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Letter from the Editor

In the early 1950s, the Indiana College English Association began publishing a twice-a-year periodical titled *The Associator*. Over the next fifty or so years, *The Associator* served a number of purposes, including as the organization's newsletter, pre-conference call-for-papers and registration, post-conference proceedings, personnel changes in English departments across the state, and updates in the field. Every so often, a piece of literary criticism or creative work would find publication within its volumes.

As digital communication became ubiquitous, the need for a printed, mailed newsletter waned, and although some later volumes were produced digitally, *The Associator* was eventually discontinued, now nearly twenty years ago.

This first issue of *Indiana English*, then, is both a rebirth and a reinvention of that history. After a number of conversations and discussions held over the past few years, it was decided that this publication would embrace the scholar-teacher model of scholarship, and focus on being an academic journal to that end. *Indiana English* offers a new, invigorated, and peer-reviewed opportunity for scholars and teachers to publish in their fields of specialty, to publish new approaches and techniques in pedagogy, and to publish their creative works.

Many thanks go to the Indiana College English Association for sponsoring this work. Thanks to University of Southern Indiana for hosting the digital version of the journal; we are grateful for the opportunity to give greater access. Thanks also to the Indiana Council of Teachers of English for giving us their blessing to use the name *Indiana English*.

- Stephen Zimmerly

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The City and the Sea: Trickster Geographies in Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*

by Monica O'Neil

Introduction

The premise of William Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* can be described in a single far-fetched sentence[1]: Two sets of identically dressed twins, identically named and even identically freckled,[2] somehow wander around the same town without noticing each other. The family at the center of *Errors* is separated after a shipwreck. Wife and mother Aemeila, one of her twin sons, and one of the family's twin servants, wash ashore in Ephesus. Husband and father Egeon, the other twin son and other twin servant find their way to Syracuse. After the shipwreck, the separated twin sons both take the same name, Antipholus, and both servant twins also take the same name, Dromio, setting the stage for mass confusion. Mistaken identities such as these are common in the major forebears of Shakespeare's comedy—in Roman New Comedy (especially the works of Plautus) and the Italian *commedia dell arte* of the sixteenth century—but a key difference is that deception in classical comedy often relied on trickster figures, while the two sets of twins in *Errors* are accidental deceivers, tricky only because they are a physical paradox. That is, the twins are novel because of their rarity as genetic duplications, unique because of their sameness—a "tricky stratagem at best on the part of nature" (Nevo 28). The twins themselves attribute the confusion surrounding them to physical location, and in this chapter I make a similar argument, attributing the confusion of *Errors* not to trickster characters but to "trickster geography."[3] The trickery that drives the play's plotline emanates from the places the twins

1 Barbara Freedman notes that *Errors* is "widely considered Shakespeare's most insignificant, unselfconscious, and disjointed play" (264).

2 Unless otherwise noted, all quotations and references to *The Comedy of Errors* are taken from The New Cambridge Shakespeare edition.

3 William Hynes details the six general traits and roles trickster figures share: Tricksters are usually 1) ambiguous and anomalous which leads to them functioning as 2) deceivers and trick players, 3) shape-shifters, 4) situation-invertors, 5) messengers or imitators of the gods, and 6) sacred and lewd bricoleurs (34).

inhabit, and Shakespeare characterizes these settings—in particular, the Mediterranean Sea and the city of Ephesus—as magical, liminal, and beguiling.

Trickster Geographies

Even the earliest Elizabethan reviews recognized Shakespeare's debt to Plautus. The 1594 *Gesta Grayorum*, for example, noted Errors' resemblance to the "Menechmus," which was half-right, since Shakespeare lifted from both *Menaechmi* and *Amphitryon* (Miola 427). From the former, Shakespeare took the idea of a twin in search of his long-lost brother; from the latter, a second set of twins and a "lock-out" scene. In Plautus' play, Amphitryon and his slave Sosia are locked out of their house while Amphitryon's wife Alcmena entertains Zeus and Mercury, who are disguised as her husband and slave. Since *Errors* is unmistakably adapted from these two Plautus plays about twins, the "errors" referred to in the title are almost always interpreted as mistaken identity. It is true that much of the humor in Shakespeare's play results from characters presuming that they are talking to one twin when it is actually the other. However, the sinister and terrifying aspects of *Errors*, the ones lurking just under the simple gags and jokes, may require a different interpretation. I am certainly not the first to note the title's etymology (from the Latin errare) or claim that the play has as much to do with wandering or roaming as it does with making mistakes,[4] but I also claim that the twins' wandering in particular geographical spaces, both before the events of the play and during them, are central to the play's characteristic "errors" of identity. Moreover, the specific locations where they roam are just as significant (if not more so) as the wandering itself.

Although *Errors* follows the traditional Aristotelian unity of place, various locations arouse confusion within the unified stage setting. Syracusan Antipholus and Dromio[5] describe the sea and the city as places that "confound" and are imbued with" imaginary wiles" and "goblins, owls, and sprites," which they believe are the

4 See Barbara Freedman's *Reading Errantly*. She notes the ambiguity in the play's title through its Latin etymology: "Since the etymology of errors suggests not only mistakes but wandering, we will move with this play and seek to catch our errors as we make them" (266). See also Harry Levin, "Two Comedies of Errors" in *The Comedy of Errors: Critical Essays* (113-133) and Alexander Leggatt's chapter on "The Comedy of Errors" in *Shakespeare's Comedy of Love* (1-20).

5 The two sets of twins share the same names, Antipholous and Dromio and are distinguished from each other by their hometowns: Syracuse or Ephesus.

supernatural cause of the confusion they experience during their day spent in Ephesus (1.2.38, 2.2.181, 4.2.10). In Shakespeare's work, these two geographies replace the archetypal trickster whose task it is to cause confusion and stir up trouble. In Plautus' *Amphitryon*, on the other hand, Mercury fills the trickster role when he nearly drives the slave Sosia mad by taking on his likeness and insisting that the slave must be an imposter (455-457).[6] No such trickster is to be found in *Errors*, an absence explained by Leo Salingar's distinction between Roman and Elizabethan comic sensibility: "There was much in classical comedy that the Elizabethans could not accept. Their attitudes towards trickery, for instance, is morally cautious, if not ambiguous—it is funny when applied to moral deviants, but otherwise reprehensible" (171). My claim is that Shakespeare revised and re-visioned the trickster character in *Errors*. What results is the play's seemingly purposeful rejection of guile and deliberate deception, relying instead on coincidence and confusion.

As I argue, it is geography, not the intentions of the twins themselves, that drive the mistaken identities. The Syracusans come to Ephesus specifically to look for their twins, and the many coincidences should tip them off that their doubles might actually be there. Instead, Syracusan Antipholus attributes the strangeness he encounters to the confounding effects of the sea and the witchcraft of Ephesus. Thus, the geographies that the Antipholi and Dromios inhabit—and wander around in—are more than just settings. In a sense, they become agents that exacerbate the hidden problems of identity. Nevo attributes the confusion to a "knot of errors, the *processus turbarum*, [that] turns the world of the protagonists upside down, and discovers them to us in all their comical, previously hidden ambivalences, violences, and consternations" (27). While I agree with Nevo about the presence of "hidden ambivalences, violences, and consternations," I would suggest that the world that the Antipholi and Dromios roam around in was already upside down; the places themselves help bring out the previously hidden identity issues that exist between the twins.

That geography plays such an important role in *Errors* should not be surprising. Aside from the ambiguous meaning of "errors," which connotes not only mistakes but wandering in far-flung places, several major characters are defined geographically. Scholars refer to

6 Mercury's trickery immediately throws Sosia into a troubling identity crisis. He asks himself and the gods, "Di immortales, obsecro uostram fidem, / ubi ego perii? Ubi immutatus sum? Ubi ego formam perdidi? An egomet me illic reliqui, si forte oblitus fui?" "Immortal Gods, I beg your protection. Where have I vanished to? Where have I been transformed? Where have I misplaced my appearance? Or did I leave myself over there, if by chance I forgot myself?" Translation mine.

the twins by their city of residence to distinguish them: Solinus, as Duke of Ephesus, is inseparable from the territory he governs, and Egeon and Adriana have names that echo regional bodies of water within the larger Mediterranean. Not only are many characters intimately associated with particular places, but the play's many confusions often arise from the perceived supernatural attributes of the Mediterranean Sea and the city of Ephesus—liminal, seemingly magical places that deceive and confound, just as an archetypal trickster would. These are the places that shatter familial bonds, force long separations, and ultimately play a role in the twins' reunion. In calling these places liminal, I borrow from anthropologist Victor Turner, who explains that "liminal entities are neither here nor there, they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial" (95). The unexpected happens within these threshold places because they are unstable. Further, by wandering through these liminal spaces, the Antipholi and Dromios become liminal figures. They, too, find themselves betwixt and between, searching for a solid identity and familial structure while roaming in the margins. In the pivotal lock-out scene, Ephesian Antipholus finds himself literally stuck in the threshold, begging to be let in to his house (3.1). For both the characters in the play and for Elizabethans watching it, these locations possess ambiguous but predominant dualities: the sea brings separations and reunions, and Ephesus represents both witchcraft and Christianity.

The following sections focus on these trickster geographies, examining the characters' attitudes toward them and how those attitudes arise from Elizabethan cultural concerns. Each of these locations plays a part in the twins' magical and somewhat miraculous transformation. Turner claims that liminal people go through three steps: "separation, margin (*limen*, signifying 'threshold' in Latin), and aggregation" (94). The Syracusan and Ephesian pairs go through this process as they are exposed to each trickster geography. The sea is the source of their separation, while the town causes marginalization and alienation.

The Homeric Sea

Although *Errors* rejects an archetypal trickster figure as the architect of the play's confusion, the traits of the archetypal trickster can be found dispersed among the uncertain spaces in which the twins roam. Of the play's trickster geographies, the Mediterranean

Sea is the one that destroys Egeon's family and diminishes each member's identity. The Mediterranean is tricky because it is an in-between space, separating cultures, beliefs, and territories, but also serving as a fluid passageway that enables the commingling of these elements. William Hynes claims that tricksters are "shape-shifters" who possess "ambiguous and anomalous" qualities—characteristics and traits that accurately describe not only the Mediterranean in *Errors* but also the literature that influenced Shakespeare's characterization of it (Hynes and Doty 34). Indeed, one can see how much Homer's *Odyssey* shaped Shakespeare's Mediterranean as the characters in *Errors* go through their own odyssey of separation and reunion.

When considering literary representations of the Mediterranean Sea, scholars inevitably find themselves looking back at the *Odyssey*. At its heart, Homer's epic is an episodic set of fantastical myths, but its treatment of the sea and sea travel gives real insight into the Greek's fear of and reverence for the Mediterranean. It can also serve as a guide for thinking about the meaning of the Mediterranean in *Errors*. While the tales in the *Odyssey* mostly center on Odysseus' thwarted journey by sea to return to Ithaca after the Trojan War, one of the most compelling characterizations of the Mediterranean comes not from these misadventures, but from Menelaus' retelling of his return to Sparta. Having been stranded on the island of Pharos for over twenty days by a lack of wind, Menelaus learns he must capture Proteus, the archetypal old man in the sea, and force him to reveal how to get back home. The problem for Menelaus is that Proteus possesses "old wizard's tricks" that allow him to transform into other creatures and escape (4.461). Indeed, when Menelaus and his men rush Proteus, the divine old man "turned into a great bearded lion, and then a serpent— a panther—a ramping wild boar—a torrent of water—a tree with soaring branchtops" (4.512-517). Menelaus subdues Proteus, learns about the fate of his brother and other Achaeans, and also learns that he has to make a sacrifice to Zeus in order to leave Pharos.

Homer's personification of the Mediterranean in the form of a shape-shifting wizard reminds his audience that the sea is capricious, possessing raw, untamable power and multiple dangers, but also valuable resources. There is a magic in the sea's volatility and a liminality in its uncertainty. Although notw a personified character in *Errors*, the Mediterranean exhibits these same protean qualities, granting fortunes one moment, then bringing destruction the next, and leading to a family reunion in the end. Much like Proteus in the *Odyssey*, the characters in *Errors* who have been submerged in the

Mediterranean take on unstable identities, as if the qualities of the sea become ingrained in their very natures. Egeon, the merchant of Syracuse, tells Solinus, Duke of Ephesus, about a violent tempest that he and his family endured, calling it "a doubtful warrant of immediate death" in the first scene (1.1.67). Their lives are spared but the separation caused by the subsequent shipwreck explains the mistakes people make in distinguishing the Antipholi and Dromios throughout the rest of the play. When the family is split apart, the twins' identities are fractured, and the way the characters describe their confusion is framed in terms of the sea, as if any perplexing situation must be traced back to the first tragedy that damaged their identities. Members of Egeon's family talk about the waters that have torn them apart in a way that makes the Mediterranean a source of magic, an agent of fortune, a place of uncertainty.

The Mediterranean is not dangerous just because of tragic acts of fortune, such as the shipwrecks and pirates Egeon encounters, or because of magical sea creatures like the ones Syracusan Antipholus compares Luciana to. Quite possibly the biggest threat the Mediterranean poses is the effects of its transformative qualities. Unlike Circe, who fully transforms Odysseus' men into pigs, the magical effects of the sea in *Errors* leave the characters half-formed, neither the people they were before, nor wholly someone else. If one spends enough time at sea or has had his or her life shaped by traumatic events at sea, it can also drastically change one's identity and the connectedness he or she feels with family.

In *Errors*, the sea is not simply dangerous because of the many outward obstacles it presents or because of the bodily harm it threatens. It is also dangerous because it changes the characters that have been submerged in it into liminal figures without full personalities and identities. The Syracusans are afraid that some magical force will transform them while they are in Ephesus, yet their time at sea before their arrival might be the real agent of change (1.2.95-102). Only through reunification of their family can they fully regain themselves and their place in the word. Paradoxically, as the play shows time and again, they have trouble reuniting with family precisely because their identities are too diminished to be recognizable to others.

Shakespearean storms at sea and shipwrecks often cause a loss of family, loss of identity, and a reversal of fortune, as in *Twelfth Night, The Tempest,* and *Pericles,* and the storm and shipwreck of *Errors* cause these same kinds of losses and reversals. As the family voyages to Syracuse, their ship is caught in a storm and starts to sink. Aemilia ties herself,

one twin son, and one twin servant to one side of a mast. Egeon does likewise with the other two boys on the other side of the mast.[7] At this point the family is separated into two little groups of three, but they are still tenuously linked by the mast as they float helplessly in the sea. Ships show up on the horizon as the storm clears, and the family believes that they are saved, but a rock breaks the mast in two, completely fracturing the family. As the two groups float away from one another, they are rescued by ships heading in different directions. Just within this one episode, which Egeon recalls to Duke Solinus just before his death sentence is supposed to be carried out, there are a few separations and hopes of reunion before the final heartbreak, when two ships carry off the separated family groups (1.1.62-120). This initial episode establishes a template for the rest of the family's missed opportunities to reunite in Ephesus. It seems during Egeon's tale that when the connecting mast of the ship does not keep the family together, then he is certain a rescuing ship will. When two different ships pick up the family groups, Egeon tells Solinus that he was still confident that his ship could catch up to the one that rescued his wife and the other half of the twins (1.1.115-117). In the same way, the audience is reassured that the mistakes in identity that take place in the rest of the play cannot go on indefinitely. Eventually, one of the twin merchants, one of the twin servants, or a family member will wise up and reveal the cause of the errors. Part of the reason this fails to happen time and again is because the original rift in the family separates them for so long that they cannot recognize each other even when they are so close and have so many interactions with the same people. The separation at sea causes the family's lack of identity, and that lack of identity causes much of the confusion in the rest of the play.

Palimpsestic Ephesus

Building upon his allusions to the *Odyssey* and representation of the sea as a liminal space and agent of fortune, Shakespeare darkens the Ephesian city center by making it a town overrun with witches and sorcerers—ones that take their influence from ancient Greek and Roman religion, the New Testament, and Renaissance magic. Shakespeare's Ephesus, with all its cultural, religious, and geographic overtones, has led Randall Martin to refer to the city

7 Odysseus similarly has himself tied to a mast so that he can listen to the Sirens' song without being lured to his death (12.174-179).

as "a palimpsest" because of the anachronisms in *Errors* (366). And like a palimpsest, the town is not wholly one place. Viewers can see the surface representations of an Eastern Hellenized space, but also traces and glimmers of something more mysterious. Shakespeare's Ephesus combines both Eastern and Western elements. For example, Antipholus of Ephesus speaks of "Turkish tapestry" in his house, but that house, the Phoenix, is named after a London tavern or a shop on Lombard Street (1.2.75 and fn. 75). T.W. Baldwin even refers to the Ephesus of *Errors* as "Ephesus-London" because of the numerous allusions to London in the Ephesian cityscape (96).[8]

Yet Ephesus hardly needed Shakespeare's vision to be classified as a city influenced by Eastern and Western culture. Anatolia changed hands between Eastern and Western powers several times. It was ruled by the Persians beginning around 550 BCE, then fell under the control of Alexander the Great in 334 BCE (Kealhofer and Grave 417), and was finally absorbed into the Roman Empire in 133 BCE (Graf 53). Situated on the Western coast of modern-day Turkey, Ephesus was a major hub for merchants and travelers moving between Asia Minor, the Near East, and the Mediterranean regions. In *Revelations of John*, William Barclay describes Ephesus as "the Gateway to Asia … For all the travelers and the trade, from the Cayster to the Maeander Valleys, from Galatia, from the Euphrates and from Mesopotamia, Ephesus was the highway to Rome" (58). As Barclay points out, the trade route in Ephesus was two-way—both an entrance to Asia and a path to Rome. As a point of transition between East and West, Ephesus has a natural liminality that lends itself to the themes of dislocation, discovery, and metamorphoses in *Errors*.

Setting the play in such a region places contemporary anxieties and tensions as a backdrop for the entire play. The movement and transition inherent to the place correlates to great flexibility of cultural interactions, whether they be profitable or polluting. Linda McJannet notes of this cross-cultural contamination, "Although eventually dominated and influenced by Rome, the culture of the East retained much of its Hellenic character, and the Romans were 'Orientialized' even as the East was 'Romanized'" (McJanet 88). This concern is expressed more overtly in other Shakespeare plays where the phrase "turning Turk" is used to signify a complete reversal in one's actions, attitudes, or fortunes (*Much ado about Nothing* 3.4.50; *Hamlet* 3.2.251;

8 Baldwin suggests, "the twin Dromios, find themselves much confused in the witchery of Ephesus-London, as no doubt did their creator."

Othello 2.3.15).[9] Not only does the phrase suggest betrayal of one's Christian, Western European heritage, it also implies an inherent untrustworthiness in those from the East.

These same anxieties over Eastern contamination appear in *Errors* and can best be seen in Syracusan Dromio's description of one of its citizens, the Ephesian kitchen maid Nell. He describes her as "swart like my shoe, but her face nothing like so clean kept" (3.2.95). This description at once identifies Nell as a dark-skinned representative of Turkey and suggests that she is a metaphorical and literal contaminant who cannot be contained. Nell, who mistakes Syracusan Dromio for her husband, also sweats so much that "a man may go overshoes in the grime of it" (3.2.96). Nell insists that she and Dromio are married and she harasses the servant until he is driven away. These descriptions, which speak overtly about foreign pollution and contamination, come before Dromio projects her Turkish pollution and spreads it worldwide. What follows is a comparison of the woman to a globe, presumably because of her rotund shape, with many European countries located in seemingly diseased parts of her body. As Syracusan Antipholus asks more questions about her, a map of Western Europe is projected on her body, making her both a figure of jest and danger. Pauw describes the scene as a form of commodification in which "a woman's body is imagined as a geopolitical entity to be mapped out according to the rules, and field of reference, of male power politics" (5).

Since antiquity, nations and regions have been compared to women's bodies. Pauw compares the above passage in *Errors* to a passage in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* where "Athenian and Spartan negotiators … map out their respective sexo-territorial demands on the sexy body of Reconciliation," personified as a young woman (1). The practice of depicting a country or region as a female was commonplace in Renaissance Europe as well. In fact, European monarchs at war with the Ottoman Empire commissioned artists who represented their patrons' battles through the female form.[10] Titian's *Religion Succored by Spain* (c.1575) depicts Spain as a woman armed with shield and

9 *Much Ado About Nothing* 3.4.50, Margaret tells Beatrice, "Well, and you be not turned Turk, / there's no more sailing by the star." *Hamlet* 3.2.251, "Would not this, sir, and a forest of feathers—if / the rest of my fortunes turn Turk with me." *Othello* 2.3.15, "Are we turn'd Turks, and to ourselves do that / Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites?"

10 See Larry Silver's "Europe's Turkish Nemesis" in *Representing Imperial Rivalry in the Early Modern Mediterranean* 58-79. Silver discusses the importance of Titian's *Religion Succored by Spain* and von Aachen's *The Battle of Sisak*, among other paintings, as representations of European women and the Turkish Other.

spear striding toward Religion, a cowering, bedraggled, bare-breasted woman with snakes nipping at her back and a cross by her feet (see fig. 1). In the background, a turbaned man representing Turkey struggles at sea with a chariot and two horses. This unsubtle piece of allegorical propaganda commemorated the Holy League's victory in the Battle of Lepanto—a maritime battle in the Gulf of Corinth that prevented the Ottomans from taking further territory in the Mediterranean.

In a similar female-centered piece of propaganda, Hans Von Aachen created *The Battle of Sisak* (1603) to commemorate a Habsburg victory over the Ottomans ten years before (see fig. 2). In it, the goddess Victory places a laurel crown atop a woman in a blue and white checked dress representing Croatia. Above the two women, an eagle, representing Rudolph II, Holy Roman Emperor, attacks a crescent moon, representing the Ottoman Empire. In the background Rudolph II's forces can be seen driving Ottoman forces into a river. Both works address European Christian victories over the Muslim Other, and both works use women to represent Christian nations or Christianity itself. The Turkish threat in von Aachen's painting, on the other hand, is represented less by men in stereotypical garb and symbols that would mark the Turks as Other to a European audience. In both works the Turks driven into bodies of water, which often serve as natural boundaries, and so may be used in these paintings for locative and topographical value; however, as natural boundary markers that help establish ownership of territory, the waters subsuming Ottoman forces also clearly demarcate Christian European lands that the enemy has been pushed back from. These waters place the Turks back in an indeterminate space beyond the Christian pale and function much in the same way as the Mediterranean Sea did in real life.

Fig. 1. Titian, *Religion Succored by Spain*, 1575, oil on canvas, Prado Museum, Madrid.

Fig. 2. Hans von Aachen, *The Battle of Sisak*, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

These two works contrast with Syracusan Antipholus' description of Nell and serve as good points of departure from Pauw's assertions in *Landscaping the Body*. Nell's description does not at all seem like Western dominance over a contested space nor male dominance over a female body, as Titian and von Aachen's works convey and as Pauw suggests. The fact that she is in pursuit of Syracusan Dromio shows that Nell is not willing to play by "the rules of male power politics." Although Nell's description is hardly complimentary, it shows an entirely othered figure, Eastern and female, threatening and harassing a Western male, the opposite of what takes place in *Religion Succored by Spain* and *The Battle of Sisak*. On a macro level, the description illustrates the fear of the East subsuming and polluting all the countries of Western Europe. After all, the Ottoman Empire was a real threat to European powers. Suleiman the Magnificent ruled from 1520-1566 and was in control of not only the Middle East and Northern Africa, but also southeast Europe and the Mediterranean (Strobel). Scholars have noted that many of Nell's ailments sound like she is suffering from venereal disease.[11] Ireland is located "In her buttocks," Scotland in "the palm of her hand," France is in her hair, and England is located on her chin "by the salt rheum," next to a stream of either mucous or tears. Finally, Spain, which during Shakespeare's time was arguably the most infiltrated by Turkish forces, is on and in her nose, which is covered with pimples and pustules that Dromio calls "rubies, carbuncles, and sapphires" (3.2.119-120). Taken together, the historical threat of Turkish dominance in the Mediterranean coupled with Nell's overtures and implied venereal disease within the text, and Syracusan Dromio's description of her shows Renaissance anxieties about Eastern liminality and its polluting effects on Western Europe. As Europe is projected all over Nell's body, one gets the sense of an Eastern invasion and infiltration, or a Europe drowning in foreign pollution, rather than Western countries leaving marks of dominance on an Eastern body. If infected with Nell's disease, these European countries could effectively "turn Turk."

Syracusan Dromio's description of Nell is more than a comedic episode making fun of a large, promiscuous woman. It is not a coincidence that the majority of body parts mentioned by Dromio are themselves liminal and paradoxically provide both boundaries and

11 See Jonathan Gil Harris's "Syphilis and Trade: Thomas Starkey, Thomas Smith, *The Comedy of Errors*" in *Sick Economies: Drama, Mercantilism, and Disease in Shakespeare's England* (40-42). Harris suggests that Nell's "communicable disorder resulting from transactions between nations" is "integral to the play's presentation of syphilis" (40).

passageways between the inside and outside of the body. In this way, viewing Nell as an Eastern presence invading and infecting Europe illustrates the liminality of Turkey, Ephesus, and the Mediterranean Sea. Turkey sits in an in-between space, decidedly Eastern and yet close enough that it can reach, influence, and pollute Europe. A commonly held and heavily trafficked sea serves as both a buffer zone and a passageway. If Nell could at any time have been described as merely a Turkish kitchen maid, Syracusan Dromio's depiction of her shows that she can no longer be dismissed that easily. In the same way, the Ottoman Empire emanated from Turkey and took control over large swaths of the Mediterranean Sea before chipping away at parts of Europe. The Ottomans were associated with Turkey but could not be contained there. Nell's own border and boundary ambiguity mirror the region she comes from, not only in the ancient world that *Errors* supposedly takes place in, but in Shakespeare's time as well.

If Nell and Syracusan Dromio's interaction is looked at as a parallel to Luciana and Syracusan Antipholus' in 3.2.1-70, then we have a full picture of the dangers of the Mediterranean region. Nell threatens to overpower Dromio with her sexual forwardness, hinting at the real-life contemporary struggles over land, trade, and influence between Europeans and Ottomans in the region. Luciana lacks Nell's overt and aggressive sexuality, but her allure, her refusal to engage with Antipholus, and her almost bewitching charm draw the Syracusan twin away from his mission to reunite with his family and his desire to get back home. Linda McJannet asserts, "the relatively benign views of the East in these plays [*The Comedy of Errors* and *Pericles*] suggest a paradoxical relation between humanist veneration for ancient Greek culture and Christian hostility to the Muslim Turks" (McJanet 87). In a point of contrast, I do not see the views of the East in *Errors* as particularly benign. With its witchcraft, mountebanks, harsh laws against foreigners, pirates, and tempestuous sea, Ephesus and the Eastern Mediterranean are about as threatening as can be in a comedy. The second part of McJanet's statement, however, highlights the difference in treatment between Luciana's characterization as the sea and Nell's characterization as a contaminating force threating to take over Europe. Both the sea and Turkey itself are dangerous, as we can glean from their applications to two dangerous women. Yet Luciana's characterization in terms of the Odyssean sea show a sort of veneration of her within the text and a veneration of Homer without; Luciana is dangerous, magical, and forbidden, but still beautiful and intriguing. On the other hand, Nell, representing Turkey, shows

hostility and even fear of the region and the people who inhabit it. Together Luciana and Nell illustrate the reputation for the practical reality of magic in Ephesus that confuses the visiting Syracusans, causes mistakes in identity, and keeps Egeon's family separated, even while they all in such close proximity to one another.

Conclusion

As with carnival, the reversals of power in *Errors* last only for a prescribed time. At the end of the play, order is restored, and power is placed gently back into the hands of the palace, church, and family. More than a conventional Christian ending on par with the anticipated weddings at which so many Shakespearian comedies conclude, the abbey and Aemilia's new role as abbess represent the vow that all cloistered religious take—stability of place and personal identity, which the Antipholi, Dromios, and Egeon have lacked since the family's separation. The abbey where the family reunites acts as a tranquil, stable antidote to the chaos caused by the sea and city. Sequestered in the abbey and thus far removed from volatility, Aemilia appears, sets the world right side up, and provides refuge and clarity not only for the Syracusans fleeing Ephesian captivity, but for everyone threatened with permanent displacement caused by the play's trickster geographies.

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The American Road Trip: A Battle for Relevance and Sacrifice in Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*

by Julie Breeden

America is a vast, diverse landscape peopled by a vastly diverse group of residents. Fixing an identity to America, or defining what it means to be an American is nearly an impossible task. In *American Gods*, Neil Gaiman explores how the landscape, mythology, and people of America collide to form "a type national identity." Newly released from prison Shadow Moon, the protagonist, sets out on a quest across the country with a washed up god of Norse mythology who goes by "Wednesday." As Shadow discovers his identity, so too is the identity of America revealed. Gaiman develops a story of gods, brought to America and representing the cultures of the immigrants who brought them and now waning in relevance. These immigrant gods are battling with the new gods of this new world for power and place. As Wednesday seeks to rally these disparate old gods to do battle with the new gods, he and Shadow traverse the heartland of America and explore the national identity in small towns and at roadside attractions. Through this overarching travel narrative, an exploration of the text shows America to be a unique identity born of inherited values that are discarded in favor of new aspirations developed in a landscape that shapes our spirituality and personal lives.

American Gods uses old world gods to show that our national identity is formed by people from many places who are leaving behind their places of origin and assimilating to life in America. Olesen claims that the motto of the United States, 'E Pluribus Unum,' is reliant on "Americans abandoning the traditional delineations of the 'Old World' ethnicity and becoming something new and ambiguous in the 'New World'" (Olesen 117). This process is the interplay between new inhabitants and the American identity. Immigrants bring with them their old-world customs, ethnicity, and identity. Over time these comfortable ways are discarded in favor of the ever-evolving American mores either through assimilation to the new world, or the new world's incorporation of immigrant ways into a dynamic American ideal. This new version of America takes on an updated identity of its own as the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts, and comfortable old ways, personified as old gods are discarded.

The inhabitants of America are all from someplace else in Gaiman's novel with even the indigenous and native people depicted as crossing the Bering Strait in 14,000 BC to arrive in the new world. These native people brought with them the god Nunyunnini, "who was the skull of a mammoth, and the hide of a mammoth fashioned into a rough cloak" (Gaiman 366). After eating the "*pungh* mushrooms," and stepping into the skull and cloak of the god, Nunyunnini would speak to them. As years went on, and these peoples spread across the land. They became separate tribes, and "soon Nunyunnini was entirely forgot" (Gaiman 371). This short vignette represents a model story of all the immigrants to America. They arrived in a strange new place and clung to their old gods. Eventually as generations passed and people spread across the land their old gods were forgotten.

Gaiman focuses on the gods and the beliefs they represent. According to Olesen, Gaiman "does not address the American assimilation of immigrants in terms of ethnic assimilation, but in the more nebulous and intriguing context of religious and mythological assimilation" (Olesen 119). Olesen therefore believes the novel's focus is a portrayal of gods as representations of beliefs capable of being forgotten and therefore left behind. Americans are assimilating to the new world in an abstract philosophical way. However, ethnic assimilation is an obvious challenge of this process as Shadow's ethnic identity is questioned throughout the novel. First by a prison guard, "And what are you? A [s**c]? A [gy**y]?" "Not that I know of, sir. Maybe." "Maybe you got [n****r] blood in you. You got [n****r] blood in you, Shadow?" and Shadow replies "Could be, sir" (Gaiman 11). Even Shadow is unclear about his ethnic background as are many Americans. Shadow's quest with Wednesday to rally the old gods in opposition to the new gods is also about belief and relevance. The old gods were not only forgotten, but replaced by new gods.

> There are new gods growing in America, clinging to growing knots of belief: gods of credit-card and freeway, of internet and telephone, of radio and hospital and television, gods of plastic and of beeper and of neon. Proud gods, fat and foolish creatures, puffed up with their own newness and importance. (Gaiman 123)

The old gods are fighting for survival against new gods that are more relevant to the current American experience. Within that quest for survival Shadow will also discover the roots of his identity, showing that both religious and ethnic origins as well as contemporary

values shape American identity. All these things are foundational to shaping America, and as Olesen states, "The political conclusion to draw from the narrative is that the sharp edges of Old World religions and mythologies need to be smoothed away in order for individuals to be able to stand safely next to one another as Americans" (123). This reinforces the idea, E Pluribus Unim, out of many, one. Out of the many ideologies, eventually one will be created and this is necessary to stand together as one nation. Also necessary to bring people together, is a shared experience and location as depicted in the roadside attractions in the novel.

Roadside attractions are part of America and Gaiman uses them in *American Gods* to create places with significant meaning shared across cultures and tied to the American landscape. As Wednesday and Shadow pass a signpost for Mt. Rushmore, Wednesday comments, "'Now that,' he said, 'is a holy place'" (Gaiman 299). Mt. Rushmore is a national monument, and a roadside attraction, but a "holy place?" Shadow responds that, "I know it used to be sacred to the Indians" and Wednesday replies, "That's the American Way—they need to give people an excuse to come and worship. These days, people can't just go and see a mountain" (Gaiman 299). The American way is to take places that are sacred and create a seemingly secular attraction in that location. The mountain is already a holy place, but it is a holy place to Native Americans. By transforming this already sacred place into a national monument it becomes something of significance to all people, or at least more people. It becomes a sacred place for all Americans. Roadside attractions in the novel are significant places that are transformed into spaces to create a shared experience among people from different backgrounds. They are locations now linked to national identity.

Gaiman further complicates this idea of roadside attractions becoming a place of identity when the gods retreat to the center of the country to declare a truce in their war and collect the body of the recently killed Wednesday. Since roadside attractions create a tie to the new god of money for a region, local residents calculated the center of the country and attempted to create a new roadside attraction. This conscious attempt to make money is at its core an unconscious act of devotion to the new god of money. Surely the center of this vast nation would embody the real America and people would come to experience it. As it turned out, the center of the country was located on a pig farm and not even the construction of a hotel and church could make it appealing to tourists in search of an authentic American

experience. It was, however, useful to the gods. "We are at the center of this place: a land that has no time for gods, and here at the center it has less time for us than anywhere. It's a no-man's land, a place of truce, and we observe our truces here" (Gaiman 398). This irrelevant roadside attraction is tied to the gods in its lack of meaning. There was nothing of inherent devotional value there; hence, nothing built upon this place could create an outward symbol of shared meaning to draw the devoted and the merely curious alike. An uninteresting roadside attraction also brings no revenue and as such does not cultivate itself as appealing to the new gods of consumerism. Therefore, as the old gods begin to lose their value and their meaning, they, too, are able to utilize that location. It is a no-man's land. The new gods have no power because it is not a consumer-driven place. It is devoid of retail opportunities. The old gods have no power there because there is nothing sacred attached to the location. It's neutral ground. They are useless gods taking a break from a useless war in a useless place.

The road trip structure of the story and its progression reinforces the idea that Americans draw their national identity not only from their place of origin or their current homes, but also from a collection of places they have been or created. Each individual American's identity contains the complexity of the larger abstract idea of an American identity. "Shadow seems to be on track to finding his identity: surely somewhere in the many small towns, big cities, and roadside attractions that he is about to visit, he will find a place to which he feels he belongs" (Carroll 319). Carroll's description of Shadow follows the arch of a protagonist who searches for his place in the world. Shadow and his search for his place reflects a broader search for the spiritual heart of America. His story begins with his release from prison and his journey home to Eagle Point, Indiana. However, that is not his home. "I didn't really ever have a life here. I was never in one place too long as a kid, and I didn't get here until I was in my twenties. So this town is Laura's" (Gaiman 66). Shadow mirrors the immigrant experience. He is from someplace he is not really from and doesn't feel tied to. He knows that it is Laura's place and that is why he incorporated it into his place, but without her he is untethered. His home does not exist in this location. Therefore, he feels free to take up with Wednesday and explore the country.

However, when Shadow develops his own identity and discovers the identity of America, the old gods become less important and die out on their own. It is this dynamic movement forward is central to the American experience. Shadow discovers it in his visits along the

way as Wednesday is trying to rally the old gods who know all too well the futility of trying to maintain the old ways. In Cairo, Il., Shadow meets Ibis and Jacquel, ancient Egyptian gods practicing their skills in embalming working in a funeral home. Jacquel tells him, "Fighting isn't going to change a damn thing." The fight for relevance is already over and the effort to stem the tide is futile. "America just didn't care that we arrived. So we get bought out, or we press on, or we hit the road" (Gaiman 185). Jacquel is talking directly about selling the funeral home, but the idea of selling-out and giving-in to the machine of American culture's new god of money is the spiritual conundrum facing all immigrants represented by the gods. How much of the old ways can be held when faced with the wave of newness that is the constant reinvention of America? America requires that we "press on" moving forward in the common direction or "hit the road" and leave it all behind which isn't really a viable option.

This reality of capitulation to the new gods and giving up the fight is further reinforced by Wednesday and Shadow's visit with Whiskey Jack and Apple Johnny. Jack explains to Wednesday that the old gods will lose and have already lost, "Like the white man and my people. They won, and when they lost, they made treaties. Then they broke the treaties" (Gaiman 309). Even a win against the forces of change can never be a win because change happens anyway, win, or lose. It simply isn't worth the fight. There is a glimmer of hope in the idea of playing the long game and remaining in place. Wednesday, Shadow, and Johnny Chapman accept a ride from a woman when they leave Whiskey Jack and go to pick up a car. She complains about the condition of the roads and tells them that the white population in the badlands is waning. "How you going to keep them down on the farm, after they seen the world on their television screens?" she asks, speculating that they are moving to big cities and "maybe if we wait. . . we can take the whole of the middle back without a fight" (Gaiman 314). The white population conquered the natives and imposed their ways, but now converted by the new god of media, they leave the badlands for the cities of "New York and Miami and L.A." The native population is left on the reservation and the surrounding areas are discarded by yet another wave of reinvention and change. This creates a cynical hope that if values are held long enough to remain after assault from the new gods they can remain in place and perhaps be reclaimed but this is unlikely.

If Shadow Moon is fully an American, he is the product not only of his ethnicity, but also the places he has been, and the

experiences that he has had. What, then, defines this identity in terms of values? The premise of Gaiman's novel is that over time Americans discard their old gods, their old values, in exchange for new gods that represent new American values. However, it isn't that simple. Gaiman also forces readers to wrestle with a question even larger than "What do we value?" He asks, "What are we willing to sacrifice for those values?" Gaiman explores American's willingness to sacrifice others by putting Shadow in the idyllic town of Lakeside, WI. Shadow arrives there on a cold winter's night and is welcomed first by old-timer Hinzelmann and then by Sheriff Chad Mulligan. They save him from the cold, and the sheriff chauffeurs him around the quaint town. Mulligan introduces Shadow to a diner, grocery store, library and to neighboring local residents, all welcoming and friendly. Shadow even learns from Hinzelmann that there is a local charity fundraiser where residents place bets on when an old klunker will fall through the ice of a frozen lake. Lakeside seems almost too good to be true. Lakeside is fictional, "yet readers of this fantasy novel want Lakeside to exist" (La Jeunesse 45). So much so, in fact, that online searches for Lakeside reveal several pages where people speculate on where it might be and if they have found it. Readers are literally searching for Lakeside. This supports Carroll's belief that there is a collectively held abstract concept of the "real America" that is an ideal small town where life is somehow better. The people are nicer and the living is pleasant. Americans want this to be true, and they are searching for it. Gaiman places this mythic utopia in Wisconsin. Wisconsin, America's dairy land, symbolizes a purity of life, pure as the nutritious richness of milk. This small town, on the shore of a crystal lake exists in the heart of flyover country, a part of the nation left behind. The idea that people are searching for Lakeside is disturbing. If the people searching are readers of *American Gods*, then do they not realize that this fantasy ideal is built on a morally unacceptable sacrifice of children to the old god Hinzelmann? Gaiman is showing readers the human cost of the ideal "real American" life, but, yet they still aspire to the corrupt fantasy.

Gaiman foreshadows the coming sacrifice by using the idea of sacrifice in small ways throughout *American Gods*. Early in the book in "Somewhere in America," an aspiring producer sacrifices himself for pleasure in worship of Bilquis, the Queen of Sheba, who has begun prostituting herself as her old-god relevance has declined (Gaiman 28). Bilquis' worshiper seems to be an unwitting victim but nonetheless he loses his life while sexually exploiting her and she is subsequently

strengthened. The idea of sacrifice is also explicitly illustrated during Shadow's first meeting with the goddess of Media. She appears to him in the form of Lucy Ricardo on an old "I Love Lucy" rerun he is watching to kill time in a hotel room. Lucy looks out from the television screen and addresses Shadow directly. "Shadow? We need to talk" (Gaiman 155). Shadow is taken aback and asks the obvious question, "who are you?" Media describes herself as "the TV" and as "the little shrine the family gathers to adore" and says "The TV's the altar. I'm what people are sacrificing to" (Gaiman 155). When Shadow asks what they sacrifice she responds by saying, "Their time, mostly. Sometimes each other" (Gaiman 155). These two incidents bring the idea of human sacrifice into the book. The producer's self-sacrifice is an almost fitting end for a seemingly rich man looking for a cheap thrill. Media's description of herself as the "little shrine" seems a bit too close to home. Readers recognize themselves and their families in the idea that they "gather to adore" the television. Gaiman's critique forces readers to recognize the idea that Americans sacrifice their time and their relationships with loved ones to the goddess of the television. When they fully engage with the television they disconnect from important humans in their lives. The passive worship of Media is a figurative human sacrifice.

In these two cases with both Bilquis and Media, the sacrificial lambs are willing participants in their undoing. In Hinzelmann's Lakeside, however, sacrifices are mysterious killings of children. But, are the killings really that mysterious? Sophie's frustration with life in Lakeside and the loss of her friend seem to suggest that the town passively approves of its annual sacrifice. "I'm leaving this fucking town . . . Alison's gone. Sandy Olsen went last year. Jo Ming the year before that. What if it's me next year?" (Gaiman 283). Sophie's friend Alison is gone, as is Sandy, and Jo Ming. Sophie is suggesting that she will leave town now rather than being the next to mysteriously disappear in the annual sacrifice. "What if it's me next year," asks Sophie, showing that she and consequently the rest of the town, know that each year a singular child disappears. She is considering leaving her home to prevent her own disappearance and assumed death. The entire population is aware that they are giving tacit approval to this sacrifice of one of their children but have a silent pact not to mention it.

The parallels between Lakeside's annual sacrifice and the annual sacrifice in the village from Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery," cannot be ignored. "The Lottery" begins on a sunny June day in a small town amid an atmosphere akin to a summer celebration. The

annual lottery is an ingrained part of small-town life despite the fact that "much of the ritual had been forgotten or discarded" (Jackson 2). The box from which lots are drawn is old and haggard and ritual singing no longer occurs. This idea of the ritualistic nature of the sacrifice is replicated in Lakeside's annual raffle for charity that sends a klunker into the icy depths of the lake in the name of a children's hospital. Both works also place their ritual sacrifice at specific times of the year. Jackson's lottery happens on a very specific date, June 27. Just at the arrival of summer and the end of the school year, the town assembles to kill one of its own. Conversely, Lakeside's death takes place in the midst of a frozen winter, but the evidence of the gruesome event disappears as the lake-ice thaws in the coming of spring. Both events usher in a new season of warmth and growth. The towns dispense with the nasty necessities of death to make way for a life of growth and prosperity. These killings are carried out to ensure the continuance of the utopian prosperity of both communities. Old Man Warner represents the voice of tradition in "The Lottery." When faced with the idea that other nearby towns have given up the lottery he snorts, "Pack of fools," and suggests that soon the young folks will, "be wanting to go back to living in caves" (Jackson 6). Through him Jackson shows the belief that the town's very success and civilization depends on the sacrifice of the lottery. "Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon" (Jackson 6) he says. This sentence seems harmless at the time he speaks it, but as readers learn that the lottery is really a violent ritualistic stoning of a community member, it becomes a chilling awakening to the extremes to which people will go to ensure their way of life. "Violence, even sacred violence, can be the tie that binds and defines the community" (Doty 380). Both towns are built on a sense of community that the sacrifice brings. Jackson's town comes together each year to carry out the act, and Gaiman's Lakeside cloaks the act in a children's charity. However, the underlying motivation for this brutal killing, economic prosperity, is at the heart of "The Lottery" and of Lakeside's child sacrifice. In discussing the pitiful state of nearby towns that exist only for limited tourist money, or dry-up when manufacturing leaves, Callie Knopf tells Shadow, "what I'm saying is Lakeside's lucky. We've got a little of everything here—farm, light industry, tourism, crafts. Good schools" (Gaiman 281). Lakeside's sacrifice ensures a well-rounded community founded in various sources of economic prosperity. The people of Lakeside seem to have long forgotten the reason for their sacrifice. In fact, they seem able to deny that they even aware of it; despite the fact that Shadow

notices an emptiness to Callie's words. But like Old Man Warner, Hinzelmann gives voice to the transactional nature of the action, "I gave them a lake, and I gave them prosperity…" "And all it cost them was one child every winter" (Gaiman 501). The town's prosperity, like Hinzelmann's existence, was conditioned on the annual sacrifice of one of its members. As long as the community doesn't talk too overtly about it, they seem to be willing to go along and make the exchange.

Jackson's and Gaiman's stories of small-town utopias, somehow representative of what Carroll refers to as the real America, force readers to consider what and who they sacrifice to the continuance of the American lifestyle. Will they sacrifice a loved one? Or maybe someone else's loved one? Or maybe as Media suggests, their precious time? (Gaiman 155) Both authors ask these questions by creating idyllic small towns built on gruesome truths. When faced with these moral questions, only the most deceitful reader could leave these texts feeling free of the complicit guilt they place on us all.

Ursula Le Guin adds nuance to this moral question of sacrifice in her short story "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas." Le Guin's utopia, Omelas, is directly described as a dream of perfection. Set, like "The Lottery," on a beautiful day during a festival of summer, "Omelas sounds in my worlds like a city in a fairy tale," (Le Guin 740) it is perfection. It is town full of happiness and joy, and yet, the people "were not simple folk" (Le Guin 740). It is the American ideal, a sophisticated town full of happiness and joy and lacking one interesting quality. "One thing I know there is none of in Omelas is guilt" (Le Guin 741) The people of Omelas live a life of happiness free from guilt. That is a dream that must be too good to be true. After Le Guin draws readers in with the description of perfection she explains that the truth of the town is that in the basement of a beautiful building is a caged child. This scapegoated child being is kept in the dark with barely enough food to survive and lives without love or affection. The town's people, "all know it has to be there" (Le Guin 741). The prosperity, the joy, and the happiness of the town are built of the scapegoating of the child. "The terms are strict and absolute" (Le Guin 741) and the town's people, like the citizens of Lakeside and the small town in Jackson's "The Lottery," find a way to accept the terms and maintain the sacrifice. One child is kept caged in appalling conditions in exchange for happiness and joy among the citizenry. Le Guin extends the idea introduced in "The Lottery" some 25 years earlier by focusing not on the people who live in Omelas and maintain such an atrocity, but by considering the ones who walk

away. The final paragraph shifts to the adolescents who first go to see the child and weep for days or the older people who fall silent for a few days then leave. They walk out of town, never look back, and never return. Initially, this ending seems to give readers some moral cover. The idea that some people in the town choose not to be party to such actions is a relief. However, the ones who walk away from Omelas also do nothing to stop the atrocity. They simply turn their back on it. Le Guin speaks to the readers who tell themselves, after reading "The Lottery," that they would never do such a thing; they would never be party to a gruesome killing. Le Guin asks, would you stop it, or just walk away from it? The truth is that while most people will not actively participate in such a heinous act, most will also not stop one.

Shadow Moon is the one moral man who will return and put an end to the practice of sacrifice that most will tacitly accept. After Shadow's resurrection, he returns to Lakeside to remove the stain of guilt that sits on the town's prosperity. He does not participate in the sacrifice as in "The Lottery," nor does he simply walk away from Lakeside's practice of ritual sacrifice and never look back like "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas." He takes the moral action of returning to Lakeside to expose the killings and free the town to be whatever it will become without Hinzelmann's godly interference. Shadow walks onto the ice to discover Alison's body hidden in the trunk of the klunker just as the ice breaks. He is submerged into the depths of the icy lake of Hinzelmann's creation only to emerge reborn as the town's savior who ends Hinzelmann's murderous reign and ensures the future safety of Lakeside's children.

American Gods by Neil Gaiman is more than a mystical fantasy road trip into the American heartland. It is a biting critique of what it means to be American and how one becomes an American. Through the old gods we witness the process of assimilation and the building of community. Immigrants come to the new world and bring with them their old gods and their old customs and cultures. These gods and practices are abandoned over time in favor of a new amalgam of various cultures that become the American culture. The old gods become irrelevant in the face of the new American landscape and travel across the vast country exposes citizens to new ideas and ways of living that they adopt and adapt. Filling the void formed by the loss of the old gods, new American gods rush in and fight for a place in the hearts of Americans. Gods of money, and credit cards fight with the gods of media and technology for status in the lives of Americans.

Even as they do, they replace gods of automobiles and manufacturing. Gaiman shows this constant rotation of gods in a cycle of relevance and replacement as a defining aspect of American culture. He asks what is it that Americans value and looks not only at the gods we worship, but at the things we are willing to sacrifice to those gods. This examination is a chilling one. Apparently, maintenance of the American way requires the sacrifice of our time and attention, our fellow man, our community members, and even our children. These sacrifices can be small and unnoticeable or devastatingly horrific and substantial. Through the character of Shadow Moon, Gaiman provides readers with a model for navigating a bleak and corrupt landscape. Shadow's version of an American is an aspirational one. His quest begins in a tragedy and a lack of true identity. The challenges of his journey help him to define himself and his values. He ultimately actualizes in his righteous act of ending the selfish sacrifice in service of prosperity. Shadow's actions challenge Americans to value their fellow Americans more than they value their freedom, security, and prosperity.

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Pedagogy

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On Publishing a Campus Literary Journal

by Jim Coby & Saul Lemerond

Abstract

In this article, we discuss our experiences as the facilitators of the creative journals at each of our Indiana institutions of higher learning, Hanover College, a private liberal arts college, and Indiana University Kokomo, a public regional campus. Student-run undergraduate journals provide outlets for creative expression for students across a range of disciplines as well as provide a host of practical learning opportunities, yet relatively little information exists for faculty helming these projects. Our goal is to provide readers with insights from our experiences running our respective journals.

Introduction

In his 1943 poem, "Madam's Calling Cards," Langston Hughes writes of his titular character approaching a shopkeeper to discuss printing services. Madam explains, "I told the man/ I wasn't no mint,/ But I hankered to see/ My name in print" (164). For Madam, validation exists in seeing one's name on the printed page by signaling to the world the author's significance. Such a belief animated Madam's desire for calling cards, and such a desire animates many of creative writers' ambitions. True for seasoned writers and novices alike, having a forum for publication and seeing a work through to the point of publication can be extremely gratifying. We're fortunate that the institutions at which we work—Hanover College and Indiana University Kokomo—each support their students this opportunity by publishing annual journals of creative and academic works.

At each of these universities, we serve as the faculty advisors to the journals. Jim, at Indiana University Kokomo, is Editor-in-Chief of *Field: A Journal of Arts and Sciences*, while Saul, at Hanover College, facilitates *Kennings*. Our relationship dates to graduate school, and in our discussions about the trajectories of our lives and careers, we discovered that each of us had been given the reins of our school's respective literary journals.With that came significant freedom and

pressure, as we quickly discovered that there is little in the way of practicable, actionable advice or discussion online or in print about what the process of running an undergraduate literary journal entails. While there are countless teaching guides, pedagogical journals, and workshops that concern themselves with classroom instructional ideas, few are available for our aims. A notable exception to this statement is Audrey Colombe's *Creating an Undergraduate Literary Journal: A Production Guide for Students and Faculty*; this guide, however, has only been available since February of 2022, which signals to us how relatively little has been written about this subject, in addition to how substantial the potential readership for information is.

Our ambitions in this essay are not quite as capacious as Colombe's. Instead, we hope that any faculty member potentially considering taking the lead of their campus's journal finds some helpful and relatable advice here in our recountings of our experiences. Additionally, we hope students who may be considering serving on a creative writing journal board find points of interest in our piece. This essay begins with brief accounts of our experiences over the past few years. Before sharing these accounts, however, we've combined our knowledge to devise a brief set of what we believe to be best practices concerning student expectations and responsibilities. We then conclude our essay with a brief discussion about where we foresee literary journals—individually, and as a large publishing unit - heading in the near future.

Lessons Learned and Best Practices

What sits below is by no means exhaustive. Certainly anyone desiring to take on the brunt of work starting and maintaining a literary journal should seek supplemental advice from additional print sources and from fellow faculty who have also participated in these sorts of activities. Nonetheless, we believe that what we've discovered in our experiences will provide valuable insight for those embarking on similar missions.

- Reach out to the community and make your journal not just an integral part of the campus ecosystem, but the greater social landscape or your service area.
- Whenever possible, maintain some degree of institutional knowledge. At best, have students serve in Review Board roles

one year and then leadership roles the next. At worst, keep detailed notes from previous year's meetings and make sure that interns have access to these.

- Have students take the lead on both the design and theme of the journal. Within reason, don't second-guess their artistic abilities.
- Foster cross-campus and interdisciplinary dialogues with your journal. Whenever possible, populate Review Boards with students from disciplines outside of the humanities and fine arts.
- Prepare for failures. Putting together a journal is a difficult process, and things willw go wrong along the way. And that's okay. Focus on the successes and a quality final product.
- Reach out to other departments and foster interdepartmental collaboration.
- Explore other, especially digital, avenues of publication, (e.g. podcasts, broadcasts, and in person performances).

Jim's Narrative

I began my career teaching American literature at Indiana University Kokomo during the spring semester of 2020. Talk about timing, huh? Everything began auspiciously enough: the students were clever and responsive, resources—both for faculty and students—abounded, and my supervisors encouraged me in my teaching and research pursuits. What was new, however, was that I would be assuming the role of Editor-in-Chief, and running the attendant internship, for our campus's literary journal, *Field: A Journal of Arts and Sciences*, beginning in the fall semester. I was attending weekly meetings with the journal's interim Editor-in-Chief and his remarkable group of interns, and then came the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic. I won't belabor the point. But, suffice it to say, my window of observation was unfortunately brief, and I went into the fall 2020 semester somewhat flying by the seat of my pants. My objective over the rest of my narrative is to highlight a few of the lessons that I learned in an effort to both prepare other faculty members who might one day assume similar roles, and also to highlight the intense affective labor in which faculty members running internships participate.

Structure of the Internship

Before exploring the outcomes of the internship, it's likely useful to take a step back and understand broadly how I structure the course. On the Executive Board are a Managing Editor who is responsible for outreach and event planning (in addition to standard responsibilities such as soliciting submissions, serving on Review Boards, and attending weekly meetings), the Associate & Copy Editor, who takes the helm proofing submissions and responding to contributors, and the Art Director, who chooses the typeface for and designs the general structure of the journal. Beyond this, I have students serving in the positions of Review Board Team Leaders. Review Board Teams Leaders cover the following areas: Visual Art and Media, Prose, Poetry and Music, Research and Film.[1] Each of the Review Board Team Leaders holds the responsibility of assembling a Review Board consisting of at least three total members, designating where and how often their Review Boards will meet, and designing a rubric by which their Members will assess their submissions. These Members tend to be our most diverse group, as they are recruited primarily through word-of-mouth and campus interactions. As a result, we have a wide array of disciplines and majors represented, which better allows us to examine the quality and rigor of research from outside of our own specific disciplines.

Lessons Learned

One of the first things I learned over the course of running this internship is just how enterprising and ambitious the participating students are. Certainly, the students enrolled in this internship have been the cream of the crop, and yet I initially was reluctant to cede much of my authority to them. For example, early in our semesters we create several calls for submissions for our campus body. As Peter Elliott rightly suggests, the way to make a campus literary journal as inclusive and well-rounded as possible is to "advertise to and invite the entire study body for submissions" (39). The calls include posters that will be hung throughout campus, a lengthy, detailed CFP that will be distributed through email, and a short, punchy call that will

1 One of my major goals with *Field* was to widen the scope of potential submissions. In addition to visual art, poetry, prose, and research, we also accept comix, videography, music, podcast, and spoken word submissions. We house these contributions on our YouTube channel and provide a QR code in our printed volume to help interest parties access this material.

appear on social media. Given that we needed three sets of copy, I expected that my interns would find composing different versions of the same basic call several times over to be tedious and unnecessary. The truth of the matter could not have been more different. Far from finding the assignment tedious, they relished the experience. Sure, there were some reservations and nerves ("You mean my writing will be read by the *entire* student body?"), but those quickly fell to the side as my interns focused on the most efficient and compelling ways of structuring their calls.

Furthermore, I found that students actively desired to get absolutely everything they could out of the internship. Certain responsibilities—soliciting submissions, proofreading accepted materials, collating and arranging the journal in an aesthetically pleasing format—came with the territory, and I anticipated students being excited to take part in these. What surprised me was their interest in the minutiae of the project. For example, I share budget information with my students, but I did not suspect students would take such a vested interest in ensuring that we were receiving the best printing rates in the state. Similar surprises took place throughout the semester. There's a Student Life Expo? Let's greet students! We need to distribute copies of older volumes? Let's get involved with Kokomo's First Friday events! We've just released our latest volume? Let's plan a party! This is all to say that while it would be unwise to remain totally "hands-off" during the semester, you should be willing to provide students with as much responsibility as they desire to take on.

On Assessment

Despite how it might appear to outside observers given the lack of "traditional" class elements (for example, my interns and I don't utilize classrooms, preferring coffee shops, campus lounges, and my office as our meeting spaces), this internship is, indeed, a class. It's a rigorous one, too. Still, given that the objectives of this internship so differ from what I would generally aim toward in one of my composition or literature courses, I found myself struggling initially with how to treat grades in this class. To that end, I've been thinking quite a bit lately about "ungrading."

Traditional methods of grading—assigning numerical or letter grades—have fallen out of vogue in the past several years, as "they derive from the notion that there is a single, fixed amount of intelligence—fixed mindset—and that every individual can be arrayed against all

others in an objective distribution" (Blum 7). Inherent to such ideas are "racist, classist, sexist, ableist, and more" assumptions (Blum 7). Indeed, it's been my experience that attempting to judge the work of, for example, one of my interns who regularly leads critiquing sessions with their Poetry Review Board team members against, say, an intern who's responsible for graphic design and page formatting to be frustrating at best, and maddening at worst. Although each student is an intern in the same class, their micro objectives diverge in such ways as to be impossible to compare. Would it be fair for me to assign, I don't know, a 96/100 to the graphic design student because I don't like a chosen typeface, even though they completed their work? Or should I award a B to the Poetry Review Board team leader because they went off-script in one of their meetings? That seems unfair to me.

Jesse Stommel writes that "Grades are not a good incentive. They incentivize the wrong stuff: the product over the process, what the teacher thinks over what the student thinks" (28). I agree with Stommel. And so I make it clear to my interns early in our time together that, while I will, per University policy, be awarding them a grade at the conclusion of our time together, those grades should not be their focus. The focus should be on the product. Solicit submissions. Spread the word about the journal. Review and assess to find the strongest works. Reach out to printers to determine costs. Plan events to share our journal with the community. These are our objectives; these are the goals to work toward. If they're completed, if at the end of our academic year we have a print journal that we can hold in our hands, flip through, and, most significantly, be proud of, then everyone is earning a high grade.

Of course, even if students don't *like* grades, they generally *want* grades; they're accustomed to having milestones throughout the course to let them know whether or not they're succeeding. I certainly don't want to create undue stress on what is surely one of the most stressed-out generations of college students.[2] And so, I make it clear early in the semester that there will be checkpoints along the way to help students assess their progress. For example, each week I ask that students submit a roughly 250 word document in which they detail their work performed during the week. Additionally, at the end of

2 The American College Health Association found in 2021 that neraly half of college students reported experiencing "moderate or severe psychological stress" and over half harboring feelings of loneliness: https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/college-students-stress-levels-are-bubbling-over-heres-why-and-how-schools-can-help#:~:text=Judy%2C%20a%20study%20this%20year,in%20four%20had%20considered%20suicide.

the academic year I ask that students write a letter to their successor describing the various successes and struggles we encountered and highlighting the "things they wish they would have known" going into the internship. For each of these assignments I assign students a grade of complete or incomplete. I suppose I could grade them for their formatting and that I could scrutinize their grammar, but if these students are being trusted with the production of a literary journal, shouldn't they be trusted to author their own weekly reports? Still, the little green checkmark in our Canvas gradebook serves as a signal to students that they're completing the work satisfactorily, and that we're actively moving toward a product about which we can all be proud.

Saul's Narrative

Developing a Practicum

Part of my responsibilities at Hanover College, a small liberal arts college located in Southern Indiana, is as the faculty advisor to our student-run literary magazine, *Kennings Literary and Arts Journal*. Hanover holds the distinction of being the oldest college in the state, and its literary magazine has been published since 1941. When I arrived in 2018, its production process was as follows: Each year the students on staff would solicit submissions from themselves and their friends. They would read the submissions and then vote yes or no on them. The work would be collected in a Word .doc file, printed, stapled, and distributed to *Kennings* staff and the staff's close friends. This is the way it has been done for the past eighty or so years, and there is nothing wrong with this. That the students at Hanover had been coming together to produce a magazine of what is mostly their work and the work of their close friends is not only common, but a time-honored tradition in the history of zine publishing at colleges and in plenty of communities outside of academia. However, making a zine with friends and creating a literary journal are two vastly different projects requiring vastly different sorts of labor, which leads to vastly different learning outcomes. Editing a literary journal is a multimodal learning activity. The value of such activities is something I've written about in the past in *The Journal of Creative Writing Studies*. As such, I decided to add a practicum in publishing to the curriculum and go about the business of teaching Hanover's students how to professionalize its literary journal.

When preparing to design the curriculum for the practicum, I sat down and made a list of everything necessary to produce a semi-professional undergraduate literary journal. We needed a call for submissions, a website, money to print the journal, someone qualified to be layout editor. We needed a system for reviewing large numbers of submissions, and we needed a way to distribute as many journals to as many people as possible. It should be noted that all of these issues outlined and dilated upon in Audrey Colombe's *Creating an Undergraduate Literary Journal*. The only text I was able to find that covered the subject directly. It is one of two texts I ended up using as course texts for the course, something I'll speak to more later.

Securing a Budget

The first and biggest issue was funding. Print journals cost money, and my department did not have the resources to shoulder this cost. Naturally, I followed a route laid out when I was an undergrad in a similar course. This is to say, it is very common for colleges and universities to have a common pool of money to fund campus clubs. At Hanover, where I currently work, this is called the Student Activities Budget Committee (SBAC). These are the same sort of funds that make the student newspaper possible or allow for the campus improv troupe to go to their regional improvisational comedy festival. It's also where *Kennings* had been getting its print budget for the past seventy years. I asked the Editor-in-Chief of *Kennings* to go to a budget meeting and ask for as much money as the committee would give them, and we were granted a large enough budget for a three hundred issue print run.

Design and Layout (Partnership and Collaboration)

My next issue was to find someone to collaborate with who could help professionalize the design of the journal. There are two basic options when considering design work: you can outsource the design work, or you can do it in house (Colombe 103-105). I scheduled a meeting with the head of the graphic design department, and explained what it was that I was trying to accomplish. I brought a wide variety of literary journals to show him as examples. I asked if there was any way one or more of his design students could work with my students to design the journal. It turns out that this professor is always actively looking for practical projects for his upper-level design

students, projects that his students can then put into their portfolios when they get out onto the job market.

I can say in hindsight that this worked out incredibly well. The design professor was and continues to be excited about the journal. The design students visited our class and vice-versa. They worked closely with us, consistently sending us concept work and proofs to approve or critique. We provided them with printing parameters, ideas, and feedback for visual themes content. It went so well that we plan to continue the partnership for the foreseeable future. It is the sort of dynamic collaboration between departments that I don't believe we see enough of in academia.

The Website

Design of our website is also work we chose to do in house. The previous editor and chief made the skeleton of a website and developed a Google Forms page to link for submissions. We then linked to Doutrope.com, a popular online data aggregating website that writers and writing markets use to find each other. In the future, when we are more established, we plan to link to *Poets and Writers* as well as to NewPages.com. The value of a website cannot be overstated. Both practically as well as pedagogically. Writers will often decide whether or not to submit to a journal based on what they learn from a website. This means websites need to appear professional and updated. For one of the major assignments in my course, I asked my students to critique a professional journal's website and then come up with ideas for how we might improve our own website. The number of ideas generated by this assignment will probably keep our web editors busy for years to come.

I should point out that one of the major reasons for posting our journal on websites that provide links to writing markets like Doutrope.com or New Pages.com is that it opens submissions to a broader writing community, and this is important for several reasons (not least of which is that it provides students with a good deal more submissions to review). I believe it is important that students not just review the work of their friends, which is fraught with the sort of favoritism that is very much at odds with developing one's own sense of aesthetics. In past years, the staff of *Kennings* would average somewhere around twenty poetry submissions and five or six fiction submissions, and they would accept nearly all of them. This past year, the poetry staff read, ranked, and reviewed over one hundred poems, and due to space constraints, could only accept about one fifth of

them. This sort of process goes much further toward developing a strong personal sense of aesthetics. If a journal only has so much space, then the staff needs to decide, very clearly, which poems it cannot live without seeing in their journal.

The website, it turns out, is quite possibly the most important, work intensive aspect of running a journal, outside of putting the journal together itself. We would find this out later on as more and more submissions came in.

The Structure of the Course

Hanover College is a small private liberal arts college with a student population of just around a thousand students and just over eighty professors. One of the principal reasons students are attracted to Hanover is its small class sizes. A general class size for my Practicum course is eight to ten students. I assign each student a role in the journal: Editor-in-Chief, Managing Editor, Chief Copy Editor, Web Editor, Poetry Editor, Fiction Editor, Non-Fiction Editor, and Visual Arts Editor. With the possible exception of Editor-in-Chief and Web Editor, who have responsibilities throughout the semester, each of the other editors is given a specific set of responsibilities over the course of the semester congruent with their position. For instance, it is the Poetry Editor's responsibility to manage the meetings where the class reviewed and ranked poetry submissions.

There are too many submissions for all the students to review as a single class. Because of this, I also split the students into staff so that we can review all of the submissions in a reasonable amount of time. Since there were eight-ten students, I generally assign each student to two staff, and we rotate review days accordingly. In preparation for rank and review days, I ask that each student read a group of submissions ahead of time, rank them on a scale from one to five (five being: I absolutely want to see this in the journal; one being: I absolutely do not want to see this in the journal), and leave a comment on them justifying their ranking. Then each student walks into class ready to defend and/or negotiate with the other members of their staff. Selection is often the part of the process that students find the most stimulating. As Peter Ginna mentions in his book *What Editors Do*, "The power of that feeling is something that outsiders often don't understand ...[Editors] live to find books they believe in and to bring them to readers" (17).

Once selection is finished, we devote one week to copy editing as a class (there are several more rounds later with the Copy Editor,

the Managing Editor, and the Editor and Chief). Outside of this, we also have to plan distribution, which consists of a launch party and setting up distribution tables around campus. This is the nuts and bolts, or practical, portion of the course. Beyond that, the students have a series of projects and presentations also due over the course of the semester. As in the website project, I also asked them to do a similar project at the beginning of the semester where they had to critique the content of a variety of journals that I provide them, which range from professional science fiction and fantasy magazines to major academic literary journals produced by some of the nation's most prestigious MFA programs. I also bring in speakers, editors, and alumni with experience working in the industry.

The idea of the undergraduate journal is not necessarily to provide students with experience running a professional literary journal. Undergraduates are precluded from producing what one might call a professional journal simply by virtue of the fact that the entire staff come into the class with little to no experience with the process, which is to say that they are amateurs by definition. However, because they are in a practicum, the idea is to give them as much information about the professional publishing world as possible while at the same time showing them as much of the practical ins and outs of running a journal.

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Creative

doi.org/10.58090/usi.1462244

Because Suffering is Optional

by Eva Roa White

The spring semester of 2020 was a happy time for me. Though I was still dealing with my own personal health crisis at the time, after two years of teaching exclusively online, I was very excited and grateful to return to the physical classroom and my students in person. Two of my three classes (two online, one in person) that semester were especially engaging. In particular, the in-person class was a joy to teach. I had one of those teaching moments of grace when the individual students and the instructor merge into one identity and the teaching seems effortless as the discussions led by the students flow into profound insights.

When the pandemic hit, I had just emerged from my own personal trauma, an auto-immune disease that first landed me in the hospital and then left me isolated from campus. For two years, I was first confined to my bed, then my home, tethered to an oxygen machine, but still teaching full time online. By the fall of 2019, the magic of medicine and physical therapy freed me to carry an oxygen tank and teach in person. The joy of regaining my face-to-face connection to my students and my supportive colleagues was part of what helped me heal at a faster rate. Though still frail, I was soon able to drive myself to campus and carry my book bag and oxygen tank without the help of my husband, who had been my unofficial nurse for all this time.

Suffering is a great teacher, I have found. Perhaps the greatest teacher of all. I noticed that my view of life had changed profoundly as a result of my illness. I had always thought of myself as a caring teacher, but I now had this new, extraordinary sense that connected me to other suffering humans at a deeper level. It was as if I had grown invisible tendrils that shivered at the presence of any type of suffering.

This first semester back on campus, my in-person class became a little family of sorts. Perhaps it was my gaunt appearance and struggle maneuvering the heavy oxygen tank around the classroom that won them over. Certainly, my vulnerability was a great factor. Illness had reduced me to a weakened state that had me depend on the kindness of others to survive. For a very long time, I was forced to let others take care of my most basic human needs. This new fragility did not match my driven pre-illness persona. I was a changed woman. My

recently developed survival skills included patience, acceptance, vulnerability, and recognition of suffering. It also drove home the words of Japanese author and marathon runner Haruki Murakami who, in his "Foreword" to his running autobiography, *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*, shares:

> One runner told of a mantra his older brother, also a runner, had taught him which he's pondered ever since he began running. Here it is: Pain is inevitable. Suffering is optional. Say you're running and you start to think, *Man this hurts, I can't take it anymore*. The *hurt* part is an unavoidable reality, but whether or not you can stand any more is up to the runner himself. This pretty much sums up the most important aspect of marathon running. (Murakami vii)

I took this one step further and added "and life." These words guided and sustained me during my recovery. When my body screamed it hurt too much to get up, I thought of Murakami and how he pushes his body and mind. And I chose. I chose to do physical therapy, go for a walk around my neighborhood, and find renewal and satisfaction in every small achievement of my incapacitated body. This was my own marathon.

That following of Spring 2020, some of the students from the fall in person class took another one of my courses. In this small seminar that featured women and literature, I found a tribe of women who also knew suffering. Not that we discussed this overtly, but it bled through our discussions of some of the novels we were reading. The experience was very rewarding in that we connected as human beings and women as well as teacher and students. Some looked to me for support through their own traumas, if only by showing up to their presentations in other classes or listening to their progress with their struggles. By the time March came around, I was winning my race back to health. I was using oxygen less and less, the constant pain was diminishing, and my stamina increasing almost daily. My walks around the neighborhood became longer and longer. Life was good again. I was recovering not only my physical health but also my ability to once more enjoy the small pleasures in life.

And then, the pandemic took it away.

Next thing I knew, I was back at home teaching online again. This time, my isolation was not as traumatic. I was no longer on oxygen, had gained weight, and the brain fog that comes with deep shock had cleared.

Also, I now knew that suffering was optional.

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Sonnets of the Betelguese

by Anthony Rintala

A kiss, they say, is how you end stories.
Or death, that solemn ceremony,
masses mourning some dumb bastard's glories
while the living squirm, hungry or horny.
Maybe a birth, some new irony capping the end
of all—punctuation a prologue.
Death is defied by fucking and stubbornness;
it was the plan all along.

The planet keeps going, spinning as it twists,
dances with skirts hitched as we burn, choke and drown.
And they'll see us clear from Betelgeuse—
if we can skip to the end for now—
        as a vague permutation of gravity
        nudging a red sun around from inside its skin.

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Rocket among the Rabbits

by Anthony Rintala

Rocket runs hard, the rabbit pup
flapping from her jaws, new teeth
mill new flesh as she stretches
from fence to fence across the yard.

Everything is different between meat
tabled, carved with intention,
and supple skin rent wild from thin
bones in the mouth of your child.

The radicchio bloom of flesh and fat,
the well and drop, the worried eyes
of two sweet things, one taking the other
in a gulp. The signature of viscera in air.

The obstruction is swept and scooped
from the airway like a wizard's hare,
Pinnochio paddling sky. Rocket tugs hard
against her harness, absolved--so alive.

doi.org/10.58090/usi.1462247

The Great Vampire Hunters of the Gorbals

by Anthony Rintala

We were innocent when we hunted death,
the all of us, knit by parental excuse
and buoyed by our arms, linked so.
Armed ourselves with rake, stake, steak knife,
jewelry, Bible verse, and play-yard scripture,
then snuck to the Necropolis straight from school
to catch the beast that ate someone someone else knew.

We were strong when all we knew of horror
came in Chinese whispers. One heard grinding feet,
a horse's hooves, a goat's. Another, teeth that smashed
like iron gates, milling children's bones, sillioned flesh with
claws, no, horns. A scythe. Exposed bones puncture eyes.
Pride. "There's the vampire," one of us cried. We pulsed like hearts,
snuck as grandmother's footsteps, toward the ghoul that was never there.

We were bold when we could rise in a hunt, hounding
the grave alleys with filled fists, then scatter with the dawn.
Now the Gorbals is a crypt itself, shattered along the Clyde,
a cenotaph of sky-worn grey where we all will die.
Time swooped down on cancerous wings, bit our veins,
poisoned what was once and mangled us in industrious ways,
leaving us drooped in doorways or over our children's graves.

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Our Covid Garden

by David O'Neil

My love, to grow a garden is our best
hope in these times. When plans have shriveled up
like sunburnt seeds—like unsaid words suppressed
in fear—resilience sows fresh strength. A cup
runs over, sloshing life across each cracked
white furrow, urging as we fade, "Do not
look back!" Your faithless almanac has tracked
last season's blight, saplings we had thought
in safer months might thrive. Ignore their call.
Though promised yields were spilled from springtime roots,
kind harvests wait. Look calmly to a fall
of bold rebirth, and tend these new-world fruits
with me. In time sunflower, squash, or maize
may climb in crisp green spirals through the haze.

Contributor Bios

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David O'Neil is an assistant professor of English at the University of Southern Indiana, where he also serves as director of the English Teaching program. He has taught courses in linguistics, grammar, medieval literature, writing pedagogy, the history of English, English composition, and Latin and Ancient Greek language. David's research interests include medieval studies, historical linguistics, applied linguistics, and poetic meter. In his free time, he enjoys writing verse in traditional meters.

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