to withstand human body temperatures, the foreshadowing becomes obvious. This simple yet effective opening scene bridges together, in a highly self-reflexive manner, the adaptation of the cordyceps fungus that begins the apocalypse, and the adaptation of a video game from 10 years ago. Now introducing a far broader audience, fans of the original game and newcomers to the show, expanding the world and remaining true to repeating what makes the game so special, *The Last of Us* has perpetuated its existence much like a biological organism.

It's safe to say that after the third episode, I was easily convinced that this was the best video game adaptation I'd ever seen. The first two episodes generally held true to the events of the game, recreating cinematography and iconic lines of dialogue, but then, the first substantial divergence from the game took place. It was a risk and it paid off massively, demonstrating that an adaptation should aim to provide new meaning to existing work, not just retell it. The episode tells the story of Bill and Frank. Bill is a survivalist that Joel and Ellie inquire about getting a car in the original game. After barely making it through his zombie infested town, they find a car and also find Bill's survival partner, Frank, hanging from a rope, bite marks on his body. Not much is assumed regarding the nature of their relationship, but fans have long insinuated that Bill and Frank were romantic partners. In the show's episode, they take this speculation and run a marathon with it. We receive a beautiful, decades-spanning love story about

this stubborn, distrusting survivalist opening his arms to a straggler that fell into one of his traps. There's such a beautifully acted moment when the two share their first kiss. The catharsis of this intimate gesture after years of loneliness at the end of the world is so palpable. The world of *The Last of Us* is remarkably expanded whilst holding nearly no similarity to the original sequence in the game. Going back to Druckmann and Mazin's core tenets for adapting a screenplay: dumping the gameplay and dramatizing the mundane is exactly what this episode does. This tenet of removing gameplay beckons an inquiry into the playable sequences that have also been adapted in the show.

Moments where the player controlling Joel becomes the spectator viewing Joel, are still very prevalent, especially in the fourth and fifth episodes. Joel and Ellie arrive on the outskirts of Kansas City – although, in the game it's Pittsburg. They are promptly ambushed by bandits and lose their vehicle, needing to fend for themselves. This sequence is almost identical in the original and adapted forms. The key difference can be attributed to the dumping of gameplay. This section of the game has a large emphasis on stealth and combat, lots of sneaking around with Joel and Ellie to avoid what appears to be some sort of militia that has overtaken the quarantine zone from the military dictatorship. The show expands much more on the history and dynamic of this militia group now controlling Kansas City, providing an identity to these momentary antagonists. Enemies,

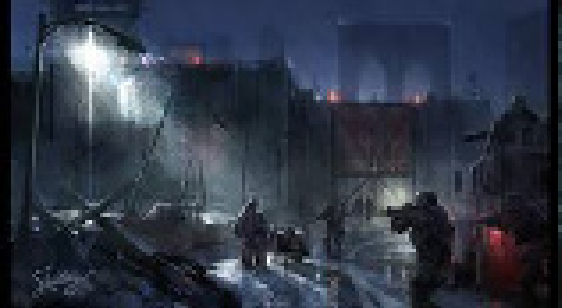


identityless, barely observed up close after strangling or shooting to death in the video game become real humans with complex issues and motives. Through context clues in dialogue, we learn of the horrible treatment that the people of Kansas City faced by the military, of the leader, Kathleen, and her vendetta against anyone who ratted out their neighbors to the government. This is where the next two important supporting characters, Henry and Sam, come in. An older and younger brother, Henry is a father figure and protector for young Sam, who immediately reflects the innocence of Ellie as they quickly become friends. The obvious difference here is that in the show, Sam is deaf, and Henry communicates with him in sign language during a zombie apocalypse. Not only does it heighten the intensity of protecting a deaf little brother from zombies, but it also provides the overarching conflict behind Kathleen's obsessive search for Henry and deepens the moral ambiguity of the whole situation. Mazin explains, "Neil (Druckmann) and I felt: let's get under the hood, let's understand some of these people, and let's not steal their humanity because it cheapens the impact of their sins."²⁴ This point seems especially pertinent to video game adaptations in particular, where a large portion of the enemy characters are often rendered to nameless humans trying to kill you. Rather than an NPC, you have a human.

DESIGN BY SKYLAR SMITH

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1. Stuart, Keith. 2019. "The Sonic the Hedgehog movie trailer is a 200 mph slap in the face." *The Guardian*.
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4. *Ibid.*
5. Brokenshire, Mark. n.d. "Adaptation | The Chicago School of Media Theory." *Humanities Division: Lucian*. Accessed March 7, 2023.



Witches and Bi*ches

Written by Isabel Sellings

Designed by Daisy Herrera



For centuries, Western society has been obsessed with witches. When one thinks of the term “witch” one might think of early depictions such as the Wicked Witch of the West, with her iconic green skin and shrill voice. Yet behind this depiction is a centuries old war on the religion of witchcraft. Since the early 1400s, women have been accused of being witches for a variety of reasons— sexual promiscuity, aging, or features such as birthmarks or scars. The hunting, torture, and execution of women accused of being witches in England and New England hold a place in history as an era of fear and panic. But despite the stigma and fear towards witchcraft, witches hold an important space in cinema history. From early depictions like the Wicked Witch, to more modern versions like the Love Witch, cinema’s depiction of witches has evolved with western society’s attitude towards women in general, as well as differing religious practices. This article aims to answer the question of how and why did the cinematic evolution of witches occur.

First let’s start by explaining witchcraft. Many of us know the tropes of flying on a broom and creating fireballs out of thin air, but what witchcraft really is is much more intimate. Witchcraft is intuitive, essentially manifestation and using items to enhance that manifestation. There are different types of witches such as Pagan, Hoodoo, and Wiccan. Within each type, a witch usually has a main element they use within their craft.

This could include sea, garden, kitchen elements, etc. “Light” magic is used for selfless purposes, meant to improve their own and other’s lives. “Dark” magic is generally used against others with intent to harm. However, some witches say that light and dark magic are subjective, arguing that what is “light” and what is “dark” is a matter of context. Dark magic has been used to describe historically black uses of witchcraft such as Voodoo. This historical misconception illustrates the connection between witchcraft and social isolation. The white patriarchy has turned witchcraft into a fear mongering weapon, while real witchcraft is not a weapon for fear, but a tool for empowerment.



As we look at how film has portrayed witchcraft, we can track how the cinematic depiction of the witch has evolved with societal values towards women and other marginalized groups. According to Kristen Sollee, professor at the New School and author of *Witches, Sluts and Feminists: Conjuring the Sex Positive*, “If you want to talk about representations of witches in popular culture over the past 500 years, you have to really talk about representations of women in popular culture at large over the past 500 years.”(1) Going back to the early days of popular cinema, we can track the evolution of the witch with waves of feminism that rippled across the West, particularly in America.

We can track the evolution of the witch with waves of feminism that rippled across the West



The first depictions of witches in Hollywood came in the 30s, with two of the most iconic witches present in this decade: Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs in 1937 and *The Wizard of Oz* in 1939. These brought forth the lasting cinematic image of the witch: ugly, manipulative, and the essence of evil. It should be noted that many anti-semitic symbols made their way into witch character designs in this time. Big, hooked noses have always been a prevalent anti-semitic stereotype. The iconic black witch’s hat has its design roots in the 1200s, where the Catholic church would decree that Jews must wear a *judenhut*, a pointed cone shaped hat, to identify themselves.

Later when Jews were accused of being tied to Satan —as witches were — those wearing a *judenhut* were subject to anti-semitism. On the other hand, the Wicked Witch and the Evil Queen’s counterparts, Snow White and Glinda the Good, are presented as pure, innocent, and the epitome of Anglo-Saxon beauty standards. This dyad of magic in the form of good versus evil, ugly versus beautiful, and corrupt versus virtuous is reflective of societal values in this time. Women were either obedient and pure, or tainted and evil due to them being outsiders to society. Outsiders were threats to the Christian morals the West adhered to for hundreds of years. The Catholic church in Europe dictated how non-conformers, such as Jewish people, were treated.

400 years later the Catholic and Protestant church in Europe in addition to the Puritan church in colonial America led mass witch hunts against those who they did not understand. Accusations of witchcraft were fueled by xenophobia, and those morals bled into American cinema in the 1930s. Films of this era depicted witches as evil due to their rebellion against Christian morals.

Allison Yarrow, author of *90s Bitch: Media, Culture, and the Failed Promise of Gender Equality* states, “As the 90s dawned things were looking up for women. Daughters of second-wave feminism came of age and chose new paths unavailable to their mothers: delaying marriage and children, pursuing higher education, joining the workforce, and assuming independence and identities outside of the home.”(2) This newfound cultural independence and empowerment for women gave rise to a decade full of witch centered media.





Films and television shows like *The Craft*, *Hocus Pocus*, *The Blair Witch Project*, and *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* all came out within 10 years of each other. Even the book *Wicked*, which would be the source material for the hit Broadway musical, was published in 1995. The 60 year progression of feminism is shown through these various witch depictions. Witch characters were now multidimensional, veering away from the rigid good vs. evil trope of cinematic past.

art of what makes *The Craft* stand apart from other witch films is its authentic approach to real witchcraft. Pat Devin, a practicing witch, was a consultant for the film and helped write many key scenes and lines to make the witchcraft rituals authentic yet approachable. Pat Devin recounted writing the scene in which Sarah is being initiated into the witches' coven, stating, "My goal for the rituals and chants was that they be authentic, if generic, and that they contain nothing that could not be easily found in at least two books, or plausibly created by teenage girls....I consulted with both of my covens extensively, running my ideas and concerns by them and getting input. The idea that the girls wanted "a fourth" so that there would be one to call each Corner was mine - often, in my Women's circle, we have a different Priestess call each Corner."⁽³⁾ Devin's involvement and input being shown on screen displays Hollywood's evolved attitude toward witchcraft. Instead of being demonized or parodied, witchcraft was shown as a tool for growth and empowerment for young women. How witchcraft was used was up to the individual, such as Rochelle wanting to stand up to her racist bully, or Nancy wanting to escape her abusive stepfather. Their reasons for using witchcraft are grounded in reality, and are relatable to many.

Witchcraft itself is not evil, and only seen as "dark" when its power is used to abuse others. In this way, *The Craft* shows an evolution of witchcraft in Hollywood due to the power of portraying and using witchcraft being in the hands of witches themselves, on and off screen.

The Craft took the image of an ugly, decrepit hag and turned it on its head. Now the image of the witch was a young woman figuring out herself. Coming into one's witch powers was meant not as a hindrance, but a metaphor for coming into one's own personal power, such as building confidence, embracing sexuality or standing up to the ones who would mean them harm. Protagonists like Sabrina from *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* or *The Craft*'s Sarah were meant to be relatable and desirable, a far cry from the Wicked Witch of the West. In today's era of film, one film stands out as the heir to *The Craft* as a revolutionary depiction of witchcraft.



In today's era of film, one film stands out as the heir to *The Craft* as a revolutionary depiction of witchcraft. Anna Biller's 2016 film *The Love Witch* succeeds like its predecessor *The Craft* in portraying realistic witchcraft and womanhood. *The Love Witch* follows Elaine, a witch who uses love spells and sex magic in order to find a man who will love her. Yet her spells and potions come with deadly consequences for her male suitors. Elaine is highly sexualized and yearns to be seen by men, yet the film is viewed through Elaine's eyes, and therefore a female perspective.

Witchcraft is also treated with respect by the film, with Elaine defending her practice to skeptics stating "Do you know what it's like to really suffer? You have to fight and fight until you're too exhausted to go on. Witchcraft is my religion, sergeant. And this religion, which is older than your Christianity, saved my life."(4). This treatment of witchcraft as a religion is a far cry from it being viewed as purely demonic and dangerous. The film aims to show witchcraft as a tool for empowerment, yet one that should be used carefully. This treatment of women and witchcraft by the film comes courtesy of its director Anna Biller.



Coming into one's witch powers was meant not as a hindrance, but a metaphor for coming into one's own personal power.

Since the beginning of Western Christianized society, white Anglo Saxon men have held witches' stories in their hands. They controlled how society treated witchcraft and its practitioners, and ostracized countless women for not conforming to white Christian ideals. Witchcraft has been branded as evil and demonic, and women associated with the practice deserve to be burned. Western society attempted to disillusion the public of witchcraft's true nature by spreading fear and lies. For too long, witches in cinema were meant to represent the fear of witches through characters being abhorrently evil like the Wicked Witch. However, progress is being made.

The Craft was one of the first films to depict witchcraft in a serious matter, as well as portraying witches as relatable female characters and having a witch contribute to the production. Today, a witch and woman of color holds a witch's story in her own hands. The accurate representation of women's desired sexual freedom as well as accurate witchcraft practices in *The Love Witch* is a huge step forward in feminist and witch cinema. While there is still much progress to be made in cinema's depiction of women and witches, Biller's *The Love Witch* is a step forward to accurate and powerful portrayal of witchcraft in mainstream media.





Endnotes:

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Operating Under the Influence in *X-Files*' “Sanguinarium”

by Rowan Lester


This week on *The X-Files Sanguinarium*: Agents Mulder and Scully investigate a series of mysterious and gruesome deaths in the cosmetic surgery ward of a hospital in Illinois. Following the discovery of a pentagram on the floor of the operating theater, the agents begin to suspect witchcraft may be at play in a world motivated by profit, speed, and vanity.

As the investigation proceeds, the agents' suspicions fall mostly on two figures: Nurse Rebecca Waite and Doctor Jack Franklin. Nurse Waite is our episode's underdog, a woman whose magical powers seemingly outclass her status at the hospital. In contrast, Doctor Franklin is a member of the hospital's board who, despite his obvious corporate sleaziness, is seemingly uninvolved with the murders' occult elements.

The placement of a possession episode in a hospital is a fantastic idea. Gone are the spin-

dly tree branches and eerily lacy curtains of other possession features. Here, the sickly green tiling and too-clean lines of the hospital are just as successfully off-putting, and they open a door into a windowless world that feels fittingly like purgatory. However, this episode stops short of falling into the trap typical of hospital-based horror stories. The space is inhospitable, but the horror is never found in the threat of the patients, or even really at the hands of the doctors. Ultimately, it is the exploitation at the hands of the rich members of the hospital's board which is the real horror.

The surgeries in the episode aren't routine either. Instead, they operate as opportunities for the literal boundary crossing of the body, while the possession is a metaphysical transgression. The experiences of the victims parallel one another: the surgeries are the physical manifestations of the possessions. In this way, the surrendering of the

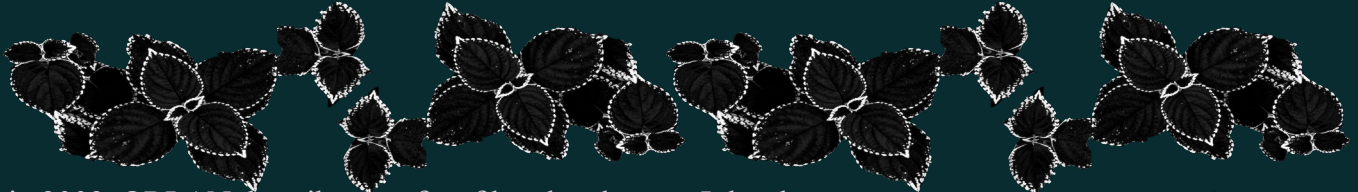


body to the doctor parallels the surrender of the doctor to the possessor, and the power dynamic between doctor and patient is corrupted by the possession. Despite this, it is still the patients who suffer when the power dynamic is transposed onto the doctors. One of the most terrifying sequences of the episode doesn't even result in anyone's death. As Nurse Waite uses leeches to put a pentagram on a woman's stomach to protect her, her patient groans and mutters, "I can't feel my feet... I'm getting a chemical peel... Why can't I feel my feet?"³ The agony with which the line is delivered epitomizes the horror of the loss of control. The confusion in the woman's voice is almost naive, emphasizing the power which Nurse Waite – and certainly her superiors – holds over her. Even in her attempts to help these people, Nurse Waite crosses boundaries and further (or even preemptively) victimizes the patients. It's easier to dismiss when these trespasses are followed immediately by a brutal scene of murder-by-laser, but it is still worth examining as an extension of a system whose failings seem to fall unerringly on the person at the bottom of the proverbial food chain. The person you must trust the most is turned against you through a system which is out of your control.

This transgression is turned into exhibition by the incongruous television monitors above the doors to each operating theater. These screens were likely placed there for the ease of telling the story, giving

other characters insight behind a locked door that they would not otherwise have reason to question and providing security footage for a typically private and routine moment. Here, they become the encroaching surveillance state manifested in grainy black and white. The monitors add another dimension to the scenes, blurring the line between the audience and the characters themselves, both stuck watching in horror as the doctors succumb to their possession.

The exhibition of both pain and beauty isn't exactly unique to this episode, either. In the early 1990s, the performance artist ORLAN underwent multiple public plastic surgery procedures. The photographs of the procedures have a similar green tone as the episode, lending them the same sickly atmosphere. A spectacle is made of ORLAN's bloodied face and presumed pain. The episode itself carefully shows the audience the gruesome details of patient deaths, to the point that Gillian Anderson (the actor who played Agent Scully) couldn't stand to watch some scenes of the episode. We see fat turn to blood and get close-ups of both a disintegrated face and a fully removed one. ORLAN's work and the effectiveness of this episode demonstrate our enduring fascination with the transgressive qualities of physical procedures, especially cosmetic ones. They demonstrate the paralleled experiences of baring both the emotional and physical to the outside world. In an interview with *The Guardian*

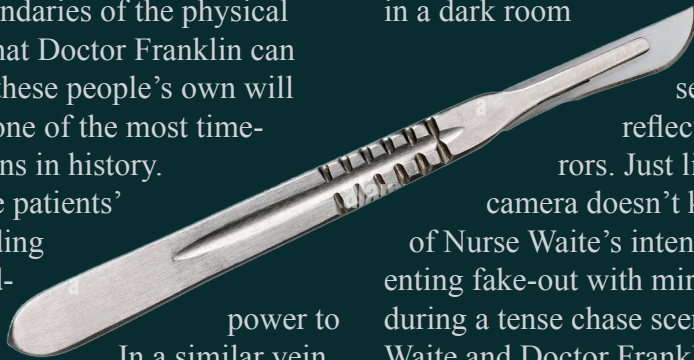


in 2009, ORLAN describes her first filmed surgery (one undergone to remove an ectopic pregnancy) in religious terms. The surgeon becomes a priest, the operating table becomes an altar. She says, "...So when I lay on the operating table, the parallels between the operating theater and the Catholic mass were not wasted on me."²

This is a common theme: there is a sort of spiritual ecstasy associated with crossing the boundaries of the physical form. The fact that Doctor Franklin can continually use these people's own will against them is one of the most timeless transgressions in history. By co-opting the patients' attempts at building their "ideal" bodies, he gains the power to create his own. In a similar vein, there's conjecture that Viking berserkers wore the pelts of bears and wolves into battle as a way of channeling the spirit of these animals.¹ Doctor Franklin performs a rather similar procedure when he fully removes his face in the penultimate moments of the episode. He literally inhabits a new body and becomes a new person through this act. Doctor Franklin intends to transgress the boundary of self, with resounding success. He reinvents himself the same way that artist ORLAN has many times over. We have an eternal ambition to transcend our physical bodies, and there is a common obsession with the evolution of

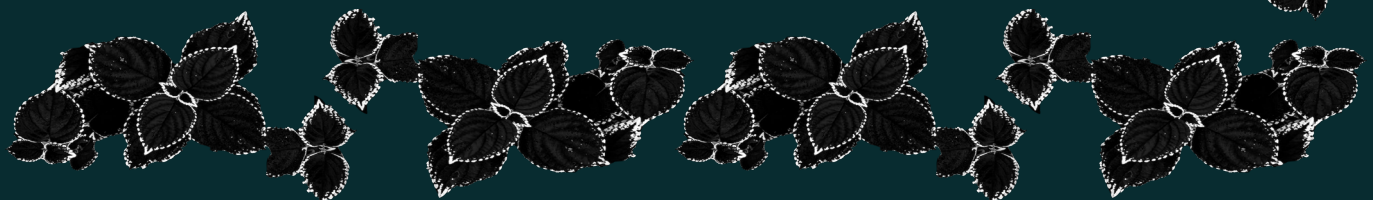
beauty. It borders on reverence.


The episode explores this fascination with the constructed self through shots of characters shown through a dizzying amount of mirrors. They distort and reveal the characters in equal measure. One of the only scenes which show outright witchcraft – specifically witchcraft in the way we've been taught to recognize it, complete with candles and murmured incantations in a dark room



– is shot so that the caster is only seen through the reflection of two mirrors. Just like the agents, the camera doesn't know what to make of Nurse Waite's intentions. This disorienting fake-out with mirrors is also used during a tense chase scene between Nurse Waite and Doctor Franklin, where the nurse's unseen presence is replaced by the doctor's own reflection as he stalks through the halls of his home. The use of his reflection, rather than cross-cutting between the nurse and the doctor, helps build the suspenseful tone of the scene. It also calls to mind the doctor's own (quite literal) two-faced nature. As a result, the viewer can trust neither the characters nor their own eyes.

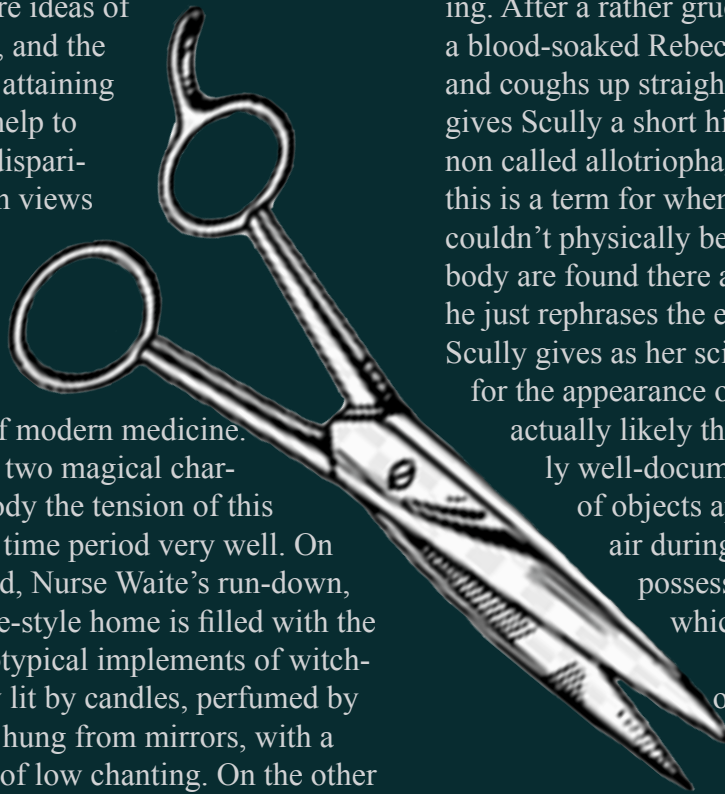
The tension between the self and the other carries through the entire episode. Technology is slowly encroaching on the world of this hospital. But despite its taking place in the ultra-modern, sickly





sterile world of the hospital, the episode is rooted in age-old motivations which anchor the witchcraft to a reliable throughline. Attempts to create a “perfect” or improved version of the body speak to the longevity of the core ideas of the episode, and the methods of attaining perfection help to bridge the disparities between views of witchcraft as part of a long-past history and the world of modern medicine.

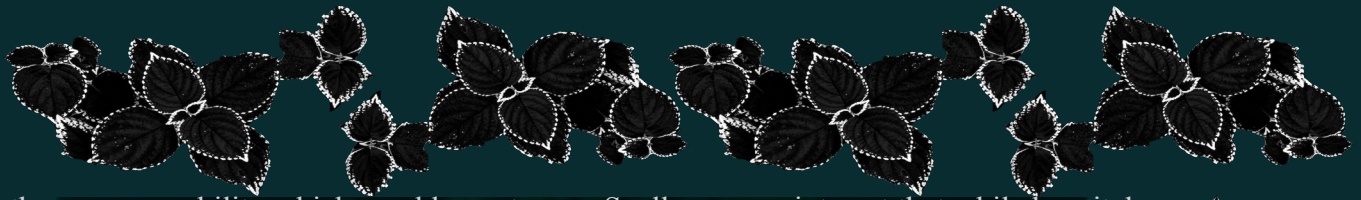
Our two magical characters embody the tension of this transitional time period very well. On the one hand, Nurse Waite’s run-down, Queen Anne-style home is filled with the more stereotypical implements of witchcraft: dimly lit by candles, perfumed by dried herbs hung from mirrors, with a soundtrack of low chanting. On the other hand, sleek, modern lines make up Doctor Franklin’s McMansion which is filled with sharp glass and pale, neutral tones. He administers influential doses of belladonna through antacid pills and gains power through cutting-edge medical procedures. In contrast, Nurse Waite calls back to the original meaning of the pentagram, falsely implicating herself by planting them in the



surgical theaters to protect the patients. In fact, it seems as if the only element of classical witchcraft that Doctor Franklin uses is intended to spite Nurse Waite after she directly attacks him for what he’s been doing. After a rather gruesome scene in which a blood-soaked Rebecca Waite convulses and coughs up straight pins, Agent Mulder gives Scully a short history of a phenomenon called allotriophagy, or pica. He claims this is a term for when objects which couldn’t physically be inside the human body are found there anyways. In reality, he just rephrases the exact phenomenon Scully gives as her scientific explanation

for the appearance of the pins. Mulder is actually likely thinking of the relatively well-documented phenomenon of objects appearing out of thin air during cases of supposed possession or haunting, which is called apportioning.

While Mulder offers many faith or intuition-based reasonings for his jumps to supernatural phenomena, this one particularly sticks out because of the surety with which Mulder proclaims it to be true. Rather than being an impressive intuitive leap, the deduction joins a long list of self-assured moments of failure which illustrate the ways the people with the most power can so easily falter. The role of human error and fallibility (and



the maneuverability which would counter these errors) is dismissed in favor of inefficient speed. The doctors regard their surgeries with the same kind of bored resignation found in workers on an assembly line.

While the possessions and murders are committed for the age-old goals of personal gain and eternal youth, the hospital's board of directors is able to aid and abet Doctor Franklin through the way their very system is constructed. The deaths of the patients are grisly yet the deeper horror is found in the hospital board's disregard for the lives of their patients in the face of profit. Greed and vanity are mainstays of classical witchcraft narratives, but in this episode, the two are separate dangers. There's nothing wrong with cosmetic surgery, but there is something wrong with the way the doctors treat these procedures as mundanely routine even after the first patient's death, sacrificing safety in the face of the doctors' own greed and vanity. They are more concerned with the profit of cosmetic procedures than maintaining the operating quality of the hospital. Agent

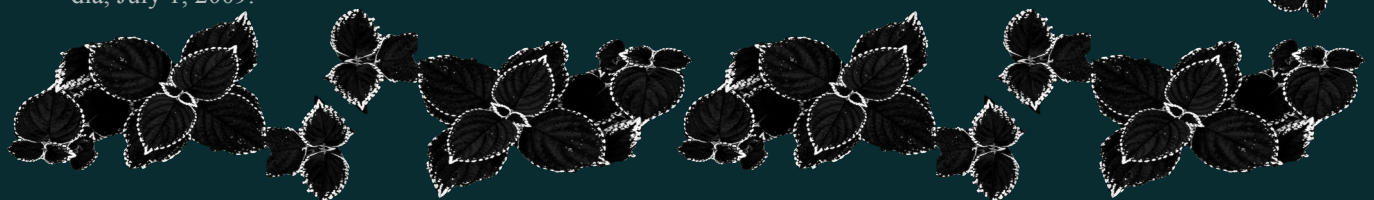
Scully even points out that while hospitals as a whole have seen their profits decline, the doctors in this hospital have only seen their salaries rise. The timelessness of both the characters' motivations and the harm they do to achieve them helps reconcile the disparate forces at play within the episode.

Many X-Files episodes end ambiguously, but this one ends with the express acknowledgment of the fact that Doctor Franklin will continue his behavior. This ending is a prescient reminder of the systemic underpinnings which enabled the hospital's problems in the first place. Within these structural power imbalances, it is the people at the bottom who are worst affected by the failings of the system. As the episode shows, surrender is the circumstance most easily exploited.

design
by
skylar smith

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To Dream In The Dark: The Work Of David Lynch

Written By: Evan Ambrose

Design By: Andre Dal Corso



In 1967, a young man by the name of David Lynch found out that he was going to be a father while studying at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (PAFA) to become a director. At the time, he had just finished creating his first short film ever: *Six Men Getting Sick*. Following this, Lynch would make experimental, animated/live-action hybrid short films that revolved around the idea of family and childhood. His crisis of understanding parenthood felt heavily journaled in these pieces

of unusual media, a necessary decade of build up to his infamous directorial debut, *Eraserhead*, an oddball film quite literally about the terrifying yet comical experience of being a father. He spent five years making the picture while simultaneously working a side job delivering *The Wall Street Journal*, often fluctuating between shooting sequences and earning enough money to continue shooting the next. When the film was finally released in 1977, critics at the time despised it. What would become Lynch's trademark quality of "uncertainty" within his storytelling may have come

off as too disturbing for Hollywood at the time. Nonetheless, this dreamy yet ominously hysterical nature of narrative was bound to make its way into the mainstream because of these initially concerned reactions.

It wasn't until Lynch directed a picture for Paramount in 1980 – a safe but incredibly effective feature-length retelling of the real life *Elephant Man* – did he finally win over the respect of critics. What later followed, however, was his notoriously known blockbuster failure, *Dune*: the first ever cinematic adaptation of Frank Herbert's celebrated science-fiction novel. Naturally, this sent Lynch back into rather experimental surrealist territory again





with a follow-up feature-length he based heavily off of a blueprint that he would later on continue to reuse throughout his career: *Blue Velvet*. This is one of the first obvious examples of David Lynch's musing of Hollywood's *The Wizard of Oz*, where he implores key elements of that movie into his own such as innocence entering a new world, same characters existing within different realities, and the conclusive plausibility that some – if not all – of it was a dream or exaggeration of what really occurred from the perspective of the protagonist. Unlike *The Wizard of Oz*, *Blue Velvet* exercises these traits within a much more unsettling context than the family-friendly flick. Lynch's movie is a coming-of-age drama about a young man learning about sudden urges for sadomasochistic relationships with women and the battle he takes to overcome giving into this new sector of a world he never knew existed. Lynch would later follow up this cult classic four years later with *Wild at Heart*, which is arguably his most literal remake of *The Wizard of Oz* (it even has a good witch appearing at the end to send the protagonist "home"). Like, *Eraserhead*, this was another movie of his that revolved around themes of fatherhood and - like *Blue Velvet* - one interested with the choices we make as young adults discovering new things in the world. These discoveries either lead us into righteous or sinister directions that we could define the rest of our lives by.

It's easy to agree that the show *Twin Peaks* was David Lynch's biggest breakout work. It's Lynch's



most blatant example of him exercising light and dark elements; the series is always alternating between its charming humor and sinister themes. There are simple teen romances and family dramas that are built upon, but as we learn more, the dark underbelly progressively unraveled in *Twin Peaks* helps deconstruct the stereotypical high school sitcom we've come to expect. The pilot episode of the show sets up the central premise that will define the show for its next two seasons: high school homecoming queen Laura Palmer has been mysteriously murdered. This inspires the *Twin Peaks* police department to send over an investigator of the FBI to look into the murder. This element of uncertainty is what got the series to become such a hit on television; people were tuning in week after week in hopes of learning more about who could be the killer. Although it was never Lynch's intention to reveal who the murderer was, nagging



executives began to pressure him otherwise when viewership for the show's second season began to decrease. It's funny to think that this would be the start to the rise in edgy high school shows such as *Riverdale* or *Euphoria*. While these shows possess a kind of darkness and perverted disturbance of innocence that make them popular amongst young audiences, it's interesting to note that the demographic of *Twin Peaks* was always widely diverse. The absolutely hypnotic approach Lynch took was something that almost everybody was interested in witnessing, as neither the old nor young had ever seen this kind of program before. The dreamy nature of his established style in nighttime television was revolutionary at the time. About a decade after *Twin Peaks* (momentarily) came to a conclusion, Lynch made what many consider to be his masterpiece: *Mulholland Drive*.

This movie, however, was meant to be a pilot episode to a new TV show Lynch had in mind, until it was rejected by a single executive.

In light of this, Lynch found a way to reconstruct it into a movie. Out of all of the movies he had made, this would be his biggest love letter to Los Angeles. However, it was also his opportunity to display the death of dreams he often witnessed within the city throughout his entire life; those false beacons of hope that only a minority of people ever accomplish within its promises of stardom. Ironically, this happened to be the film that made actress Naomi Watts big in Hollywood, who quite literally plays the lead character who fails to make it. She especially connected to the role, because it reflected the previous twenty years of her acting career before taking the part when she was never able to get on the map of fame; it wouldn't be surprising if this coincidence is what gave us the one-of-a-kind performance she puts



forth in the film. Still, despite the clarity of themes such as fame, disappointment, and the unsettling duality between dreams and reality, *Mulholland Drive* is still being analyzed to this day when it comes to plot specifics. Lynch, like most of his work, has been very quiet about saying anything that may allow the audience to see the film from any vision other than their own.

As one could imagine, dodging the feedback towards his work has always been a huge staple in David Lynch's career. Yet, more often than not throughout his 50-year career, he stood ground by refusing to expand upon the nebulous comments he's made about his films or the interpretations made by others on what they could mean. David Lynch once said, "As soon as you put things in words, no one ever sees the film the same way. And that's what I hate, you know: talking – it's real dangerous." He would go on to expand upon this quote by specifying how the act of an artist explaining his art is a crime because it disenfranchises the unique language of the art with vernacular. In a sense, it strips the art of its individual nature, and furthermore strips

the viewer of their potential to consume more subjectively. But this is likely why his work appeals universally despite it not catering to comforting clarifications: its draw is seeing something you don't know or, in other words, haven't seen before to the point where you can't just define it; it begs of you to dissect it, and spend longer time with it to really do so. For example, Lynch once said: "If you don't know what it is, a sore can be very beautiful – but as soon as you name it, it stops being beautiful to most people. But if you took a picture of it, a close-up, and you didn't know exactly what it was, it could be a great beauty of organic phenomenon." The removal of definitions for things in life is what can make things more interesting to people.

The success and incredibly supportive fanbase of David Lynch is important to consider because it's unusual for such ambiguous content to have the recognition that it does. His reign of popularity should be an indicator to future generations of filmmakers to overcome the fear of letting one's imagination roam for one's self rather than for the satisfaction of what an audience already expects. The admiration for Lynch is only a byproduct of his freedom, something he had the least amount of during his days of *Dune* or *Twin Peaks* season 2, which are arguably his most criticized pieces. Whenever he let go of the expectations of others, Lynch was unintentionally making the art that people would love the most. He helped make cinematic dream-logic appealing in the United States, a country not necessarily well-known for their own surrealist feature-lengths like countries abroad have been since nearly the beginning. He convinced everybody like he convinced himself: "I like to make films because I like to go into another world. I like to get lost in another world. And film to me is a magical medium that makes you dream... allows you to dream in the dark. It's just a fantastic thing, to get lost inside the world of film."

In many cases, Lynch can then be considered a pioneer of the embrace nature avant-garde experimental cinema has gotten over the past half-century, as well as its progression into being more prominent within mainstream media. He



spent decades getting polarized attention from the masses in order to teach a world of filmmakers that it's all just a part of the process. He's now perhaps one of the most celebrated living American filmmakers out there next to Martin Scorsese or Quentin Tarantino. I mean hell, Santa Cruz's local The Landmark Del Mar plays a movie of his every couple months! There's no escaping his impact on cinematic culture, especially today. Therefore, it's crucial to realize the power of longevity, and how the pieces of media that still seem to defy conventions even decades after they're released are often the ones reappearing within generations onward. As a young filmmaker myself, all I want to do is dream as intensely as possible like Lynch was doing throughout his career; being abstract is a benefit when working with art that my personal relationship with reality often prohibits. Not to mention, dreams bring about an endless abyss of content so detached from reality that we often do not see them displayed out in the open. But that's probably why people love watching movies so much, right? It's that escape back into dreaming - even when our eyes are wide open.

Endnotes

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