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12 December 2012

Dr. Jay McRoy, Chair  
English Department  
University of Wisconsin-Parkside  
900 Wood Road  
Kenosha, WI 53141-2000

Dear Dr. McRoy,


As I near my last semester at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, I submit this portfolio to show how I have met the five Objective Goals as outlined by the English Department throughout my undergraduate career. Within this portfolio, I demonstrate that I have learned how to communicate in a more strategic way in order to convey information to different types of audiences, how to read and apply theoretical texts into a paper to prove a larger point, how to contextualize pieces of literature within their historical framework, how to fully research a writing project, and how to appropriately collaborate with my peers in order to communicate an idea with a larger audience.

The papers I have included as evidence that I have met these five goals are “The Impossibility of the Chivalric Code in *Sir Gawain in the Green Knight*” from English 266, “The Monstrous and the Heroic: Two Sides of the Same Coin?” from English 417, “Exilic Identities in *Dreaming in Cuban*” from English 367, ““from thee springs/ Ambition’s fire”: the Role of Ambition and Tradition in *The Prince of Parthia*” from English 321, and “Performance of the Gods: Power and Dominance in *Watership Down*” from English 495. These papers demonstrate my growth as an English major, as well as my completion of the departmental goals.

This portfolio shows that throughout the duration of my undergraduate English career, I have developed a strong set of skills that will prove invaluable as I move on to graduate school for medieval/Renaissance British Literature.

Thank you for taking the time to look over my portfolio.

Sincerely,



Throughout my undergraduate career under the English Department at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, I have learned a plethora of valuable tools that will help me as I continue forth to further my education in graduate school. The papers within the portfolio demonstrate the different tools and developments I have made with both my writing and my reading comprehension in the past four years. The objective goals, as outlined by the English Department, that I have met are the Writing Goal, the Critical Reading and Analysis Goal, the History and Theory Goal, the Research Goal, and the Collaborative Learning Goal. These developments would not have been possible if not for all of the English professors I have had the pleasure of working with, many of whom have not only taught me a great deal, but have also challenged me to become a better writer and reader.

English 266, Literary Analysis, marked the turning point in my English career. In that class, I learned not only how to read more critically, which in turn led to a higher development of my thought processes, but I also learned how to write far more eloquently than how I had been taught in high school. Most importantly, I gained an understanding of theoretical texts and how to apply them to my essays. The paper included in the portfolio, "The Impossibility of the Chivalric Code in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," shows my early development in using theoretical texts to help further my argument, as well as my growing ability to analyze texts in more depth than I had before.

I continue to use and improve the skills I originally learned in English 266. The trio of upper-level English papers show how with each semester I improve my writing and comprehension skills. My English 417 paper, "The Monstrous and the Heroic,"

exhibits a stronger sense of how to apply theoretical concepts to texts, as well as how to view the texts within their historical context. My English 367 paper, “Exilic Identities in *Dreaming in Cuban*,” reflects my deeper understanding on how to write a text using a multitude of different writing styles. My English 321 paper, “from thee springs/Ambition’s fire”: the Role of Ambition and Tradition in *The Prince of Parthia*,” reflects my ability to successfully incorporate a multitude of research methods in order to cultivate an original argument.

As the capstone of my major English major, I submit my English 495 paper “Performance of the Gods: Power and Dominance in *Watership Down*,” which incorporates all of the skills I have learned throughout my English major. With this paper, I had to utilize research methods that I applied to my English 321 paper, looking at databases and other research sources to find information that not only supported my argument, but also made me think about my argument in different ways. I also had to use a variety of different writing styles to achieve my paper’s success, as I had to familiarize myself with the way in which children’s literature scholars approach texts and the language they use. I incorporated a historical contextualization to the text, a skill I learned in English 417 in order to give my paper a historical background that elevated the position I took in my argument.

These skills and the ways in which I learned to use them show the success of the English department and the English major. Without the professors who taught me and the methods they taught me in regards to approaching literature and critical writing, I would not be half of the writer that I am today. My duration in the English major has strengthened my skills as a writer and communicator of ideas. The English major has

influenced me in many ways and, ultimately, led to my decision to continue my studies in graduate school.

After the completion of my major, I hope to further my education and research in medieval/Renaissance British literature. Thanks to the department and the professors I have had the chance to work beside, I have found an area of study that I know I can successfully enter and become a part of. I began my English major wanting to go into the publishing industry, but thanks to the support and the tools in which my English professors allotted me, I have realized that my niche lies in the university and in studying something that I know I can be successful in. I feel that the professors, always willing to listen to any concerns or problems I might have, also give me the confidence and the necessary background in order to ensure my success in graduate school. This department has, without a doubt, some of the strongest educators and through these educators I have become a better thinker, reader, and writer.

The skills I have learned are all encapsulated within the texts I include in this portfolio. I have met are the Writing Goal, the Critical Reading and Analysis Goal, the History and Theory Goal, the Research Goal, and the Collaborative Learning Goal through the help of my professors, my fellow English majors, and my own cultivation as an English major.

I submit my English 266 (hereafter Literary Analysis) paper, "The Impossibility of the Chivalric Code in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," as the end product of my completion of the Critical Reading and Analysis goal. Literary Analysis taught me how to become an active reader, interacting with the texts in new, critically-intensified ways. This was due, in large part, because of the introduction to theoretical essays. While these essays caused some difficulty at first, the application of theoretical terms and ideas onto a text helped me not only achieve a deeper level of understanding with the text, but also caused me to approach it differently and with a more critical eye. I did this in my essay, in which I looked at the contradictory nature of chivalry in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Specifically, I used Derrida and his concept of totalization and applied it to the symbolic representation of the pentangle with the argument that a knight cannot achieve true chivalry, because the qualities he must adhere to inherently contradict themselves. Through the theory I had learned, I was able to support this argument with solid evidence, using more elegant language and sentence structure than any other class I had previously been in.

The challenge I faced the most with this paper had to be achieving the level of analysis Dr. Oswald asked of the class. I struggled with this, but through hard work, I was able to reach the point where my analysis was up to par with what she required. I met this challenge mainly by working with English majors outside of the classroom, as well as taking the time to read, re-read, and then re-read the theoretically essay I used.

After writing this paper and completing the class, I knew that the English major would be far different than what I had expected. Fellow English majors had prepared me for the class and the theory, but I had not understand the brevity of how much I would

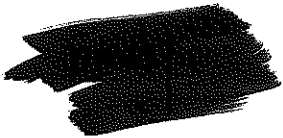
learn in this class until I had taken it. Applying theory and learning how to write in a more concise manner taught me that I could take difficult ideas, condense them into a manner I understood, and then apply these ideas to a text in a critical way. Learning this aspect about myself was integral in my decision later on to continue my studies, and because of what I initially started learning in Literary Analysis, I hope to continue my research and continue learning new, fun theories.

## English 266 Final Paper Rubric

<b>Required elements: If the paper fails to meet these requirements, it will receive an F.</b>		8-12 pages 4 8-page minimum, recent lit crit sources theoretical framework Attach previous drafts	ok
<b>Required elements: If the paper does not include these, the grade will be lowered.</b>		Cover letter and reflective commentary MLA format and citation Lit review paragraph	ok
<b><i>Introduction and conclusion</i></b>  10	Intro: gets attention through introductory trope, introduces main concepts and texts smoothly. Conclusion: pulls together evidence and culminates (not repeats). Clear "so what?" and send-off.	Still love that opening. ☺ Could set up the 5 5s better—they're specific to this text. Conclusion: there's a bit of repetition here, but this goes back to my larger desire to see you expand beyond totalization. It's a good strong argument, still.	9
<b><i>Thesis</i></b> 10	Connects to text and theory; arguable and well-shaped in scope and content.	Very nicely stated and a good clear argument.	10
<b><i>Structure and argument progression</i></b> 15	NOT a 5 paragraph essay. Paragraphs build upon one another to develop the argument in a logical and meaningful structure.	Very good clear progression of argument. I don't love the repetitiveness of the phrase 5 5s, but I like it as a logical foundation. I kind of want you to do more with it deconstructively, though.	15
<b><i>Theory paragraph</i></b> 10	Introduces the main ideas of the theory, then offers definitions of important terms, citing the text and analyzing.	Okay, I'm torn. You've got two paragraphs, both of which balance Derrida and SGGK. I'd rather see more of a Derrida paragraph in which you really think about the payoff of deconstruction. However, you DO handle a very difficult theory pretty well!	8
<b><i>Lit review</i></b> 5	Traces major trends in the critical conversation about the primary text in relation to focus and argument.	don't love the opening. It's a bit smashed together and you're not quite setting up the shape of the conversation—just mentioning different threads.	3
<b><i>Evidence</i></b>  20	Quotes primary text in all body paragraphs. Places emphasis of primary evidence above secondary. Incorporates secondary evidence and theory throughout the paper. No dropped quotes.	Good evidence. I still think we sort of lose Derrida towards the end—but this has definitely improved. Again, I think you can apply a larger logic of Derrida—beyond just totalization—to make the argument go further. Your use of Cohen is good—I think it might be slightly unwieldy, though!	18
<b><i>Analysis</i></b>  20	Each piece of evidence receives at least three sentences balancing all three levels of analysis.	Good. You've really come a long way with your analysis.	20
<b><i>Topic</i></b>	Topic sentences are argument-	a bit inconsistent. Some of these	3

<i>sentences and transitions</i> 5	based (not plot-based). Transitions are not topical, but deeply embedded in structure.	include quotes—a big no no, and some seem to just be continuations of previous pars, which makes them transitions, I guess, but not good topic sentences. Keep working on these.	
<i>Style</i> 5	Voice is appropriate. Errors are rare and do not prohibit meaning.	Good!	5
<b>Total:</b>			91





I understand that my paper will receive an F if I do not do the following:


meet the minimum length requirement, using the correct font type, size, and margins.	✓
quote from the primary text.	✓
use the correct number, quality, and type of sources.	✓
attach a works cited page.	✓
turn the final paper in by the required deadline.	✓
attach all previous drafts commented on and/or graded by the instructor (including online drafts that received instructor comments).	✓

I understand that my letter grade will be lowered if I do not do the following:

turn in a cover letter attached to the front of the essay.	✓
employ reflective commentary for each paragraph and my thesis, at the minimum.	✓
format the entire paper in correct MLA format, including the header, title, page numbers, font, and margins.	✓
follow correct MLA format for all in-text citations (including the rules for poetic citations and long citations).	✓
follow correct MLA format for the Works Cited page.	✓
correctly identify and spell all titles and authors'/poets' names.	✓

Please check the boxes below to indicate that you have considered the following before turning in your final draft:

- My introduction is creative and interesting, and does not begin with "Since the beginning of time" or "Webster's Dictionary defines \_\_\_ as..."
- My introduction transitions smoothly from attention-getter to text and topic, and then to thesis statement.
- My thesis statement is clearly stated, arguable, and connects to a meaningful "so what."
- I have read my thesis statement out loud to someone else, and this person has told me what s/he understands my argument to be, based only on this statement.
- My literature review traces major trends in the critical conversation about my primary text that are clearly related to my focus and argument.
- My theory paragraph quotes from a theoretical essay that we have read this semester, and defines the most important terms and concepts that I will use through the rest of the essay, by quoting and analyzing the critical essay.
- My theory paragraph makes a connection to my primary text, but does not devolve into a body paragraph about the primary text.



Dr Oswald  
English 266  
12/5/11

Cover Letter for  
The Impossibility of the Chivalric Code in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

Dear Dana,

Can it really be the end of the semester already? It seems kind of crazy that this is the last paper I will write for Literary Analysis. I'm really proud of it, too. I worked hard on making sure everything connects and makes sense. I have learned a lot during my time in this class, and I've especially strengthened my writing. I have acquired skills that I will use throughout the duration of my English major career (and beyond!).

That said, I still had a tough time rewriting sentences in order to get rid of those pesky to-be verbs. I tried to get rid of as many as I could, but some of them proved to be quite evil. That's definitely something I would want to keep trying at. Also, I'm still shaky on my theory. I have it down for the most part, but there are still some sections I feel could be strengthened.

I do, however, really enjoy the paragraph I added using the Green Knight as an example of a gap in the structure of knighthood. I think it's interesting, though I'm sure the language could use a little tweak here and there.

As I said before, I'm really proud of this paper and where I've come with my writing!

The Impossibility of the Chivalric Code  
in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

It takes more to become a knight than dashing good looks and the ability to handle a sword well. Images of knights defeating dragons and other adversaries come to mind when the word chivalry appears in conversation. Chivalry, though, involves much more than the modernized conception lets on. Chivalry exists as a system put in place to keep order in a kingdom. Knights in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* have a set order, a chivalric code to abide by known as the five-five's (5-5's). The 5-5's include not only the physical characteristics a knight needs in order to fulfill his duties, but also the behavioral characteristics he needs as well, represented through a pentangle. The knight must perform the 5-5's in tandem with each other, in a sort of perfect sync, by the society he finds himself a part of. In order to have success and any merit as a knight, the knight must adhere to this chivalric code. What does it mean, then, when a poem such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, presents the ideal of chivalry as inherently impossible? I argue, using Derrida's concept of totalization in relation to structure, that it becomes impossible for Gawain to achieve all of the 5-5's of a good knight at the same time when confronted with both Bertilak and the Lady, as shown in the text. Thus, the pentangle Gawain wears is the physical manifestation of the impossibility of totalization. Though the pentangle represents an idea that the society views as noble and unyielding, in reality the pentangle expresses the impossible feat of completing each conduct in tandem with the rest.

Other scholars have looked at the issue of chivalry and the chivalric code, such as

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Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, who argues that chivalry exists in order to keep the knight from becoming a monster. While Eugenie Freed states that the only damage done to Gawain's chivalric code is his attempt to save his own life, I argue that the code disintegrates before Gawain makes the attempt to save his life. Other scholars use their essays to question Gawain's moral conduct at the end of the poem, such as Catherine Cox; she specifically refers to Gawain's outburst concerning the lady. Others, such as Colleen Donnelly argue just what the Green Knight tests on: in her opinion, the Green Knight tests her behavioral conducts; I concur with this claim.

The 5-5's that Gawain has to abide by in order to achieve status as a knight work as a center to the structure of knighthood. Jacques Derrida states in his essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" that the job of the center lies in "mak[ing] sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the *freeplay* of the structure" (Derrida 915). This means that the center works as a way to keep the elements in the structure from moving, so gaps always occur in any structure. Structure thereby becomes reduced by the act of adding a center, it starts to deconstruct upon itself and place all emphasis on this center that actually lies outside of the structure itself. In relation to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, this means that while the 5-5's work as a way to become a good knight, they sit outside of the structure of knighthood; they remain something different than the structure of knighthood itself.

While at Bertilak's castle, Gawain finds himself unable to adhere to all of the 5-5's and their disintegration leads to the collapse of the structure of knighthood. In addition to structure, Derrida's concept of totalization states nothing is ever whole or complete; it can be built upon and added to forever. If someone can continually add to an

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**Comment:** I definitely had to split this epically huge paragraph up, which is why the first sentence may not be very transition-y.



idea or concept, then nothing is ever truly finished, thus, “totalization is...defined at one time as useless, at another time as impossible” (Derrida 923). Derrida argues that totalization, the concept that everything is whole and can be completed, is not only useless, but impossible. Its uselessness comes about because it is detrimental to believe that ideas simply end. We base all that we do on ideas that have been built upon for centuries, such as language, which has grown and changed and modified throughout our existence. Totalization becomes impossible because “[t]here is too much, more than one can say” (Derrida 923). Someone can draw an infinite amount of answers for just one question. No matter how hard he tries to pinpoint one single answer to a question, he never will, because the finality of just one answer never comes forth. Thus, if the center (the 5-5’s) can change because Gawain has to choose who to remain loyal to when faced with two conflicting persons, the entire structure of knighthood collapses. Derrida’s theory of structure connects to the concept of totalization in that it is the center which arrests the substitutions totalization makes possible. The substitutions cannot make their way into the actual structure because the center will not allow them to.

As a knight, Gawain is expected to complete each aspect of the 5-5’s represented through the pentangle at the same time. These traits include a group of five behaviors: purity, generosity, love, courtesy, and compassion (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* 39). On their own, each of these conducts can easily be achieved. The possibility to combine each of the qualities occurs as well, as long as they receive their own separate attention. However, once Gawain finds himself faced with remaining loyal to both Bertilak and the Lady, it becomes apparent that achieving each quality at the same time<sup>4</sup> proves an impossible feat, because Gawain cannot have all qualities intertwining at the

same time. In the presence of one of the qualities, another may either cancel out or contradict another quality.

For example, if Gawain must remain loyal to the Lady by accepting her kiss, he no longer abides by the purity Bertilak may expect of him (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* 1239-1240), though readers know these behavioral conducts happen to be what Bertilak hopes to test Gawain on as the Green Knight. The society in the text views the pentangle as a perfect embodiment of all the knights need to do in order to achieve status as a good knight. Nowhere do they mention a situation that may lead a knight astray in his portrayal of the 5-5's, but yet still remain an acceptable, pure knight. The knight receives a given set of guidelines about what actions he needs to follow through the meaning of the pentangle and how his peers view the emblem, and if he does not follow the structure this emblem stands for (i.e. knighthood) he will, presumed, no longer find himself deemed an acceptable knight. As Coleen Donnelly states, "it is not his prowess and courage that are being tests, rather it is his humility, loyalty, and truthfulness" (282). The Green Knight does not hope to tests Gawain on the aspects of knighthood that include both courage and fighting skills, but rather, he tests Gawain on those behavioral traits that are found within the code of the 5-5s. He tests Gawain on how loyal he remains to all parties, his humility, and if he tells the truth at all times. These behavioral conducts ultimately become what Gawain fails at during the duration of his stay at Bertilak's castle. Thus, no matter how strong of a fighter or how courageous Gawain presents himself, if he cannot uphold and abide by these behavioral conducts, he fails the test set out by Bertilak and ultimately fails the very code knights must adhere to.

The knights view the pentangle as an "emblem of fidelity...[encapsulated as

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**Comment:** Again, this was supposed to be combined with the next paragraph, but it just made for one epically huge paragraph, so I had to split it up.

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**Comment:** I think this helps the whole purity issue we discussed during my presentation (:

an] endless knot" (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* 626-30). The statement that the people view the pentangle as an "emblem of fidelity" means that it exists as a strict observance of the promise a knight makes to fulfill his duties as a knight. While wearing this emblem, the knight makes a promise to do his duty in a way befitting his court and the kingdom he defends. To view the pentangle as an endless knot means that it has a circular form incapable of being broken by any outside source; it means that it cannot be changed and it will remain the same forever. [With the pentangle, though, Gawain finds himself faced with a situation in which he has to decide what to do in order to remain loyal to one party while, invariably, unable to remain loyal to the other.] Eugenie Freed argues in the essay "'Quy the Pentangel Apendes:' The Pentangle in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*" that "the only...chink...revealed in Gawain's armour of virtue [is] the desire to save his own life" (Freed 134) at the end of the poem. This means that Gawain only commits one act that harms his virtue, and the rest of the time he stays at Bertilak's castle, he remains perfectly virtuous to all parties. While Gawain's desire to save his own life certainly accounts for one reason Gawain's performance as a good knight in the poem weakens, many other events transpire that lead to his damaged portrayal of the 5-5's.

[This statement ignores the fact that Gawain does not tell Bertilak that he receives kisses from the lady.] Though Gawain does not outwardly lie about whom he receives the kisses from, in order to remain loyal to the lady, he withholds information from the lord. This hindrance to tell the truth to the lord begins the deconstruction of the structure of the 5-5's while Gawain stays at the castle, because this marks the first time Gawain remains loyal to one party while disloyal to the other. The climax of this disintegration of the 5-5's comes about when Gawain accepts the green belt from the Lady and promises not to

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tell her husband she gave it to him. The deconstruction of the 5-5's does not end there, however, because at the end of the poem, in an attempt to sustain his good image as a knight, Gawain uses the Lady as a scapegoat for his actions.


[This inability to remain loyal to both parties at the same time comes into climax during the third bedroom scene in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* when Gawain makes the choice to lie to Bertilak; this decision shows how impossible it becomes for Gawain to adhere to the 5-5's while staying at Bertilak's castle as soon as the Lady "begged [Gawain] for her sake never to reveal [the gift]" (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* 1863). The Lady, promising Gawain that no harm will come to him if he wears the green belt, makes him promise he will not tell her husband that he has the belt, and especially that she gave it to him. When Gawain accepts the green belt from the lady, he remains loyal to her, but becomes disloyal towards Bertilak, because he promises the Lady he will not tell the lord that she gave him the belt; he abides by the 5-5's towards the Lady, but loses his purity and loyalty towards Bertilak. Gawain tells Lord Bertilak that he will "carry out the terms of [their] covenant" (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* 1933) when Bertilak returns from the hunt, acknowledging their exchange of earned winnings. Gawain, through, gives the Lord only the three kisses, dismissing the gift of the girdle. He does not, in fact, carry out the terms set about at the beginning of the game; he breaks them in order to save his life.

The structure of the 5-5's completely deconstructs upon itself when placed in a situation in which Gawain has to choose whom to remain faithful to. He takes the belt because "it flashed through his mind/ This would be a godsend for the hazard he must face" concerning the Green Knight (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* 1855-56). Gawain

Comment: I like this topic sentence.


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Comment: I think this is a good quote to use for evidence, I like it.





recognizes that this belt, promised to keep any harm from the wearer by any man on earth, will help him when faced by the Green Knight. In this act, though, he breaks his loyalty towards the lord in order to achieve his loyalty towards the lady. This stops the pentangle from attaining its status as an endless knot, which could be perceived as either a sign that Gawain is not a true, pure knight, or that the manifestation the pentangle represented has a serious flaw to it. I argue this is an example of how Gawain cannot reasonably achieve the 5-5's in tandem with each other when coupled with two or more people he has to stay loyal towards. Gawain has many choices he can take in regards to the decision with the belt, for there is a "field of infinite substitutions in the closure of a finite ensemble" (Derrida 923). Gawain can choose one of many paths to take for this one decision, this one action. He can choose to deny the lady and not take the belt, thus showing his loyalty towards the lord, but not the lady. He could choose to take the belt and not tell the lord (which he does), thus proving his loyalty towards the lady, but not the lord. He could even take the belt, but choose to tell the lord about it, which would honor his loyalty towards both the lord and lady in one aspect, but he would still end up not completely honoring his promise towards the lady. A vast, infinite amount of substitutions for the act await Gawain. However, each choice comes with a double-edged sword, because in the end he would end up dishonoring someone, no matter what he chooses to do.

Gawain does not help himself when he commits his final act against the 5-5's and uses the Lady as a scapegoat for his actions. If the structure of knighthood includes the characteristic of purity and loyalty, Gawain certainly does not adhere to it when he goes out on his diatribe against the Lady at the end of the poem. In her essay "Genesis and



**Comment:** I think this is a strong paragraph. I like my evidence.

[REDACTED]

Gender in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” Catherine Cox draws a comparison to the Bible and states how Gawain argues he “inadvertently played Adam to the Green Knight’s Lady’s Eve” (379). When the serpent tempts Eve into biting the apple, Adam plays on the fact that he falls victim to her seduction and blames her for his actions that leads them to their downfall. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Gawain likens himself to Adam, thus placing all the blame for his actions onto the Lady. Even though the decision lies on him, Gawain acts as if he did not have a choice in the matter and blames the Lady, likening her to Eve. So, not only does Gawain lie to Bertilak about the belt in the first place, Gawain later strips all loyalty towards the Lady away and blames her for his actions. Now, Gawain has become disloyal to both Bertilak and the Lady throughout the entirety of his stay, the pentangle he represents broken because of his decisions, which damages the entire structure of knighthood itself, as seen and represented in the text.

At the beginning of the poem, the poet describes the chivalrous knights in a way that would reflect how the society in the text viewed the men. The knights are seen as “men of great worth,/ Noble brothers-in-arms worthy of the Round Table” (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* 38-39). The title of knight holds great value in this poem, the men who own the title act as noble brothers protecting their King and kingdom. Part of their worth comes from the chivalric code they follow that keeps them in line, as well as the qualities they attain through this code. Without the highly-valued chivalric code, their role as knight would not hold as much value with their society. In his novel *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages*, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues that the knight must keep order so he does not become that which he has sworn to protect the kingdom from, a

[REDACTED]

**Comment:** I really, really like the idea presented in this part of the paper. I hope it makes sense. I feel it's something I would probably need to strengthen.

monster; "The knight is necessary to preserve order...[and must] be adequately controlled by the systems of power that have produce him." (Cohen 78). The knight preserves order in the kingdom in which he lives, but finds himself in the control of the King he protects and serves. The reason the King must keep tight control over the knight is so the knight does not become a monster, abandoning the chivalric code and knighthood itself.

[The deconstructive technique Cohen applies plays with the idea of knighthood to show that without the chivalric code, nothing separates the knight from the monster. Using this logic, the Green Knight can be seen as an example of what happens when the knight is no longer controlled; once free, he becomes an order-less monster that threatens the very existence of knighthood. Without the chivalric code, the knight loses the quality that makes him a knight and becomes a thing outside of the structure of knighthood. The Green Knight becomes an example of the sort of *freeplay* that is unable to form inside the structure of knighthood, because "the center of a structure permits the freeplay of its element inside the total form" (Derrida 915). The freeplay is unable to form inside the structure itself, because the center organizes the system of the structure so that any substitution or element attempting to add itself to the structure is forbidden. Variety does not exist within the center, for it forbids any attempt of change. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the 5-5's act as the center, while the Green Knight becomes that which a good knight cannot allow himself to become.

[The structure of knighthood, as shown in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, no longer includes the chivalric code, thus eliminating all need for knights, if the chivalric code continues to attain that which a knight must become in order to be considered a

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**Comment:** Again, I'm really fascinated by this topic!

knight. The entire portrayal of a knight consists of this collapsing, deconstructive ideal;

knights should be out saving princesses and protecting the kingdoms they have sworn to keep safe, so what does it say about knighthood when Gawain, instead of committing acts seen as knightly, goes out and plays a game with the Green Knight? The overlaying question becomes, what is the purpose of knights? If Gawain cannot uphold the chivalric code he has vowed to adhere to, he forfeits his title as knight, instead becoming a man who attempts to imitate a knight's role and *fails*. It is not the structure of knighthood that fails Gawain, but rather, the inherently impossible chivalric code he must abide by as a knight. Perhaps, if the society in the text reformed the strictness of the chivalric code, or actually abided by it, Gawain would not have failed. Perhaps, the poet uses the poem in a way to call out on the dying ideal of the chivalric code that no knight, in the text, truly abides by.

Gawain accepts a challenge no one else dares to; he steps up and defends both his court and his uncle, King Arthur, against the Green Knight. Upon accepting this challenge, Gawain binds himself to a situation in which he must leave in a year to seek the Green Knight out for reparation; to get his just rewards that he owes the Green Knight from the challenge. The fact that Gawain steps up when no other knight will earns him the title "noble" Gawain, and his society perceives him to be a grand knight. The pentangle representing the 5-5's of a good knight, a chivalric code Gawain has to uphold in order to keep earning his status, backs up his status as a good, pure knight. The pentangle, though, represents a feat which cannot be achieved by Gawain, no matter how good of a knight he tries to be. It represents a totalization of five behavioral conducts that, while perfectly easy to achieve on their own, sometimes get in the way when trying to

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**Comment:** I like my conclusion. The second part of the topic sentence is kind of choppy, I'd like to strengthen that. And it's a two paragraph conclusion, because it was getting kind of lengthy.

achieve them in tandem. For Gawain to remain loyal to one party would mean he betrays the other, which would not make him the pure knight his society calls him to be. In order to please the lord, Gawain cannot worry about what he has to do to please Arthur. While with the lady, Gawain has to not only receive her in a loyal manner, but he has to do it in a way that will not seem disloyal to the lord. Due to this inability to achieve the 5-5's in tandem when faced with two people Gawain has to remain loyal to, the structure of knighthood falls within itself; Gawain cannot remain loyal to both Bertilak and the Lady, therefore proving it impossible to perform the 5-5's.

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**Comment:** I think this sums up my paper rather nicely. I like this conclusion.

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I submit my English 367 (hereafter Latina Lit) paper, "Exilic Identities in *Dreaming in Cuban*," as the end product of my completion of the Writing Goal. With this class, I had to learn how to employ different writing strategies, as I entered a field of literature I was not too familiar with that led to me think about ideas in a new and different way. I focused on researching exiled Latinas and the identities that form through this exile. Using a theorist I was familiar with, Edward Said, I set off on employing different writing techniques throughout the paper. One of the ways in which I did so was through the language I used, as I had to learn terms familiar to those within this literary discussion that I had never heard before, and cultural ideas I had not been exposed to that led me to approach the text in a different way.

To be completely honest, this paper presented little challenge for me. I chose a topic I was deeply engrossed in and because of this, had no trouble finding applicable research or analyzing my argument. For the first time in my English major, I sat down to write a paper over the span of a weekend, and sincerely enjoyed every aspect of it. This paper came easily to me. I was especially proud of the way I structured my sentences and my analysis of my evidence; I feel it is quite strong in that paper and shows the writer I have grown into throughout my duration as an English undergraduate. My writing style and voice within this paper reads vastly different than the writing in my Literary Analysis paper. I have learned different writing techniques and, through the professors I have had, different ways in which to formulate my thoughts and ideas onto the page. This paper exemplifies this.

Thus, what this paper taught me about the English major is that sometimes the work one has to do does not necessarily have to be considered painful busy work. I found

a topic that interested me and that I had pleasure doing further research into. This taught me that sometimes topics just “click” with a writer and that with this topic of interest, I could broaden my writing style and embrace a new voice that emerged.



Dr. Martinez  
English 367  
16 July 2012

Exilic Identities in *Dreaming in Cuban*

The methods of exile have changed since its early days; before, exile was

delivered by the ruler of a nation as a punishment, a banishment from the land in which someone came from, where he was no longer considered a citizen and could not be helped by any of his kin in a sort of social death. Now, exiles flee from their native lands in fear of their lives from a corrupt government or other political persecutions, such as was the case in 1959 when Cubans fled from their homeland to the United States after the appointment of the dictator Fidel Castro. Many Cubans believed they would be able to go home after the dictatorship fell, not believing that Castro would be in power long. This belief, however, came to crumble throughout the years and decades that passed with nary a counter-revolution in sight. Exile appears as a common theme in many Latina/o authors' work, particularly in relation to how exile helps shape and define an identity.

The theme of exile in relation to identity is prevalent in Cristina García's novel *Dreaming in Cuban*. The novel is based on the del Pino family, half of which has moved from Cuba to New York after the rise of Communism and Castro. Celia del Pino watches as her daughter Lourdes, son-in-law Rufino, and granddaughter Pilar immigrate to the States, the geographic border that comes between them there for the duration of her life. Each of the three characters that move face exile in different ways: Lourdes embraces exile, Rufino loses himself in exile, and Pilar hates it, feeling as though she was ripped from Cuba against her will. With these characters, García demonstrates that the identity of an


exile can never be erased and comes to define those taken at a young age to dual identities, forced to live a hybrid life, stuck between two cultures, never completely belonging to either one.

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In his essay, "Reflections on Exile," Edward W. Said, a post-colonialism theorist, discusses the effects that exile has on displaced peoples, forced out of their homelands into strange new territories and thrust into a new culture with a new language and set of social codes. Said writes that exile is an "unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted... The achievements of an exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever" (173). The division between a self and his or her homeland and community can be traumatic, as it forces the individual away from everything familiar and places them into a strange and harsh environment, where the exile knows no one. Oftentimes, an individual is forced from the homeland due to new nationalistic politics he or she does not adhere to. According to Said, one cannot have exile without nationalism, the vocabulary concerning both words so similar that to discuss one is to discuss the other: "the interplay between nationalism and exile is like Hegel's dialectic of servant and master, opposites informing and constituting each other" (176). Exile would not exist without nationalism, for it is nationalistic principles and beliefs that enable leaders to separate a certain group of people and deem them outsiders, Others incapable of living amongst the citizens of the state. It is the nationalistic fervor of a people that demands the banishment of another, in either subtle or powerfully political ways. In *Dreaming in Cuban*, El Líder (Castro) does not forcibly remove anyone from Cuba; rather, the people that flee are those in fear of their life, because they were in

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rebellion with the dictator, or those, like Lourdes' family, that cannot stand to live amongst the Communists, because the Communist way of life goes against theirs. Said goes on to say that exile "is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being. Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past" (177). As shown in history, exile is sometimes considered a fate worse than death, because it leaves a person separated from his or her community and culture, unable to trust and rely the ethnic group one identifies with. This separation between the familial community is a large part of *Dreaming in Cuban*, as Pilar spends the first two sections of the novel attempting to figure out a way to get back home to Cuba, where she feels she belongs the most.

The character that handles exile the best is Lourdes, who seems to come into her own identity through her state of exile. Rather than identify with the negative connotations Said lists as effects of exile, Lourdes feels that exile allows her to remake herself; it allows her to reconstruct her pain and make it something new (in the hopes that it will eventually be forgotten). On the surface, Lourdes seems to have found her place in New York. She owns a bakery of her own that (at the very least) has enough success to branch to another location. One day at work, Lourdes sits and ponders transmigration, coming to the conclusion that she is lucky because "Immigration has redefined her, and she is grateful...she welcomes her adopted language, its possibilities for reinvention...She wants no part of Cuba...no part of Cuba at all, which Lourdes claims never possessed her" (García 73). Immigration to the States has not only allowed Lourdes to become a successful entrepreneur, but it has also distanced her from the hot island where she was brutally raped, an act which caused her to lose her second child, a boy. Lourdes finds a home in Capitalism, but it only becomes one of her many armours

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against memories of Cuba that Lourdes relies on to survive. These memories become easier to mask and ignore due to the fact that Lourdes travels so far from where the memories occurred. Lourdes uses the geographic mileage from Cuba to her advantage, only allowing Rufino to stop once they have reached New York, where the temperature is far colder than that of Cuba. The weather becomes a physical armour against the memories of Cuba, a place that is in stark contrast to the environment she grew up in, so as to keep the painful memories at bay. Lourdes has no need to remember that hot day and the "field of dry grasses" if the temperature around her is the complete opposite; nothing will spark a memory in her (García 70).

*Nice*

The geographical distance is not the only physical armour that Lourdes relies on to survive; the physical act of gaining weight and putting on clothing also becomes a way to combat ill wanted memories. Lourdes quite literally dons her armour against Cuba, layering on both body fat and warm winter clothes. Lourdes comes to love winter, "the cold scraping sounds on sidewalks and windshields, the ritual of scarves and gloves, hats and zip-in coat linings. Its layers protect her" (García 73). Lourdes uses her clothing as a shield against intruders, those in the present and in the past. This need for a protective set of clothing arises, because of the way the soldiers' easily accessed Lourdes' body in Cuba. Instead of having heavy, multi-layered clothing on in Cuba, she wore simple, light clothes due to the hot weather; the soldier "sliced Lourdes's riding pants off to her knees and tied them over her mouth. He cut through her blouse without dislodging a single button and slit her bra and panties in two" (García 71). The chill of New York allows Lourdes to cover her body under multiple layers of clothing, assuring her that the ease with which the soldiers were able to access her body would not happen again.

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The numerous layers of clothing act as one aspect of a physical deterrent against intruders for Lourdes. Along with the thicker, multi-layered clothing, Lourdes gains 118 pounds whilst living in New York: "The flesh amassed rapidly on her hips and buttocks, muting the angles of her bones. It collected on her thighs, fusing them above the knees. It hung from her arms like hammocks" (García 20). Lourdes' dramatic weight gain serves her, once more, as an armour against unwanted memories and manly attention. In Cuba, Lourdes' had been a skinny girl, the object of men's attention. After the rape, though, *interestly* Lourdes wants nothing more than to become the complete opposite of the woman the soldier had brutally abused; her weight allows her to control who would see her body. As a heavier woman, "men's eyes no longer pursued her curves," and she could rest easy knowing that an intruder would not take advantage of her body again (García 21).

Lourdes dons her weight as a sort of bulletproof vest against male attention, protecting her body in a way she could not on Cuba. In the article, "Multiple Articulations of Exile in US Latina Literature: Confronting Exilic Absence and Trauma" by Fatima Mujcinovic, Mujcinovic states, "the author conveys that the intensity of the trauma and betrayal drives this character [Lourdes] to alienate herself completely from the space of home(land) and embrace exile as a space where she can recuperate her obliterated self" (175). Lourdes believes, though she may not outright say it, that if she can get as far away as possible from Cuba, the trauma she faced will disappear or heal. This is not the case, however, for Lourdes cannot erase her past, no matter how much armour she puts on, be it weight or Capitalism. Thus, whilst Lourdes' convinces herself that exile has been the best thing for her, has allowed her to reinvent herself and become someone new, all exile has truly allowed Lourdes is a safe protective net to hide behind. Lourdes does not have to face her

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memories and the pain of the rape whilst safe in New York, buried beneath her layers of both fat and clothing, in the chill of the winter season. Everything is in stark contrast to Cuba, which allows Lourdes the chance to simply forget, though this is harder than she presumes it will be, and the entirety of the life she builds in New York is simply an alienation from her past.

Lourdes' husband, Rufino, does not see exile as a grand reinvention, as his wife does. Rather, exile in New York leaves Rufino miserable, unable to live the life he had enjoyed in Cuba. While Lourdes spends her time attempting to forget Cuba and what transpired there, Rufino spends his time filling his day with activities that remind him of Cuba. A major absence in Rufino's life is the ranch he grew up on that his family owned, where he took care of the animals that lived there (García 28). Rufino attempts to bring some of the old farm ways he is used to back when he decides to grow his own honey with a nest of bees he purchased, which Lourdes promptly gets rid of after one week (García 30). Rufino is also the one to tell Pilar stories and histories about Cuba "after Columbus came. He said that the Spaniards wiped out more Indians with smallpox than with muskets," whereas her mother will not speak of the island (García 28). Rufino spends his time in the back of the warehouse where they live, attending his own little projects, while Lourdes works in the bakery. Lourdes is the one to actually make money to support the family, while Rufino "has his workshop next to [Pilar's] and tinkers with his projects there. His latest idea is a voice-command typewriter he says will do away with secretaries" (García 30). The novel never states if Rufino brings an sort of income into the household, but the reader can clearly see that Lourdes takes on the role of head of the household, both as the breadwinner and as the one to punish Pilar when she feel it is

necessary. Mujcinovic explains this phenomenon when she states that "the male experience of exile... [is] debilitating and frustrating, [while] the female experience of exile becomes more positive and affirming" (180). ~~The men~~ typically find themselves in a role they are not used to playing, forced to be passive in the face of their family about their future, not knowing if or when they will ever be allowed to return home.

This passivity is met with an economic downturn, because it is far easier for woman to find a job in domestic services than it is for a man to find a job suitable to support the family (Martinez 2012). ~~Thus,~~ a gender swap occurs and suddenly it is the woman making money and helping run the household. Women are able to "transcend the roles of devoted wives, mothers, and daughters and are able to develop their own careers and interests" (Mujcinovic 181). This is seen in *Dreaming in Cuban* with Lourdes and Rufino. Rufino must sit by and watch while Lourdes runs her bakery successfully and all he has to keep him busy are inventions that will probably never amount to anything. When Lourdes first opened the bakery, Rufino attempted to help her run the business. Pilar recalls this, stating, "Dad used to help Mom in the bakery but she lost patience with him" (García 31). ~~This~~ emasculating gender swap leaves Rufino helpless and yearning for home, his exile negatively trapping him in a prison he cannot escape from. His exile becomes a part of him in such a way that he cannot completely fit in in the States, all of his time spent in solitude in his warehouse. The exile also fragments the family, as Lourdes is too busy running her shop and they slowly drift apart. Rufino turns to other women, which drives a wedge between himself and his daughter, who witnesses one such occasion. Exile does not lead to the reinvention of a new identity and self for Rufino, it merely solidifies his Cuban-ness and leaves him alienated in his new home, driven apart

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from his family.

Stuck between both the seemingly reinvented Lourdes and the miserable Rufino is their daughter, Pilar, who feels as if exile was forced on her, and wants nothing more than to return to Cuba. Lourdes and Rufino packed up the family and immigrated to the States when Pilar was two years old, but she remembers “everything that’s happened to [her] since [she] was a baby, even word-for-word conversations” (García 26). This includes the moment she was ripped from her Abuela Celia’s arms against her will and carried off to New York, a place where she does not feel as if she belongs. Pilar wants nothing more than to return both to Cuba and her grandmother. Through their nightly dreams, Celia sends Pilar visions of Cuba, of her Cuba. Thus, Pilar’s nostalgic longing for home and Cuba is greatly influenced by her desire to see her Abuela once again. Instead of blaming Lourdes and Rufino, though, Pilar places a great deal of blame on the Cuban government’s shoulders when she says:

Most days Cuba is kind of dead to me. But every once in a while a wave of longing will hit me and it’s all I can do not to hijack a plane to Havana or something. I resent the hell out of the politicians and the generals who force events on us that structure our lives, that dictate the memories we’ll have when we’re old. Every day Cuba fades a little more inside me, my grandmother fades a little more inside me. And there’s only my imagination where our history should be. (García 137-138)

Though it is Lourdes’ and Rufino’s decision to immigrate from Cuba to the United States to flee Communism, Pilar sees the government as the main reason she is not in Cuba; because of this, Pilar only has her imagination to fill in the gaps where her Cuban identity



and history should be, along with the visions that Celia sends her. There was a time in Pilar's past when she attempted to go back to Cuba after seeing her father with another woman; at that moment, New York was too much for her and all she wanted to do was return home (García 25). After her failure to return to Cuba when she was younger, Pilar "felt like [her] destiny was not [her] own, that men who had nothing to do with [her] had the power to rupture [her] dreams, to separate [her] from [her] grandmother" (García 199-200). Rather than being in charge of her own destiny, it is the politicians' policies that dictate the relationships that Pilar will and will not have with her family members, playing a large role in the formation of Pilar's hybrid identity. Said writes of this feeling of not belonging to a culture or ethnic group that one emigrates to and states that, "just beyond the frontier between 'us' and the 'outsiders' is the perilous territory of not-belonging," which is a space that Pilar occupies throughout the first two sections of *Dreaming in Cuban* (177). When Pilar feels like she no longer belongs in New York and she cannot handle the environment anymore, she wants nothing more than to return to the simpler home that she was taken from when she was a child.

This borderland that Pilar occupies, neither in the "us" nor the "them" category, shapes her identity into that of a hybrid—a dual personage in which she is able to skirt the border and chameleon herself into both cultures. This means that while Pilar desperately longs to return to Cuba, she will never completely belong there, just as she does not completely belong in New York. The influences she has gathered from both cultures shape her in such a way that she will never have a truly Cuban or American identity: she will occupy a space within both cultures. It is within this space that Pilar's hybrid identity allows her to take on the role of the family recorder, relieving Celia of the

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duty. In Celia's final letter to her love Gustavo, she writes, "My granddaughter, Pilar Puente del Pino, was born today... I will no longer write to you, *mi amor*. She will remember everything" (García 245). Pilar's hybrid identity allows her to occupy two cultures equally; instead of becoming a marginalized Other in either culture, she coexists within both at the same, which allows her the ability to observe and record both of the cultures. Said draws on the writings of Theodor Adorno, who believes that "the only home truly available now [to exiles], though fragile and vulnerable, is in writing" (184). Exiles come to realize that the places they live in are not stable; at any one moment they could be taken away from their home once more and driven somewhere else. Instead of relying on buildings and communities, they begin to rely on other forms of expression that live past other material objects: writing and art. As someone who lives in both cultures, Pilar knows all too well that the physical home can be taken away at a moment's notice; as she expressed herself through her art and punk exterior, Pilar will now take on the role of family historian and recorder, documenting their lives. As Said states, exiles have a unique outlook on both of the cultures they inhabit, because they "cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience" (185). Exiles are some of the best suited to recognize and draw on these discrepancies between cultures; due to Pilar's dual identities, she is able to see the problems and merits of both cultures. When Pilar arrives in Cuba, she sees both the negative aspects of the environment, as well as the positive because of her hybrid nature. Not only does she see advertisements for the revolution and neighborhoods in disrepair, but she sees the colours, the various shades of blue that she had never known existed (García 253).

The last section of the novel brings the fragmented family together again with the

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return of Pilar and Lourdes to Cuba. In her article "From Alienation to Reconciliation in the Novels of Cristina Garcia," Katherine Payant comes to the conclusion that the del Pino family finds complete reconciliation by the end of *Dreaming in Cuban*. According to Payant, "it is Pilar's desire for roots and connection..., and her return to the mythical Cuba...that brings healing to this family's wounds (169). While Pilar's journey to Cuba certainly reunites Lourdes with her mother, the relationship between the two is never fully healed, because Lourdes is not able to look past her pain and trauma to truly talk to Celia about the past. Also, it was not only Pilar's insistence to go back to the island that reunites Lourdes Puente with her mother Celia; her ghostly father, Jorge, urges Lourdes "Please return and tell your mother everything, tell her I'm sorry" (García 197). After telling Lourdes the truth about his past with Celia, Jorge tells her to return to the Island and deliver his last message to Celia. Thus, it is not simply Pilar's desire to return to Cuba that brings the family together again; Jorge plays an integral part as a mediator after death between the split family in order to get them to reunite once more. Payant also believes that once she is on the Island, Lourdes is able to overcome her pain and trauma:

Lourdes does go through her own reconciliation and awakening. She visits the scenes of her happy honeymoon and the scene of her rape at the family ranch.

Though she still feels the cruelty of that day and fears that her baby's death might mean nothing, the fact she was able to visit the ranch shows healing. (171) km

This is not completely true, though. While Lourdes does indeed go back to the place where the rape occurred and she lost her second child, the scene is far darker and less of a healing moment for Lourdes, than a moment of reliving the pain all over again. Lourdes desires vengeance for her child, fears that "her rape, her baby's death were absorbed

quietly by the earth, that they are ultimately no more meaningful than falling leaves on an autumn day. She hungers for a violence of nature, terrible and permanent, to record the evil" (García 227). Lourdes' desire goes unanswered, though; the earth remains silent, and no grand moment, no ultimate violence of nature arrives to mark Lourdes' pain. All she has is her memories; the earth has forgotten what happened to her, even though she cannot. Because of this, Lourdes cannot move on or reconcile with her past. She does not receive an awakening that allows her to begin her path to healing; she receives silence.

At the end of the novel, when Lourdes goes back to Cuba with Pilar, she does not find a new sense of identity as Pilar does. Instead, Lourdes hides behind American consumerism to hide from her Cuban trauma; she tells an audience that they too could "have Cadillacs with leather interiors" and when they laugh at her she tells Pilar, "Look how they laugh, Pilar! Like idiots! They can't understand a word I'm saying! Their heads are filled with too much *compañero* this and *compañera* that! They're brainwashed, that's what they are!" (García 221). The barrier between Lourdes and Cuba is complete; she can no longer speak to them, her Cuban identity buried so deep inside of her because of the pain she has experienced, that she has to rely on the American mannerisms she has learned to use as armour against that pain. This barrier between Lourdes and Cuba carries forth to her relationship with her mother, who has not changed over the years as much as Jorge led Lourdes to believe. Lourdes reflects on this, coming to the conclusion that her mother is a complete stranger to her and that "Papi was wrong. Some things never change" (García 223). All Lourdes sees when she returns to Cuba is stagnation and decay; nothing has changed, except for the worse. Mujcinovic writes that "*Dreaming in Cuban* emphasizes that even when exile offers personal security and fulfillment, it cannot

erase the traumatic past," as evident with Lourdes (178). She attempts to alienate herself from what occurred in Cuba, but she is never able to completely erase the memory, the son she never had still haunts her. Lourdes tries to take on another image and transgress past her exile into a new ascended being that does not feel the pain from the homeland, but exile assures that the identity will never fully change, as the person does not have the chance nor the means to overcome the past that traumatizes her. Exile assures that Lourdes will never fully be able to return to her homeland, nor will she be able to completely fit in in America, because her past traumas remain too great for her to forget, still influencing her actions and the life she leads. *indeed.*

maybe some needs from Pilar too

García demonstrates Lourdes' inability to return to Cuba by describing Lourdes' views on Cuba and how it correlates to her past. Contrary to what the reader may believe prior to the return trip, though, Pilar cannot stay in Cuba either. While Pilar has a positive experience in Cuba, and is able to finally reunite with her grandmother, the overall trip is unsuccessful in convincing Pilar that she completely belongs in Cuba. Pilar comes to the understand that the Cuba her grandmother has sent her visions of throughout the years is a different Cuba than the Cuba Pilar sees. Payant sees Pilar's experiences in Cuba as unsuccessful and states that "Pilar had feared the 'Cuba' of her dreams might not exist, and not surprisingly, her fears are confirmed. Furthermore, she does not belong in the real Cuba" (171). Even though Pilar is able to see the beauty in Cuba surrounded by the harsh reality of the revolution and Castro's reign, the beauty is not enough to convince Pilar that she completely belongs in Cuba. In fact, Pilar lies to Celia at the embassy and says that she cannot find Ivanito, deciding to give him a chance at a life outside of Cuba and Castro, rather than be truthful to her grandmother (García 242). In an interview, Cristina

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García stated that “[everyone] has his or her version of Cuba. Everybody...claims Cuba and makes its history his or her own, just as everyone does in families” (Irizarry 179-180). When it becomes clear to Pilar that her version of Cuba is not the Cuba she sees completely whilst there on her trip, she realizes that she belongs less in Cuba than she thought she would. ✓

This realization reflects Pilar’s decision that she must eventually return to New York. The first inkling the reader receives about Pilar’s future in Cuba if she were to stay comes when Celia and Pilar discuss her art; Celia tells Pilar that her art cannot “attack the state. Cuba is still developing...and can’t afford the luxury of dissent” (García 235). | yes  
Pilar’s sense of expression and the way in which she identifies herself, through her paintings, would not be acceptable in Castro’s Cuba. It does not belong and her ex-punk, American influences would put her in jeopardy of going against the state. Pilar comes to the decision that she must return to the United States:

...I love Havana, its noise and decay and painted ladyness. I could happily sit on one of those wrought-iron balconies for days, or keep my grandmother company on her porch, with its ringside view of the sea. I’m afraid to lose all this, to lose Abuela Celia again. But sooner or later I’d have to return to New York. I know now it’s where I belong—not *instead* of here, but *more* than here. (García 235-236) |

Plenty remains in Havana for Pilar to love: her grandmother, the colours, the sea.

However, all these positive qualities Havana has cannot take away the fact that Pilar will never truly fit in in Cuba. She comes to the realization that she can belong in both Cuba and the United States, but she belongs *more* in New York. She does not say that one is

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better than the other, but finally comes to the decision that she can be both Cuban and American at the same time. Her hybrid identity becomes clearer to her, and more concretely defined. She knows that because of the stories she must tell, the history she must record, she will never leave Cuba; it will always be a part of her. Said believes that living within dual cultures creates a more complex individual, for "[most] people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions" (186). This awareness is a unique trait to have, for it means that exiles can observe with more complexity in both of the cultures they belong to, thus making them highly suited to act as recorders for a culture. At the same time, exile makes it impossible for Pilar to completely return to Cuba, for she grew up during her most integral years in a different environment with different ideals. She will always be outside of the society she lives in, which can play a toll over the years. Pilar may be ready to fully accept her hybrid ways, but this means she will also have to accept that she will always be on the outside looking in.

*only modern world*

Exile has changed and evolved since its earlier days. While it is no longer inflicted upon a people by a ruling monarch, politicians and leaders' policies still force people from their homelands, separating families and fragmenting cultural lines. This separation leads to a divided sense of self; the exile no longer belongs to his or her homeland, but will never belong to the country he or she flees to. Instead, the exile will always live between the two cultures, unable to fit in completely to his or her surroundings. In *Dreaming in Cuban*, Lourdes Puente believes herself to be saved and reinvented from her Cuban past when she moves to the United States. This is not the

*before the rise of nation*

case, though, for Lourdes merely finds a suitable armour in the United States to protect her from her past trauma; she never moves on from what happened to her, thus leaving her stuck in a divided sense of self she continues to try to mask. As well, Rufino Puente remains divided from both his country and his family, unable to fit in, a more than passive father to Pilar and husband to Lourdes. By the end of the novel, Pilar Puente realizes her hybrid existence will never change; she cannot change her dual identity into one main identity, but rather must live with the complexities her hybridity allows her. Pilar recognizes that she is able to move freely through both cultures, experiencing the positives and negatives and able to observe aspects of each that anyone without a hybrid identity would miss. Rather than becoming a marginalized Other that does not belong, Pilar uses her duality in her role as family recorder and historian; she makes what was a fragmented self into a more defined identity consisting of influences from both the United States and Cuba. An exilic identity becomes a part of the exile. It can never be erased or forgotten. It can, however, be used as something positive, so long as the exile comes to terms with the fact that he or she will never again belong to just one community. If the exile can accept the complexities that come along with having a dual identity, he or she can use the exilic identity to record and observe the aspects of culture that others miss. If the exile cannot come to terms with this, though, he or she will remain stuck and unable to move on from the traumas of losing the homeland.

she says  
a new her is born every day

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Scholarly  
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I submit my English 321 paper, “from thee springs/Ambition’s fire”: the Role of Ambition and Tradition in *The Prince of Parthia*,” as the end result of my completion of the Research Goal. I completed this paper this semester, Fall 2012, for Dr. Coronado. Like my Latina literature paper, I can honestly say I enjoyed the research process that went into creating this piece. This paper completes the goal successfully, as I had to incorporate a variety of different research methods.

The problems presented with this paper ultimately became the reason why I enjoyed writing it so much. Due to the fact that I picked the first American drama staged on an American theatre, I had little actual reviews or critical records of the play—at first. I had to do a fair amount of digging around using a multitude of different research methods. I incorporated a variety of different research strategies taught to me in my history courses, which proved invaluable when it came to cultivating my information for this paper. Not only did I apply historical knowledge to the text, but I also took the time to research dramatic theory and used Bertolt Brecht in my paper. The skills I had learned in Literary Analysis and throughout the rest of my upper level classes I had taken thus far made me confident that I could approach a new theoretical text on my own and apply it to my paper successfully. The research process was, as one can see, extensive. I had an outline, an annotated bibliography, a final paper proposal, and a rough draft to help me make the paper the best it could be by the time I turned it in. With each stage, I learned more about the play or theatre at the time and never grew tired of my topic. I wish I could go further with this paper and do more, as I feel there is still a lot left to say.

This paper taught me the excitement that can come out of finding and cultivating an argument of which there is little scholarly work done. I knew approaching this would

be difficult, but I also knew that my time in my major had given me the skills necessary to tackle such a task. This paper completes the goal, because the amount of research I did ultimately paid a key component in the success of my paper, and I have never done this breadth of research for an English class before.



Dr. Coronado


English 321

11 December 2012

“from thee springs/ Ambition’s fire”: the Role of Ambition and Tradition in  
*The Prince of Parthia*

Political turmoil, regicide, tragic young lovers, and scorned women: though such characters run rampant through the pages of Shakespeare, early American playwrights took these tropes and attempted to make them their own. Thomas Godfrey attempted such a feat with his work *The Prince of Parthia*, written in 1765. The tragedy was not performed until two years later, when the American Company put on the show on 24 April 1767 (Quinn 3). While not a major success, the play did receive a revival in 1915 (Quinn 4). It seems strange that the *The Prince of Parthia* is the first play written by an American and also performed by a cast of American actors, as it heavily imitates popular European (namely British) plays like *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*. However, correlated with the backdrop of growing tensions between Britain and its American colonies, the play takes part in a discussion about sentiments on both sides with its resonant themes of honour, admiration, duty, loyalty, and the right to rule. The text suggests that a political power can neither completely strive for its own ambitions, nor can it rely too heavily on its traditional past; a balance between the two must exist in order for a political system to retain success.

Godfrey wrote *The Prince of Parthia* during a time of growing turmoil between




British America and Britain; theatre of the time reflected this tension and though many critiques of Godfrey's play denounce any originality on his part, the play does address social changes and perceptions. In Colonial America, conservatives attempted to censor the theatre, leaving those that chose to bring drama to the stage in the radical faction. In his book *Performing Patriotism: National Identity in the Colonial and Revolutionary American Theater*, James Shaffer agrees with the statement that there is a palpable influence of the theatre on early American culture, as argued by Jeffrey Richards. Shaffer goes on to state that

Richards maintains that the religious and political lives of even the most staunchly anti-theatrical American colonists were informed by a performative ethos—the trope of the *theatrum mundi*, or world stage—that led public men in British America, especially prominent American revolutionaries as John Adams and George Washington, to draw on dramatic texts for political purposes in their writings and to comport themselves as actors on the public “stage” during the American Revolution (10).

This trope of *theatrum mundi*, the world as a stage, dates back to Shakespeare. It explains the theatricality and performance of politics during Colonial America. This shift in thinking and the way that political figures embraced this trope and applied it to their position makes drama a deeply ingrained aspect of American politics. This theatricality and expression of the performance in politics becomes prevalent in Colonial American plays, including *The Prince of Parthia*.

As tragedies are wont to do, the play begins with a charming hero. Godfrey, relying heavily on Shakespeare and other playwrights of the time, writes the tale of



Arsaces and his family. The play opens with Prince Arsaces of Parthia returning home after war, victorious, to the cheers of the people and flowers strewn amongst the street. Beloved prince of the kingdom, nearly everyone greets him with joy and exultation, save for his own brother, Vardanes. As the younger brother, Vardanes resents Arsaces his glory and his right to rule after their father, King Artabanus, dies; he also resents the fact that Arsaces has the young maiden Evanthe's heart. The play makes it clear early on of Vardanes' commitment to climbing to the top of the political ladder with the help of Lysias, an officer at court with a vendetta against the king.


As the play continues, conspiracies and secrets unfold as the storm (quite literally) brews in the background. Arsaces and Evanthe confess their love for each other, learning soon after that Evanthe's adored father, Bethas, lies in the prison, saved earlier in the play by Arsaces. After the two young lovers approach the king in order to take each other's hand, Vardanes gains the chance to convince his father of Arsaces' betrayal through a fabricated tale he knows the king will believe in order to get Evanthe back. The play comes to a close with the murder of the king and Arsaces' victory against his brother. Due to the fact that young lovers simply cannot survive in a tragedy, Evanthe takes poison after believing her maid has seen Arsaces' defeat by Vardanes' hand. She dies after learning her fatal mistake, which leads Arsaces to stab himself. What tangled webs Parthians weave, leaving the sole survivor in the family, Gortarzes, to unravel the mess the others have made.

The performance of these characters harkens back to plots made popular by Shakespeare and other contemporaries; audiences recognized *The Prince of Parthia*, and most likely knew what would happen on the stage from the beginning scene. Drama

[REDACTED]

theorist Bertolt Brecht discusses the performance of those on the stage in relation to the audience that watches them in his essay "A Short Organum for the Theatre." Within this essay, Brecht argues that these familiar performances relate back to the audience some aspect of their reality; even though these characters may seem fantastical and out-of-the-ordinary, their conflicts represent some conflict the audience members feel or recognize. Brecht states that the stage "constructs workable representations of society, which are then in a position to influence society, wholly and entirely as a game: for those who are constructing society it sets our society's experiences, past and present alike" (186). Even though Godfrey uses plot devices such as the vengeful brother out to destroy the good, heroic brother meant to take the throne, these character representations not only remind the audience of their British roots, but also brings to mind the struggle between Britain and her colonies; with the tensions of the American Revolution increasing, Americans filled the role of Vardanes, wanting desperately their own power, rather than having to watch their elder, Britain, assume all of the power over them.


Against dramatic soliloquies and ghosts, the play remains focused on the roles of ambition and tradition as motives to either gain or retain political power. Ambition for glory and a reputation like Arsaces' drives Vardanes' actions throughout the text. Jealous of Arsaces' social standing, Vardanes' states, "he's the bane/ Of all my hopes of greatness. Like the sun/ He rules the day, and like the night's pale Queen,/ My fainter beams are lost when he appears" (Godfrey 89). Vardanes places all the blame on Arsaces for his unhappiness, as he is the sole catalyst holding Vardanes back from achieving equally as great feats. Feminizing himself when placed next to Arsaces, Vardanes sees himself as the pale moon compared to Arsaces' bright sun—forever the second best,



weaker beam of light to shine upon the Earth. Envious, albeit critical, of Arsaces' reception from the citizens when he comes back home, Vardanes wonders if perhaps "there is magic in it [his name], PARTHIA'S drunk/ and giddy with joy;...O! curse the name, the idol of their joy" (Godfrey 88). In Vardanes' eye, Arsaces' takes on a supernatural identity, becoming something more than human through his role in the society and his perfect way in upholding the system. While this seems fantastical and out of place for colonists, Brecht argues, "What was popular yesterday is no longer so today, for the people of yesterday were not the people as it is today" ("The Popular and the Realistic" 1252). This speech and this way of thinking made sense to those living during Shakespeare's time, but a century later, it had fallen out of fashion. This is not to say that these characters and this way of thinking did not represent emotions or ambitions that the colonists did not express themselves; however, at this time America wanted to separate itself from anything British, thus it left behind this way of thinking and adopting a new "American" ideal. These characters and the plot they lived in simply did not fit into the growing American mold. The quest for ambition, though, fit in perfectly with the American desire to separate itself from Britain.


To combat Vardanes' desire for ambition and greatness, Arsaces takes on the traditional role of eldest son and soldier. Arsaces remains, until the end of the text, a loyal Parthian that follows the traditional rules of being a good soldier and leader. Three separate instances of Arsaces saving someone's life in the text appear, two told by his brother Gortazes, and one occurs when Arsaces convinces the King to spare Bethas (his noble captive). His reputation, discussed and outlined in the beginning of the play, sets him up to be a god of sorts, untouchable and glorious in all he does, whilst still managing





to remain noble and kind. Phraates, another officer at court, describes Arsaces as “generous, brave, and wise, and good,/ has skill to act, and noble fortitude/ to face bold danger, in the battle firm,/ and dauntless as a Lion fronts his foe” (Godfrey 83). This reputation derives not only from Arsaces’ noble deeds and heroic actions whilst he is away from home, but also encapsulates the fact that he performs his traditional role as eldest son to the King. Arsaces acts as the King’s firstborn son should. He saves lives, he destroys those whom need to be destroyed, he possesses both mercy and fierceness and the other honourable virtues that point to his future as an efficient ruler.

Though Arsaces plays the role of traditional, brave warrior, ready to accept the crown after his father’s death, he makes it clear to Evanthe that he wishes he did not have to fulfill the job that is, by birth, his to own. Evanthe expresses the desire to run away with Arsaces, far from the confines that their community places on them, to a place where “Ambitious views shall never blast [their] joys” (Godfrey 141). Evanthe does not specify whose ambitions will prevent them from being happy, but the fact that ambition plays a role in the community worries her. As the play progresses, ambition takes on a harsher guise, deriving a negative connotation from characters such as Evanthe’s father, who recognize that ambition for the sake of vengeance or power will ultimately lead to chaos. In response, Arsaces asks, “Why was I curs’d with empire? Born to rule?—/ Would I had been some humble Peasant’s son,/ ...my only care,/ To guard my flock” (Godfrey 143). Arsaces views his position as an obligation; the traditional system of power confining him to a life he does not wish to lead. His actions, carefully thought out so as to follow the system he has grown up to adhere to, merely mimic the actions he has been told to perform. The confines of his role in the society keep him from following a



path of his own choosing. He cannot simply run off with Evanthe, no matter how much he may want to, due to this obligation. By doing this, the text shows the strictness of following purely traditional paths, reflecting that the individual cannot follow his desires within such a system. Tying this back in to the struggle between America and Britain, the text could point out to colonists that they must break away from the traditional political system they left in the first place in order to follow their desires as a new nation and people.

As the play progresses, the portrayal of emotion in both ambition and tradition becomes more prevalent and the cause for much of the instability in the Parthia court. Both Vardanes and Arsaces make decisions guided by their emotions. Vardanes seeks to steal this power from Arsaces not only for ambition's sake, but also because he loves Evanthe. In some ways, Vardanes' feelings for Evanthe lead to the end result of trying to take the throne away from Arsaces. Vardanes states, "Unblest with any views to sooth ambition,/ Rob me of all my reas'ning faculties./ Arsaces gains Evanthe, fills the throne,/ while I am doomed to foul obscurity" (Godfrey 124). Not only does Vardanes view himself as damned for being the second born son, unable to rule or have a role or any true meaning the court, he also feels that his brother has managed to steal Evanthe away from him. Vardanes admits that he has been robbed of "reas'ning faculties," which draws attention to the fact that such an excess of emotion used in such a manner only leads to the inability to rationalize one's actions in a proper way. Vardanes uses his emotions as an excuse to strive for ambition.

Gotarzes, the youngest son, encapsulates the balance that must be adhered to in order for a political system to remain successful. Gotarzes expresses a desire for

I submit my English 417 paper “The Monstrous and the Heroic: Two Sides of the Same Coin?” as the end result of my completion of the History and Theory Goal. The material in this class focused on medieval British literature; in particular, it focused on monstrosity within the texts read throughout the semester. The locations involved in the texts did not remain stationary in Britain; the texts spanned from the island to other Nordic regions, such as Iceland. In order to achieve success in the class, I had to familiarize myself with texts that were in Middle English and a history that, at that time, I knew little about. As well, I had to familiarize myself with the beliefs of the time that structured the way the texts were written and approached.

The main problem presented with this paper was using texts structured so differently from my own and using theory that, at times, was hard to approach. I overcame these challenges by not only working with the professor, but by taking the time to sit and re-read the texts as many times as necessary until I knew how I wanted to approach the texts. Answering the question, “what makes a monster?” was challenging, as well, but with the help of this paper, I finally reached a conclusion. I had to think about this paper differently than other papers and structure it in a more intense argumentative fashion in order to enter the literary discussion at hand with my topic.

While this class and this paper challenged me at times, at the end of the course I knew that this was what I wanted to study in graduate school. The research I had to do into the history and the theoretical terms I had to familiarize myself with led me to realize that I not only enjoyed the subject matter, but that I wanted to study and professionally enter the literary conversations I took a part of within the paper.

Dr. Oswald  
English 417  
20 December 2011


The Monstrous and the Heroic:  
Two Sides of the Same Coin?

Monsters and the heroes that slay them: the combination has been around for centuries. Typically, the hero slays the monster just at the right moment, saving the community from the tyranny of the monstrous being, gaining both praise and desire from the local damsels who swoon at such courageous actions. By classical definition, heroes are men who exemplify extraordinary strength and courage and often garner praise for their exploits. On the other hand, monsters are classically defined as grotesque creatures that exemplify many of the same characteristics as heroes, such as extraordinary strength, but monsters receive no praise because (typically) they use their strength for evil purposes. The line between hero and monster is very thin, the qualities so similar that some heroes could find themselves classified as monsters, as well. One such hero is the character Beowulf from the epic poem *Beowulf*, who finds himself viewed as a hero by the warriors surrounding him even though he possess monstrous qualities. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Grettir Asmundarson (though he possess many of the same qualities as Beowulf) finds himself viewed as a monster. Individual communities make collective decisions to determine what is or is not monstrous; with the application of Judith Butler's theory on performance and drag, Beowulf stands as a hero whilst Grettir becomes a monster.

Judith Butler, a gender theorist, discusses the issue of identity in her essay,


“Imitation and Gender Insubordination.” Though Butler deals with the issue of gender identity in her article, the theory can be applied to any category of identity. The main dilemma Butler faces in the essay is the problem and anxiety of *being*; Butler argues that to claim any one central “I am” in an identity is problematic because it suggests a totalization of the one “I.” This would mean that no freedom within an identity and only one true, permanent identity exists. Butler describes identity as dependent on performance and play; “...how and where I play at being one [a lesbian] is the way in which that ‘being’ gets established, instituted, circulated, and confirmed” (Butler 1711). This means that identity is wholly dependent on the society one finds himself in because that individual society, based on their perceptions of an action, determines what identity a performance constitutes. The location in which an act occurs determines if the act will be seen as either beneficial or detrimental to a society. However, just because a society collectively agrees on an identity does not mean the identity becomes a permanent aspect of a person’s life because “it is precisely the repetition of that play that establishes as well the instability of the very category that it constitutes” (Butler 1711). Thus, the repetition of a performance determines if that identity will remain the same. If the performance stops, the identity changes. Along the same lines, the repetition of the performance shows the instability of that category of identity. Hence, the mimicry of an identity establishes the “I,” while also proving that these identity categories cannot hold up without repetition.

Other scholars embrace the issue of heroic and monstrous identity, such as David Williams’ book, *Deformed Discourse: the Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature*, which offers a close look at the differences between societal perceptions



of the monster and the different types of monster vernacular that exist. According to Williams, the categories of monstrosity depend entirely on the culture that categorizes them. Each culture, based on their perceptions, define what is or is not monstrous. While Williams focuses on deformed monsters' role within a society, his material on culture deciding monster identity applies to non-deformed monsters, as well. Likewise, Jeffrey Cohen discusses issues with heroic identity in his essay "The Armour of an Alienating Identity," as well as discussing the issue of dual identities in his chapter "In the Borderlands" from his book *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity*. In a chapter titled "Grettir and Grendel Again" in his book *Pride and Prodigies*, author Andy Orchard outlines the similiarities between the *Beowulf* and *Grettir* narratives; Orchard reaches the conclusion that while Beowulf and Grettir both begin their narratives as heroes, by the end of his saga Grettir transforms into a monster. Orchard relies heavily on the concept of monstrous and heroic identity in his essay, discussing the differences between the two in great detail.

Monsters exist, partly, because an individual community places them under the category of Other. Many well-known monster categories include creatures brimming with either excess or lack, their physical deformations separating them from the community. However, not all monsters have a physical deformation. Likewise, some cases exist in which human beings exhibit such monstrous characteristics that they appear as monsters to the people around them. In the case of Beowulf and Grettir, both of the characters are human men with abilities that exceed normal human limitations. A close analysis of the text shows the reader that both characters have no physical deformations; although Grettir is taller than the men in his community, the text does not give him giant stature. Thus,



physically these characters do not have monster status; however, they are monstrous humans. David Williams claims in his novel *Disformed Discourse: the Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature* that monsters challenge “the epistemological authority of form, structure, and identity and leads the mind toward a different perspective of how things are” (59). This means that monsters challenge the order of a given community, as well as the categories the community has towards different identities. Monsters critique and challenge social order in Medieval literature. Monstrosity rebels against defined categories of behavior in a way to either challenge and subvert this order or reaffirm it. Both Beowulf and Grettir exhibit this quality; because of their excessive strength, the characters challenge the category of human males in their societies. Their identity becomes dependent upon the role they perform within their community. The cultural perceptions of the performance decides whether to construe the action as either monstrous or heroic; performances constructed by society to be either monstrous or heroic depend on if the performance works to the society’s advantage.

Beowulf has many monstrous traits that are accepted due to the fact that he uses them in order to help the community. Beowulf, though fully human, has the extraordinary strength of thirty men in one of his arms. Excessive strength is one of the many traits listed over and over again in many Medieval texts (such as the *Liber Monstrorum*) as a defining quality of a monster. Beowulf’s community, though, does not view him as a monster because he uses his strength to their advantage. At the beginning of the text, Beowulf arrives at Heorot and vows to help them defeat Grendel (or die trying), thus proving right away that he plans on performing as the hero and using his strength to help the community of Heorot. When Grendel arrives he discovers that “the strength of his

I submit my English 495 (hereafter Senior Seminar) paper, "Performance of the Gods: Power and Dominance in *Watership Down*," as the end product of my completion of the Collaborative Learning Goal. As the capstone to my English major, I focused on working within the literary community I had to be a part of within the class. In this case, I familiarized myself with children's literature scholars and what they had written, particularly in the realm of fantasy. By doing so, I could tailor my end paper in such a way that it was towards that literary community; I entered the literary conversation taking place with the research I completed for this paper. As I plan to continue my studies and further my education in graduate school, this paper was the perfect opportunity for me to learn how to more formally enter the literary discussion and submit a paper engaged in that discussion.

The difficulties presented with this paper had most to do with finding different ways to incorporate my ideas into the paper without sounding repetitive. As this paper came out to be twenty-three pages long, I had a lot of similar material to cover within these pages and the problem I ran into was presenting these ideas in innovative ways so as not to fall into the mechanical, stock structure of setting up my sentences in the same way.

Through completing this class, my assessment of what an English major does was not necessarily strengthened, but I realized upon finishing the piece that everything I had been taught in my previous English classes culminated into this paper. I used techniques I had learned throughout my major to complete the longest paper I have had to write thus far. I did so by relying on the skills taught to me by previous professors and through what I have learned with the completion of each new paper for classes.



Dr. Lenard

English 495

12 December 2012

Performance of the Gods:

Power and Dominance in *Watership Down*

For centuries, the question of what makes a good leader has prevailed in the literature of a multitude of different cultures. Every culture has its own specific myths and legends; men who excel and embody every noble virtue, surpassing everything thrown against them to stand victorious. The hero undergoes a number of trials and tribulations, sometimes on his own, oftentimes with a group of close individuals he trusts. The hero's quest is of particular interest in children's literature, especially reflected in children's fantasy novels. In this category lies *Watership Down* by Richard Adams, a novel concerning the lives of a group of rabbits on a journey to make a warren all of their own. Hazel, the leader of these rabbits and the hero of the story, comes face-to-face with many different challenges throughout the novel. Of particular interest is the way the text aligns Hazel's leadership skills and warren with General Woundwort's leadership style and Efrafa. The text presents both leaders as capable and able to run a warren, though both have radically different ways of going about it. By the end of the novel, both characters are rewarded for their actions and leadership abilities with an elevated, god-like stature amongst the other rabbits. Power, then, becomes determined by the duos'

ability to not only assert themselves within the warren as the Chief Rabbit, but also the ability to successfully raise themselves up as a being higher than the ones they serve over. *Watership Down* reinforces leadership qualities more found, oftentimes, in oppressive societies in which the subjects must conform to the leader's desires. While the villain, General Woundwort, dies at the end of the text, he does so elevated into a god-like position; Hazel, the hero, shares many of the same characteristics as Woundwort, and throughout the story shares an identity with the mythical rabbit El-ahrairah.

For a children's novel, *Watership Down* has many surprising violent elements, which makes the most complicated aspect of the novel lie in attempting to place it comfortably in one genre of literature. Since its release in 1972, many of Adams' harshest critiques of the novel argue that it is simply too violent for children. Much of this violence comes about through direct relations between Hazel's warren and General Woundwort's warren. While the leaders share similar qualities of leadership, their warrens function completely differently. These differences not only determine the overall success of the warren, but also critique the way that some systems of power tend to be quick to violence towards others, rather than work together in a peaceful manner. Looking at the way that the warrens function and the power structure that the leader has in place becomes the only way to determine which leadership qualities are reinforced by the end of the novel; even this proves difficult, as neither of the two major warrens are displaced or punished by the dénouement of *Watership Down*. In a discussion about the reception of the novel, editor of *Children's Literature Review*, Tom Burns quotes Kathryn Hume, who stated that the novel "the plot degenerates into the adventures of animals with human brains...The novelty and strangeness which entering a rabbit's mind

[REDACTED]

should entail quickly disappears. The fantasy of this story is literally only skin deep; the minds of these furry humans are but little touched by newness or originality.” (Burns 3). This critique, however, does not account for the originality of certain *themes* within the novel.<sup>1</sup> Adams presents a society (made of rabbits, yes, but still a recognizable society to contemporary systems) that struggles against a democratic people and a people oppressed by a dictator-type figure. In the 70s, a mere three decades after World War II, many people chose to forget about what had happened in the past. For Adams to present such difficult themes, to a *children’s* audience no less, makes his story original for its time. Not only does the text present this political power structure, but it does so by aligning familiar arguments and critiques in the backdrop of rabbit warrens.

As the novel deals with power relations between Chief Rabbits and their warrens and how these warrens communicate with each other, the novel warrants an in-depth analysis of the way that systems of power function. Michel Foucault, a French theorist and historian, discusses the notion of power in a multitude of his different philosophies, asking not only where power comes from, but also how political leaders or monarchs exhibit the power they receive onto their subjects. While Foucault oftentimes focuses on the effect of this power’s punishment to the subjects’ bodies, he has much to say about how political systems discipline their subjects into adhering to their rule. Foucault states what power is by outlining what it is not:

By power, I do not mean “Power” as a group of institutions and mechanisms that

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<sup>1</sup> A reference book I used to research such common tropes and themes in fantasy novels was *Imaginary Worlds* by Lin Carter. A wonderful read, the book taught me that fantasy novels truly can come in any structure, depending upon how the piece in question is looked upon. Carter’s book was a great help with the research process and much of how I went about looking for the rest of my research came from what I learned within her arguments. Though I used nothing directly from her within the paper, she was an integral part of the process to write this paper.

[REDACTED]

ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state. By power, I do not mean, either, a mode of subjugation which, in contrast to violence, has the form of the rule. Finally, I do not have in mind a general system of domination exerted by one group over another, a system whose effects, through successive derivations, pervade the entire social body. (*The History of Sexuality* 92)

In order to think about power, according to Foucault, one must first see that power does not come from one specific institution or political figure. These figures that exhibit power and rule over a group of people are not inherently powerful. Foundations of power always remain on shaky footing, because the power they retain can always be taken from them and transferred to another system. Power is not one concrete thing; it is not tangible and one cannot point to it as merely a way in which to subjugate people. Power, rather, “comes from everywhere...it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (*The History of Sexuality* 93). Power exists in any one institution or figure by virtue of public consent, as the subjects allow themselves to be subordinate to that particular political system in place. Adams’ novel reinforces this belief that power can come from different places and that different societies can use power differently throughout the entirety of *Watership Down* in every warren Hazel and his group come across.

The relationship between the leader of the individual warren and the way in which the warren itself is run tells a lot about the reinforced leadership skills that leaders must adhere to in order to gain success as a ruler. The rabbit communities in *Watership Down* reflect familiar power systems in place presently, as well as in the past. The novel begins by outlining the Sandleford warren and its power system. At the center of the power




system is the Chief Rabbit, who surrounds himself by his Owsla. Owsla members, “a group of strong or clever rabbits,” exist as a tool to exercise the Chief Rabbit’s commands, their authority coming from the main power source (Adams 14). The ways in which the Owsla members exhibit this authority depends on what type of warren they live in, as the text states:

In one warren, the Owsla may be the band of a warlord: in another, it may consist largely of clever patrollers or garden-raiders. Sometimes a good storyteller may find a place; or a seer, or intuitive rabbit. In the Sandleford warren at this time, the Owsla was rather military in character. (Adams 14)


The traits of the Owsla members depends entirely on what the individual warren needs in order to function successfully. In some cases, the Owsla members can display cunning, trickster qualities, much like Hazel. In other cases, the Owsla members must exhibit harsh, military characteristics. The ways in which the Owsla members behave acts as a reflection on the individual warren and the way it is run by its Chief Rabbit. Like any group of individuals brought together to function as the physical representation of the leader’s power, these individuals get allotted certain rights and privileges the other rabbits do not, a notion particularly reinforced in Efrafa. The texts’ main characters do not necessarily reinforce and subscribe to this notion of how a warren should be run.

From the beginning of the novel, the text presents Hazel as a leader dissatisfied with the way the Owsla treats both the members of Sandleford warren and any outsiders they come across. In a discussion with his friend Fiver, Hazel states, “It’s the same all the time. “These are my claws, so this is my cowslip.” “These are my teeth, so this is my burrow.” ‘I’ll tell you, if I get into the Owsla, I’ll treat outsiders with a bit of decency’”



(Adams 14). Hazel, then, sets himself up as a more democratic-type leader, wishing instead of asserting complete dominance over a particular group to, instead, treat everyone with decency and kindness. Hazel retains this democratic leadership throughout the text, albeit with a few bumps in the road. No matter the choices that Hazel makes that do not completely adhere to the more democratic aspect of his warren, he never assumes a role like that of the leaders that completely fail to protect their warren and the rabbits within it.


One of the main downfalls of two warrens in the text is the leader's pride and personal ambition, early referenced to by the destruction of the Sandleford warren due to the personal flaws of the Chief Rabbit. The Sandleford warren's Chief Rabbit, the Threarah, does not heed Fiver's proclamation that everyone within the warren needs to leave, as he has had a prophetic vision of the destruction of their home. Rather, he brushes off Fiver and Hazel's pleas. The Threarah, a strong leader capable of taking care of his warren and once smart enough to completely isolate them to protect them from a disease, now damns them to this prophetic death, because he, "doesn't like anything he hasn't thought of for himself" (Adams 24). Hazel, believing in Fiver's vision, takes a group of rabbits and leaves the warren, rebelling against the political structure he lives in. This does not mean, though, that Hazel's new warren will be completely different from the warren he was raised in, due to the fact that "resistance is never in a position exteriority in relation to power" (*The History of Sexuality* 95). Resistance to a political figure or structure in place, rather, exists in correlation with the structure rebelled against; no matter what differences the rebellion sets up against the structure, it always exists within that same structure. Thus, the rebellion, oftentimes, becomes subsumed into the



system first rebelled against and takes on traits that the system had. Hazel is not an entirely different leader from the Threarah, even though the rabbits that follow him exalt him as a sort of rabbit god. Hazel assumes a role and identity larger than himself quite quickly due to the more democratic traits he performs.

The text sets Hazel apart from the other rabbits within his warren by placing a mythical, demi-god identity onto him. From the start, Hazel takes on traits similar to the mythical rabbit El-ahrairah. One of the main qualities that Hazel has that makes this identity placement easy is his ability to trick others; the figure of the trickster pops up in literature spanning many different cultures and centuries. While this trickster figure usually has negative connotations along with it, *Watership Down* exalts it, placing it above the other rabbits due to its ability to survive and outsmart the enemies. The first appearance of Hazel as El-ahrairah comes when Hazel leaves the Sandleford warren with the group of rabbits that pledge themselves along with his and Fiver's cause, with Dandelion stating, "Running our risks for us, are you—like El-ahrairah?" (Adams 32). In this scene, Hazel runs across an open field to a nearby tree, going first so that if any dangerous enemies appear, the only one harmed will be himself.

One of the main differences that sets Hazel apart from the Threarah is his willingness to listen to others' suggestions. Hazel, rather than completely shut out any critiques or ideas about what to do next, listens to his fellow rabbits. Hazel recognizes that in order for the warren to successfully function, the different strengths and qualities the other rabbits bring must be utilized. This means that Hazel, while assuming the role of Chief Rabbit and leader of the group, also becomes one specific part of the group that needs strengths other than his own to function. Each rabbit in Hazel's warren serves as an



individual cog in the overall machine. This group mentality becomes especially apparent after the difficulties the group faces in Cowslip's warren. While in this warren, the rabbits as a group began to fracture, some choosing to accept the lifestyle at Cowslip's warren while others turned away from it. The *denouement* of this incident almost resulted in one of Hazel's close warren members, Bigwig's, death. This near death experience solidified the group as one being:

Since leaving the warren of the snares they had become warier, shrewder, a tenacious band who understood each other and worked together. There was no more quarreling. The truth about the warren had been a grim shock. They had come closer together, relying on and valuing each other's capacities. They knew now that it was on these and on nothing else that their lives depended, and they were not going to waste anything they possessed between them. (Adams 129)

The rabbits come together, reinforcing the group, but also Hazel's leadership. The group makes the conscious decision to follow Hazel, and even though Hazel sets himself up as merely one of the warren, he finds himself also separated from the group. Hazel causes the group to become one and they know that they can rely on him to get them out of tough situations, particularly after the incident at Cowslip's warren. This moment solidifies Hazel, as well as solidifies his identity as an El-ahrairah type figure.


Though it may not seem as such, *Watership Down* retains many elements within it that qualify it as a fantasy novel. The largest indicator, of course, remains the fact that the novel is from the point of view of rabbits. However, the novel also incorporates other fantastical elements, such as the figure of a mythical god, as well as this god's involvement in the overall creation story. Given the fantastical environment, many






fantasy novels include mythical figures or legends within their stories. It is not uncommon to see different mythological creatures within a fantasy text; *Watership Down* relies on this common trope, as well. Due to the prevalent nature of myths and the fact that they can cross boundaries and present themselves in a variety of different kinds of texts, many scholars have studied the structure behind the myth. One such scholar is Claude Lévi-Strauss in his essay “The Structural Study of Myth.” Lévi-Strauss states that “a myth always refers to events alleged to have taken place long ago. But what gives the myth an operational value is that the specific pattern described is timeless; it explains the present and the past as well as the future” (861). The figure of El-ahrairah fits this mold. He exists as a way to structure and describe the rabbits’ past, but also retains qualities that are integral to the fulfillment of the continuance of the rabbit society. The heroes of the novel hold him up as the best example of a leader, and the qualities reminiscent to the mythical legend that Hazel has are constantly reinforced throughout the text. The text positions El-ahrairah in the same category as other mythical legends and states, ““What Robin Hood is to the English and John Henry to the American Negroes, Elil-Hrair-Rah, or El-ahrairah—The Prince with a Thousand Enemies—is to rabbits” (Adams 32). Categorizing El-ahrairah in this fashion not only legitimizes the character, but also alludes to how the traits both the character and Hazel share that make them a leader to look up to.

As Lévi-Strauss points out, the mythical character exists as a way to indicate what has happened in the past, as well as what continues to happen and must happen in the future; Hazel’s leadership skills and the way he assumes an El-ahrairah identity gives credence to this notion. Through assuming this identity, Hazel reinforces what qualities



make a successful leader; he also reinforces his own position as more than a regular rabbit when he performs these actions. Celia Catlett Anderson discusses the role of myths in the novel in her essay "Troy, Carthage, and Watership Down." In this essay, Anderson states, "Hazel, the leader of the new rabbit band, himself shares many qualities with epic heroes" and eventually reaches the conclusion that through having such a mythically identified leader, the other warren members will find themselves assumed into rabbit lore, as well because "[they] are heroes who have fought battles...[that will be] told to future generations along with the tales of El-ahrairah" (12). The other rabbits within the warren, then, are rewarded for Hazel's actions and become part of this mythical cycle that reinforces proper behaviour and helps shape the formation of future generations.

One of the most reinforced qualities that Hazel encapsulates is the willingness to listen to others and allow freedom of expression within the warren. Hazel remains a successful leader not because he carries the most military strength or exhibits larger physical characteristics than the other rabbits in his warren. Instead, Hazel looks out for group members and puts their lives over his; Hazel also knows how to successfully run a warren through incorporating the other warren members' strengths into the everyday functions of the community. Hazel realizes that the most success comes from capitalizing on everyone's individual strengths. As the text makes clear, the other warren members do not question "Bigwig's strength, Fiver's insight, Blackberry's wits or Hazel's authority. When the rats came, Buckthorn and Silver had obeyed Bigwig and stood their ground. The rest had followed Hazel when he roused them and, without explanation, told them to go quickly outside the barn..." (Adams 129). Everything functions as a group and




community, because each rabbit knows that he or she can bring something new and valuable to the rest of the group. Blackberry performs as the man behind the innovative ideas, knowing how to create rafts and other such instruments, while Dandelion performs as the storyteller and Fiver performs as the rabbit with a mystical insight. Each rabbit has his own strength; Hazel uses these strengths to ground his own authority. The freedom of expression and democracy that Hazel allows within the warren establishes his successful leadership qualities.

Hazel, then, performs the heroic role established in most children's literature; he is the leader that every reader should strive to act as. Hazel listens to those members of his warren and looks out for them; whenever Hazel shows moments of too much pride or foolishness, he has the other rabbits to bring him back down and reinforce his position. In one such instance, when Hazel wishes to go to a farm in order to steal some does back to bring to the warren, Fiver reminds him of his duties as Chief Rabbit:

“Risking your life and other rabbits' lives or something that's of little or no value to us...Oh, yes, of course the others will go with you. You're their Chief Rabbit. You're supposed to decide what's sensible and they trust you. Persuading them will prove nothing, but three or four dead rabbits will prove you're a fool, when it's too late.” (Adams 212).

In this moment, Fiver must attempt to get Hazel to remember that because of his authority, the other rabbits will blindly follow him, and that he must take everyone in the warren into consideration before deciding to do something. Thus, whenever Hazel seems to slip from his successful performance, he has assistance there to help him remember what he must do as leader of the warren. This emphasis on remembering one's place




within a group and looking out for the betterment of the community rather than individual desires within a child's novel aids in the creation of a child's moral reasoning skill set. Literature has the ability to greatly impact a child's life and by presenting these choices for the hero of the story, the child learns to recognize moral reasoning skills which have "been identified by the ability to make ethical choices upon presented with a moral dilemma" and includes "the ability to articulate reasons for those choices" (Kremar 464).<sup>2</sup> Hazel has to make ethical choices for the good of his warren, and this need to morally reason through a situation applies to readers whether they are children or adults. Critiques of *Watership Down* look down upon the novel because of the violence within it, but completely ignore the way the novel depicts situations commonly found in reality. The troubling aspect of the novel remains that while it reinforces good leadership skills, it reinforces these skills in both the hero and the villain.

The later half of *Watership Down* both aligns and contrasts Hazel's warren alongside General Woundwort's Efrafa. It becomes apparent quickly that the two warrens function radically different from the other. Compared to Hazel's democratic nature, General Woundwort performs as a militaristic, dictator-like leader. Efrafa runs under his strict control with nary a rabbit hair out of place. Woundwort set a system in place in which everything functions on time and efficient, with his Owsla and his Council to help him. When Hazel and his warren come across Efrafa, the warren's system is failing. Faced with severe overcrowding issues and does that have started to re-absorb their litters, Efrafa's atmosphere is tense and slowly deteriorating. A trio of members from

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<sup>2</sup> The effect of violence on children and how that violence is structured within the fantasy realm was a great facet of research to explore with this paper. Not only did I look at this article by Marina Kremar, but a behavioral study completed by Eric Klinger was integral in the research process; I could not directly implement any of his findings, but his study helped structure how I looked at children's literature.



Hazel's warren come across Efrafa and end up getting taken in by the Efracans. They eventually escape and go back to Hazel, giving all the details about how Efrafa is run. Holly states, "Most of them can't do anything but what they're told. They've never been out of Efrafa and never smelled an enemy" (Adams 240). The rabbits within Efrafa are not only isolated from the rest of the world, they are naïve about life outside of Efrafa. While Woundwort has created this successful, efficient community, he does not expose the rabbits to anything outside of Efrafa. He, instead, makes them dependent upon himself for protection. He holds their lives entirely in his hands. Foucault discusses this power in relation to sovereigns and states "The sovereign exercised his right of life only by exercising his right to kill, or by refraining from killing... The right which was formulated as the 'power of life and death' was in reality the right to *take* life or *let* live" (*The History of Sexuality* 136). While Woundwort is by no means a sovereign, he is the head of the state of Efrafa. He determines what punishments should be doled out, as well as how the community must function. As the strongest rabbit in the warren, his physicality makes him the most feared as well as the ruler. Thus, his stature both in size and in power assures his role over the other rabbits. He decides what Marks the rabbits will join and controls every aspect of their everyday lives. If one decides to run away and escape, Woundwort decides how to punish that rabbit, and how any traitor will ultimately die.

A common trope in children's literature is the villain; Woundwort fills this role, but interestingly enough, his "villainous" qualities remain reinforced throughout the entirety of the end of the text. Many of Woundwort's villainous qualities come about through his use of his stature to dominate and control others, placing his own beliefs onto