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INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy is an open access, peer reviewed journal focused on the intersection of popular culture and pedagogy. While some open access journals charge a publication fee for authors to submit, *Dialogue* is committed to creating and maintaining a scholarly journal that is accessible to all—meaning that there is no charge for either the author or the reader.

The Journal is interested in contributions that offer theoretical, practical, pedagogical, and historical examinations of popular culture, including interdisciplinary discussions and those which examine the connections between American and international cultures. In addition to analyses provided by contributed articles, the Journal also encourages submissions for guest editions, interviews, and reviews of books, films, conferences, music, and technology.

For more information and to submit manuscripts, please visit www.journaldialogue.org or email the editors, A. S. CohenMiller, Editor in Chief, or Kurt Depner, Managing Editor at editors@journaldialogue.org.

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Social Justice from the Twilight Zone: Rod Serling as Human Rights Activist

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ABSTRACT

Rod Serling achieved critical acclaim in the First Golden Age of Television writing realist teleplays that express a strong moral sense and social consciousness. With the decline of anthology drama at the close of the 1950s, Serling created *The Twilight Zone*, which would become a forum for telling relevant stories while circumventing commercial and bureaucratic interference. As a means of exploring Serling's use of drama as a tool for social justice, this paper compares themes from *The Twilight Zone* and *Night Gallery* with charter and constitutional statements of human rights. The United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* is the moral template applied in this discussion. Serling saw drama as a political act and his commitment to social justice often extended to his activities off the page. The content and consequences of his 1968 speech at Moorpark College are cited as an important example of his real world political behavior.

Keywords: Rod Serling, Twilight Zone, Night Gallery, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Science Fiction Television, Golden Age of Television, Television Censorship

THINGS AND IDEAS: POLITICS AND SCIENCE FICTION

The use of futuristic settings and narratives to convey social messages and political arguments is not new to science fiction in any medium. Examples range from the techno-optimism of Hugo Gernsback's *Ralph 124C 41+* (1911), the dystopias of Huxley, Zamyatin, and Atwood; the literary and cinematic future histories in Wells' *Things to Come* (1936); and even the morality plays sometimes found in the television series *Star Trek* (1966-29) and *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-94). Not every science fiction story may be a political tract, but science fiction can be a relevant and powerful vehicle for social commentary. As the scholars Hassler and Wilcox observed:

> The politics of the real world on our planet continues with events, with struggle, with individual and collective success and failure. The fictional world of science fiction continues to be reinterpreted, newly invented and widely attended to in our culture. (vii)

In other words, ongoing and active connections exist between politics and science fiction – with events, things, and ideas forming the basis of social polemics and serving as part of the fictional world where the stories take place. From Jonathan Swift's book *Gulliver's Travels* (1726, amended 1735) to Cory Doctorow's *Little Brother* (2008) and the Canadian television series *Orphan Black* (2013-2017), politics have provided both cultural fuel and creative structures for speculative storytelling, most especially for the science fiction genre.

Rod Serling started his writing career as one of television's "angry young men" from the medium's first golden age in the 1950s and the author of many critically acclaimed realist dramas.[1] He is now primarily remembered as a leading practitioner in the fields of science fiction, fantasy and horror; his best-known television projects were *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964) and, to a lesser extent, *Night Gallery* (1969-1973).

On the surface, Serling's literary career path might appear to represent a major change in genre and creative focus (from realist to fantasist), but on closer examination, there is a consistent and growing concern with human worth and social justice in all of his major works. As noted by scholar Leslie Dale Feldman: "...his writing was more than science fiction; it was political theory" (6).

This paper examines three episodes of *The Twilight Zone* and three *Night Gallery* segments and compares them with specific articles from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [UDHR]. These examples represent the range of Serling's work in speculative fiction with some of the most overt statements of political themes. The purpose of this comparison is not to assert that Serling set out to deliberately educate viewers about a specific international legal charter, but to explore how the political message of one of the 20th Century's most important television dramatists closely parallels and complements the goals of a landmark proclamation of human freedom and dignity.

CULTIVATING THE VAST WASTELAND

Examining the broader cultural and political contexts in which these episodes of *The Twilight Zone* and *Night Gallery* were produced is informative because the state of American broadcast television in the 1960s both shaped the course of Serling's career as a writer, and influenced the content and format of his scripted dramas.

In his famous 1961 speech, "Television and the Public Interest," to the National Association of Broadcasters, Federal Communications Commission Chair Newton Minow noted that there were indeed *some* excellent television programs on the three existent national networks and he even named *The Twilight Zone* as one of them. However, the FCC chairman then issued the following challenge to network professionals:

> But when television is bad, nothing is worse. I invite each of you to sit down in front of your television set when your station goes on the air and stay there, for a day, without a book, without a magazine, without a newspaper, without a profit and loss sheet or a

> rating book to distract you. Keep your eyes glued to that set until the station signs off. I can assure you that what you will observe is a *vast wasteland* [emphasis added]).

Creating and communicating in such an intellectually and creatively bankrupt milieu filled with (in Minow's words): "unbelievable families, blood and thunder, mayhem, violence, sadism, murder, western bad men, western good men, private eyes, gangsters, more violence and cartoons" offered little opportunity to tell stories of any value or artistic integrity. After Minow's speech, "a vast wasteland" became critical shorthand for the argument that television was undergoing an inevitable process of crass commercialism and the "dumbing down" of content to the lowest intellectual denominator. As of 1961, there seemed little potential to use drama and storytelling to explore political issues or advance the cause of human rights and social justice.

TRAVELING THROUGH ANOTHER DIMENSION: THE ACTIVIST DISGUISED AS ENTERTAINER

By the end of the 1950s, Rod Serling was one of the most famous and honored writers in television. Teleplays such as *Patterns* (1955), *Requiem for a Heavyweight* (1956), and *The Comedian* (1957) were powerful and respected highlights of television's first Golden Age of drama. He received six Emmy awards for these and other plays, as well as the Peabody and Sylvania awards (Doll).

The impact of Serling's vision is found in Jack Gould's review of *Patterns* in *The New York Times*, printed soon after its first broadcast:

> Nothing in months has excited the television industry as much as the Kraft Television Theatre's production of *Patterns*, an original play by Rod Serling. The enthusiasm is justified. In writing, acting and direction, *Patterns* will stand as one of the high points in the TV medium's evolution … a repeat performance at an early date should be mandatory.

In the era of live television drama, when programs were not routinely videotaped, a call for a rebroadcast was quite extraordinary and one that NBC agreed with, setting up a second performance the next month.

A survey of the body of Rod Serling's work reveals that he viewed the processes of writing and storytelling as political acts. Much of his fiction contains moral and political themes, and Serling publicly stated that it was the duty of writers to explore relevant and socially significant content in their work. He resisted the interference of sponsors, censors, or outside agencies in the exercise of this artistic responsibility stating that: "I think it is criminal that we are not permitted to make dramatic note of social evils that exist, of controversial themes as they are inherent in our society" (Zen).

Serling also had astonishing creative output. He wrote 99 of the 156 episodes of *The Twilight Zone,* and penned several major motion pictures including *Seven Days in May* (1964) and *Planet of the Apes* (1968). He found time to teach at Antioch College and was involved in political causes including the Unitarian Universalist Association, the American Civil Liberties Union, and campaigning for incumbent Pat Brown against Ronald Reagan in the California 1966 gubernatorial race (Zen).

Serling's concerns about the political meaning and artistic merits of scripted television led to the creation of *The Twilight Zone*. At the end of the 1950s, and increasingly in the 1960s, it was not unusual for writers to encounter regular interference with the content of scripts from sponsors who feared their products could be cast in an unfavorable light or that certain themes might alienate audience members and potential consumers. One biographer provides a specific example of this commercially-motivated censorship:

> Serling was even more shocked and angered that year (1956) to what happened to "Noon on Doomsday", which was inspired by a murder case then in the news – the Emmett Till case, in which a young black boy had allegedly been kidnapped and killed by two white men who went to trial and were exonerated on all counts. (Sander 117)

Later, Serling described to interviewer Mike Wallace what happened to his script:

> …I wrote the script using black and white skinned characters initially, then the black was changed to suggest 'an unnamed foreigner,' the locale was moved from the South to New England – I'm convinced they would have gone to Alaska or the North Pole and used Eskimos except that the costume problem was of sufficient severity not to attempt it. ("Featuring Rod Serling")[2]

To audiences in 1959 it may have sounded as though Serling, frustrated with the political and moral evisceration of this work, had surrendered in his artistic battle with sponsors and networks:

> I don't want to fight anymore. I don't want to have to battle sponsors and agencies. I don't want to have to push for something that I want and have to settle for second best. I don't want to have to compromise all the time, which in essence is what a television writer does if he wants to put on controversial themes. ("Featuring Rod Serling")

"Controversial" in this context equates with political content and social justice themes. In the same interview Serling goes on to describe his latest project, an anthology series called *The Twilight Zone*. Here, the focus would be on good, entertaining stories that would avoid "controversy" and interference:

> …these are very adult, I think, high-quality half hour, extremely polished films. But because they deal in the areas of fantasy and imagination and science-fiction and all of those things, there's no opportunity to cop a plea or chop an axe or anything.

The Twilight Zone did not, in fact, represent surrender, but rather a change in tactics, a covert operation. The anthology series would become a forum for telling relevant stories while circumventing commercial or bureaucratic interference. Serling's creative strategy was to set the narratives in an imaginary setting with fantastical characters but to give them greater resonance and relevance by making them *about* something.

A SIGNPOST FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE: THE UNITED NATION'S UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Rod Serling may have started writing as a social realist, but he quickly developed a master's understanding of the power of mass entertainment and how popular culture works in the context of broadcast media. He was a major dramatist with a prevailing political sensibility and with an awareness of the polemic potential of speculative fiction; the struggle for human rights was likely critical inspiration to his creative vision. Some of the themes and ideas in Serling's speculative fiction are so central that it is possible, and even useful, to compare themes from *Twilight Zone* and *Night Gallery* episodes with charter and constitutional statements of human rights, such as, the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

Briefly, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1948 and in 1976 it was ratified as international law. The Declaration was a response to the atrocities and conflicts of World War II and is the first worldwide expression of the inherent rights of all persons. The UDHR is significant because it was developed by an international body and as such represents one of the most inclusive and comprehensive statements of human rights to date.

Referring to the values and principles set out in the UDHR can serve as a series of "signposts" into the significance of television dramas whose popularity endures and grows decades after they were first broadcast.

ROBOTS, MILITRAY SCHOOLS, AND TRUTHFUL EDUCATION: "THE ACADEMY" AND "THE CLASS OF '99"

Access to, and the content of, education is viewed as a fundamental human right in the UDHR and the morality of education is also a central theme in one of Serling's most powerful speculative stories. Article 26 of the UDHR states:

> Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

Both of these dramas explore the role and process of education; or rather the potentially nightmarish consequences of the perversion of education where schooling is not directed to the humane growth of the student but rather dedicated to the subjugation of the individual to a controlling (and inhumane) social structure.

In the *Night Gallery* segment, "The Academy," Mr. Holston is given a guided tour of Glendalough Academy by its Commandant. Holston's goal is to determine the suitability of this military school for his son, Roger. The establishing shots and opening dialogue quickly reveal that Glendalough is an isolated and highly exclusive institution and that Holston is a man of considerable means. The conversation between Holston and the Commandant tells the audience that Roger has a chronic discipline problem and the application of a strict regime of traditional curriculum and military discipline may be precisely what the boy needs.

"Discipline is the major item word here," the commandant states. Studies and the daily schedule are accompanied by continual drill: "Physical drill...drill at every level." Shots of the Academy students in the mess hall, classrooms and grounds, uniformed and moving in unison illustrate the Commandant's assertion.

The episode is structured as an expositional exercise where the Commandant gradually explains more and more about the nature and purpose of the Academy: First, Mr. Holston learns that Glendalough is a self-contained world with little contact with family and the outside world. Then, when Holston asks an older man in uniform how long he has been employed by the Academy, the man replies that he is actually a student and has been enrolled there for his entire adult life. This is the first major revelation in the story: essentially enrollment in the Academy is a form of life imprisonment. The final revelation occurs when Holston shares own beliefs and charges that his son Roger is "a rotter" and being locked in the Academy for the rest of his life is just the thing for him.

The dramatic tension emerges from the gradual discovery of the true terrifying nature and purpose of the Academy where education has been turned into an insidious form of incarceration, plus the sudden revealing of the antagonism between a father and his son – a generation gap in this American family.

So, who is the real villain, "the rotter" in this case? Could Roger's behavior be a reaction to his father's cruelty and callous nature? Is the audience witnessing some manifestation of a dysfunctional family? Or perhaps the son's rebellion is some form of political action? The answers to these questions can't be known because the story stops at this point. However, one could conclude that "The Academy" represents a monstrous distortion of the right to education, because in this episode, schooling becomes a form of punishment. The premise represented by the Academy is a violation of the next provision in the UDHR's statement of educational rights, which declares:

> Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. (Article 26)

Based on a 1965 story by David Ely, "The Academy" was broadcast in 1971 in the midst of a decade of anti-war and civil rights protests, and a climate of unrest and civil disobedience on many college and university campuses – including the Kent State University shootings on May 4, 1970. It is not difficult to imagine that

at least some of the television audience believed that a return to traditional education with a heavy emphasis on conformity and discipline was exactly what the then-younger generation needed to restore order to society. The unfulfilling resolution and lingering message of "The Academy" is a challenge to such socially conservative attitudes because the excesses of discipline run counter to the development of the student's intellect and personality. Further, the suppression of civil rights undermines the fundamental values of a democratic and open society.

The *Night Gallery* episode "The Class of '99" also addresses the question of education, and produced in the same year as "The Academy," shares the same sociopolitical context. The action in "The Class of '99" starts in a lecture hall of a slightly futuristic, co-educational university. The professor administers an oral exam to the class after informing them of the test's format:

> Let me review briefly our procedure: I will direct random questions to each of you and will grade you immediately. Keep in mind, however, that the question may be repeated at any time to someone else.

In doing so, the professor makes it clear that the audience is about to witness an extraordinarily difficult exam that is a manifestation of a very exacting and unforgiving educational system. The professor is very formal and authoritarian, and there is no evidence of empathy or even communication between the students.

For the first set of questions, the professor draws upon arcane fields of math and physics; and because the subject matter seems so far removed from the students' normal experience, the exam is extremely taxing and with questionable relevance. The questions soon address even more challenging issues and the tone of the oral exam shifts from intense competition to outright hostility. When the Professor asks a student (Mr. Clinton) if an African American classmate (Mr. Barnes), represents a "special problem," Mr. Clinton responds, "Possibly inferior," looks towards Barnes, and adds, "Being black, he might be inferior."

The rest of "The Class of 99" unfolds like a dramatization of a social psychology experiment that might have been designed by Stanley Milgram[3], in which the students are coached through different conflict situations based on race, class, income, politics and war. Every time the students follow the instructions of the professor there is a certain amount of psychological and physical violence involved: Verbal abuse, slapping, spitting and even gunfire. As in Milgram's experiments, students execute noxious, even criminal, behavior under the Professor's orders because it all occurs at the behest of an intellectual authority.

Unlike most of Milgram's test subjects, one of the students (Mr. Etkins) eventually rebels and refuses to kill another student, Mr. Chang, who has been identified as a member of an "enemy culture." Mr. Etkins is gunned down by another student (Mr. Johnson) for his trouble and his destruction reveals the true nature of the Class of '99. They are humanoid robots built by the university to repopulate society, which has been devastated by war and environmental degradation. As Mr. Johnson, now the class valedictorian, states, education is crucial to achieving the university's ultimate goals for the class of '99:

> All that we know...our attitudes...our values...are part of the integral data fed into us and we shall use them as a point of beginning. We must be just...but ruthless in terms of survival. We must recognize that many of the ancient virtues are simply weaknesses.

Clearly, the education of the Class of '99 is not dedicated to their personal development or to instilling a respect for human dignity and freedom. Instead, the university has inculcated the class with cultural misunderstandings, intolerance and hostility. Serling's thesis can be understood both as a criticism of contemporary education which often stress so-called "utility" over morality and a fear of where such trends will take society in the future.

PRIVACY, PERSONHOOD, AND ALIENS: "THE MONSTERS ARE DUE ON MAPLE STREET"

Just as "The Academy" and "The Class of '99" can be interpreted as critiques of educational systems, so too can the seminal *The Twilight Zone* episode, "The Monsters are Due on Maple Street" be interpreted as a critique of McCarthyism and similar political witch-hunts. UDHR Articles 6 and 12 address the rights of personhood, privacy, and reputation, which were rights directly under attack during the McCarthy era:[4]

> Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law. (Article 6)
>
> No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honor and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks. (Article 12)

At first, there is little to suggest the serious and dangerous subject matter of, "The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street." The opening shots could be from *Leave It to Beaver* (1957-63), *The Andy Griffith Show* (1960-68), or any other family situation comedy of that era: A pastoral suburban neighborhood, with freshly cut grass, polished new cars in driveways, and friendly (and white) neighbors in every house. However, this is the Twilight Zone and not Mayberry and the narrator suggests that this serenity will not last long: "Maple Street. Six-forty-four P.M., on a late September evening. [*A pause*.] Maple Street in the last calm and reflective moments...before the monsters came!"

Happiness on Maple Street is the result of certainty, security and conformity. Ambiguity and the threat of danger stress community life; and in turn jeopardize the human rights of its residents. The tension in this story starts with a meteor passing overhead and the unexpected interruption of electrical power, communications and transportation – the essential services and infrastructure that make suburban life possible. A potential crisis of uncertainty is then made worse when Tommy, who looks to be between 12-14 years old, refers to science fiction scenarios from comic books as possible explanations to Steve Brand, the episode's viewpoint character: "That was the way [the aliens] prepared things for the landing. They sent four people. A mother and a father and two kids who looked just like humans... but they weren't."

Steve replies, ironically: "Well, I guess what we'd better do then is run a check on the neighborhood and see which ones of us are really human."

As the episode continues, events and situations that would normally be regarded as innocent or trivial by most suburbanites occur: Lights flash on and off, car engines start and stop, owning amateur radios and suffering from insomnia (which one neighbor admits to) – are now seen as highly significant and potentially dangerous.

Steve Brand is one of the few residents who seriously questions the "aliens among us" theory and struggles to defend both his own and his insomniac neighbors' integrity and reputations. Brand also defends his right to privacy when his neighbors insist on coming into his home to determine if he has been using his radio to signal the space aliens. Mrs. Brand, his wife, tells the insistent crowd of neighbors that he just has an amateur ham radio, and offers to show them the equipment in the basement. In response, Steve whirls upon her and orders, "Show them nothing! If they want to look inside our house – let them get a search warrant."

This specific confrontation is interrupted by a car that mysteriously starts on its own and more flashing lights – but it is brief reprieve for Brand who is eventually overwhelmed by his neighbors as Maple Street degenerates into house-to-house warfare using torches, axes, and firearms. Meanwhile, actual alien invaders observe the chaos from their distant spacecraft, noting that the inhabitants of all the Maple Streets in the world cannot imagine any menace greater than themselves. The aliens have identified the inability to respect the rights and integrity of others as a fundamental human flaw that invaders can easily exploit. We are the monsters on Maple Street.

This episode concludes with the following powerful words literally delivered in Serling's voice as the

episode's narrator:

> The tools of conquest do not necessarily come with bombs and explosions and fallout. There are weapons that are simply thoughts, attitudes, and prejudices to be found only in the minds of men. For the record, prejudices can kill and suspicion can destroy and a thoughtless frightened search for a scapegoat has a fallout all its own for the children and the children yet unborn. And the pity of it is...that these things cannot be confined to The Twilight Zone!

This closing narration is a stark and unforgettable warning about the dangers of social paranoia and the failure to respect the dignity and privacy of others. When we disregard these rights we place the essential ties of trust that hold communities together at risk. The chaos at the end of "The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street" can even be interpreted as a demonstration of the need for legal and moral charters such as the UDHR.

INDIVIDUALITY, COMMUNITY, AND ASYLUM: "THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER" AND "THE DIFFERENT ONES"

Even by 1960, the values expressed in "The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street" would have seemed familiar to those followed Serling's work. The inherent value of the individual and the need to protect the individual, are frequent themes throughout Serling's literary career, starting with the abandoned executives in *Patterns* (1955) and the *Night Gallery* episode, "They're Tearing Down Tim Riley's Bar" (1971) through to the charity placement child in, *A Storm In Summer* (1970, remade 2000).

The episodes "The Eye of the Beholder" (*The Twilight Zone,* 1960) and "The Different Ones" (*Night Gallery*, 1971) also explore the plight of nonconformists in a world that demands uniformity. These stories can be viewed as inversions of each other: In, "The Eye of the Beholder," the audience meets a normal-looking woman surrounded by a society of monsters. In "The Different Ones," a young man with bizarre facial deformities lives in a world of people who look just like ordinary humans.

In both episodes, the person who is different is abused by the conforming majority, which makes monstrosity not a function of outward appearances but rather of an internal failure to respect the dignity and innate rights of others.

In "The Eye of the Beholder," Janet Tyler awakes in a hospital bed, her face completely covered in bandages, awaiting the results of the series of State-mandated cosmetic surgeries. Although the audience cannot see Janet's face, the dialogue indicates that her appearance is considered so grotesque that she must undergo treatments to make her closer to "the norm." Janet has little say in the course of her treatments or even in the details of her daily life – she's not allowed sit in the hospital garden or even open the window of her room. Janet is not a citizen, a person with rights; she is a patient, a medical and social problem whose different appearance prevents her from functioning in society. Janet Tyler is defined by the State as a problem that must be solved by Janet's surgeon, and the staff at the hospital who are agents of this paternalistic but ultimately oppressive society. Janet's experience exemplifies the medical deprivation of human rights and civil liberties. While the authorities stress their compassion for Janet's situation they also say that this is her final treatment and that she is running out of options. Just before her bandages are removed, her surgeon, Dr. Bernardi warns her, "This is your eleventh visit to the hospital where you have received the mandatory number of treatments and afforded as much time as possible, Miss Tyler." Even Tyler's status as patient will not protect her from her persistent individuality indefinitely.

In the *Night Gallery* segment, "The Different Ones," Victor Kotch is also marginalized because of his hideous appearance, albeit not as a hospital patient but as a housebound recluse who only interacts with his widowed father, Paul Kotch. Paul tries to protect Victor in the context of a traditional family, but both

know they will eventually be unable to shield themselves from growing verbal and physical assaults from an increasingly hostile community.

Paul Kotch uses his videophone to contact the Office for Special Urban Problems for help, but learns that his son's condition is so extreme that it is beyond the scope of the State's compassion and capacity to help. Furthermore, Victor's unusual appearance is in violation of *The Federal Conformity Act of 1993*[5], which requires Paul to "do something" about his son before higher authorities are called.

In both episodes, the "State" is the off-screen villain with the power to end both Janet's and Victor's lives. After the failure of Janet's final treatment, she asks to be euthanized, but her surgeon, Dr. Bernadi is reluctant to do so, instead encouraging her to immigrate to one of the officially sanctioned colonies set up for "people of her kind."

The State in "The Different Ones" is less compassionate, there are no such communities in Victor's world, and the representative from the Office of Special Urban Problems even raises the possibility of euthanizing Victor, saying, "Putting him to sleep for humanitarian reasons is hardly an act of murder, Mr. Kotch."

Victor Kotch and Janet Tyler escape death and their oppressive situations by fleeing to different, more tolerant, communities. Janet meets a representative of one the colonies who is "just like her," beautiful and physically perfect by the viewers' own standards but deemed "ugly" by her own society. Victor ultimately leaves the Earth as a part of an interplanetary cultural exchange program, where he meets people who are "just like him," grotesque yet kind and accepting.

"The Eye of the Beholder" and "The Different Ones" can be viewed as test-cases demonstrating the need for the following principles expressed in the UDHR:

> …All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights…Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country" and, "Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution…" (Article 14)

Both "The Eye of the Beholder" and "The Different Ones" have happy endings but they offer a qualified happiness; seeking asylum, which means an individual is forced to leave their native land, is a right of last resort. Though Janet and Victor ultimately find acceptance among "their own kind," Serling criticizes actual modern societies that cast out the "different ones" because the societies refuse to tolerate nonconformity.

"THE OBSOLETE MAN" AND THE RIGHT TO LIFE

The "Obsolete Man" (1961) is an episode of *The Twilight Zone* that features direction and acting that could be from a Berthold Brecht play with sets and cinematography that are reminiscent of German expressionist cinema. As with many *Twilight Zone* and *Night Gallery* stories, the intent is to create a sense of nightmare and "The Obsolete Man" is a political nightmare.

Romney Wordsworth, who states his profession as "librarian," has been tried by the State and has been judged in the words of the State's Leader as "obsolete" and a "bug not a person." This teleplay is one of Serling's most passionate pleas for human dignity and the events of the story touch on the right of worship and belief, as when Wordsworth disputes the Leader's broadcast proclamation, "The State has proven that there is no God!"

The "Obsolete Man" also refers to the right to freedom of expression and education when the Leader argues that Wordsworth's profession has no value:

> You're a librarian, Mr. Wordsworth. You're a dealer in books and two-cent fines and pamphlets in closed stacks in the musty finds of a language factory that spews meaningless words on an assembly line. WORDS, Mr. WORDSworth. That have no

> substance, no dimension, like air, like the wind. Like a vacuum, that you make believe have an existence, by scribbling index numbers on little cards.

Both freedom of worship and belief and freedom of expression and education are dependent on the more fundamental right to life, liberty, and security as stated in Article 3 of the UDHR.

Mr. Wordsworth is more effective in defending his human dignity and rights than Steve Brand was in "The Monsters are Due on Maple Street" because he paradoxically exercises the one right the State does extend to him: the right to select the method of his execution.

By choosing death by explosion, which is broadcast live on television, Wordsworth demonstrates the cowardice and moral weaknesses of the Leader who, trapped in the same room with Wordsworth and the bomb, pleads for his life and is finally granted mercy by the condemned man. This action reveals the inherent contradiction of this totalitarian state and as the episode's closing narration notes: "Any state, entity or ideology that fails to recognize the worth, the rights, the dignity of man...that state is obsolete."

In the surreal closing scene, the Leader returns to the courtroom after Wordsworth's death, only to be physically torn apart by his followers. One could interpret this scene as Serling asserting that a society that abandons respect of human rights, individual dignity, and social justice is ultimately doomed to barbarism and destruction.

THINGS AND IDEAS IN THE REAL WORLD: THE MOORPARK COLLEGE SPEECH

Serling did not restrict his political statements and actions to fiction as noted earlier; he was active in a number of political organizations and supported a range of progressive causes, particularly those associated with the Civil Rights and Anti-War movements:

> As he carved out a critically and commercially successful career as a scriptwriter and television producer, Serling maintained an active agenda of writing such letters[6] to newspapers, to both fans and detractors and giving political speeches. (Boulton 1227)

Just one example of Serling stating and acting on his political beliefs is found in his 1969 lecture "The Generation Gap," at Moorpark College. His talk has a truly remarkable opening:

> … I refused to sign a loyalty oath which was submitted to me as a prerequisite both for my appearance and my pay... I did not sign the loyalty oath and I waived my normal speaking fee, only because of a principle. I think a requirement that a man affix his signature to a document, reaffirming loyalty, is on one hand ludicrous – and on the other demeaning…I believe that in a democratic society a man is similarly loyal until proven disloyal. No testaments of faith, no protestations of affection for his native land, and no amount of signatures will prove a bloody thing – one way or the other as to a man's patriotism or lack thereof. (In Marshall)

Serling refused to comply with a requirement of the State of California, which he believed questioned his loyalty, personal integrity, and violated his rights of free expression and presumed innocence. He had a valid point; as Article 19 the UDHR states,

> Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

There were costs to Serling for taking this stance. For a successful writer and celebrity, foregoing the fee for a speech may seem insignificant; however it is very likely that Serling earned the enduring animosity of those in

power who created and supported the loyalty oath legislation.

While Serling ends his lecture with specific reference to the American involvement in the War in Vietnam, his criticisms shed insight into twenty-first century concerns such as racism, the rights of privacy, and personal integrity, as well as the growing militarization of society.

BETWEEN LIGHT AND SHADOW: THE ARTIST AS DISGUISED ACTIVIST

When we compare themes from vintage television programs with clauses from an international legal document we are engaged in much more than a curious categorization exercise. There is an almost intuitive appeal and intellectual impact when we view the artistry of *The Twilight Zone* and *Night Gallery* through the ethical lens of the UDHR.

The UDHR expresses values and principles that Rod Serling embraced as a writer, as a citizen of his country, and as a human being. Much of his work addresses the dangers of intolerance, prejudice, and systemic cruelty. It is not surprising that Serling used fiction, whether realist or magic-realist, in combination with real-world activism to oppose injustice and promote his political views.

The creative strategy that led to the creation of *The Twilight Zone* was ingenious because it became more than a way to avoid interference from sponsors and network censors. The ongoing popularity of *The Twilight Zone, Night Gallery,* and even later projects, such as *Witches, Werewolves and Warlocks* (1963), *The Season to be Wary* (1967), and *Planet of the Apes* (1968), generated vast audiences for Serling's work and these audiences renew with each new generation. As biographer Joel Engel observes:

> ...(Serling) remains to this day...the only writer whose name, face and voice are easily recognizable to the masses...There can be no overestimation of the impact that Serling's series has had on popular culture. (343)

Many viewers and readers may be drawn to the fantastical nature of such speculative stories for their entertainment value, but some audience members will probe deeper, seeking to discover the moral core of these narratives.

Part of Rod Serling's legacy is undoubtedly political. It is difficult not to feel moved by the rejection and shame of Janet Tyler in "The Eye of the Beholder," or experience rage and disgust at the cynical curriculum governing "The Class of '99." These are brilliantly produced works of science fiction, but they are also powerful pieces of political fiction. The opening narration to the first season of *The Twilight Zone* provides insight into the still-extant popular appeal of Serling's stories more than half a century later:

> There is a fifth dimension beyond that which is known to man. It is a dimension as vast as space and as timeless as infinity. It is the middle ground between light and shadow, between science and superstition, and it lies between the pit of man's fears and the summit of his knowledge. This is the dimension of imagination. It is an area which we call the Twilight Zone.

These narratives originate from the fringes – those aspects of our experience that are hard to define, that are about more than one thing – and makes viewers want to keep thinking about the social challenges and moral choices facing humanity. Ultimately, the ideals of human worth and dignity cannot only be appreciated at the legal or intellectual level – they must be embraced in our hearts and imaginations, and, as Serling demonstrates, science fiction is a frequent reminder that we must do so.

ENDNOTES

[1] *The Last Angry Man* is the title of Gerald Green's 1956 novel about an uncompromising physician and struggling television producer. The term was sometimes paraphrased to describe radio writers and producers such as Norman Corwin, Arch Oboler, and Orson Welles, whose work often addressed controversial social issues. The expression "television's angry young men" was also applied to emerging writers including Rod Serling, Paddy Chayefsky, Reginald Rose, and Sterling Silliphant, who were primarily associated with live and anthology drama in the 1950s. Of the latter group, Serling was the one to remain the longest and most involved with television, both asserting the artistic and political potential of the medium while denouncing its trivialization and excessive commercialization (Sander iv).

[2] The context of the Mike Wallace interview does not reveal the full extent of reviews, revisions, and re-writes that "Noon at Doomsday" and an alternate version of the Till case, "A Town Has Turned to Dust," were subject to. Christopher Metress' overview of the development process for these scripts makes a persuasive case that the core problem was a deep and intractable reluctance by sponsors and networks to address the issue of racial injustice at a time when television advertising markets were opening up to Southern States in the 1950s.

[3] Stanley Milgram (1933 –1984) was a social psychologist, best known for his controversial experiment on obedience conducted in the 1960s at Yale University. Milgram studied the willingness of study subjects to obey a researcher (an authority figure) to the extent that they thought they were administering potentially fatal electrical shocks to another study subject.

[4] From 1950 to 1956, thousands of Americans were accused of being communists or communist sympathizers and were subjected to intense investigation by government and private-industry agencies. Named after the dogged anti-communist pursuits of Senator Joseph McCarthy, "McCarthyism" now describes reckless accusations and attacks on the character or patriotism of individuals.

[5] A fictional construct in this story.

[6] Here, Boulton is using as an example a letter written by Rod Serling to the *LA Times* where he both satirizes and criticizes a leading pet food maker for sponsoring a televised speech by the founder of the John Birch Society (1226).

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"This Cabal Guy Could Be Right": Numeric Correlations in Maury Yeston's *In the Beginning*

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Abstract: The study of gematria and isopsephy, the numeric conversion of Hebrew and Greek words, yields an abundant harvest of biblical insight. Though applying this method to more secular literature is rare, we have a unique set of circumstances in Maury Yeston's musical *In the Beginning* that renders its use appropriate. Derived from Hebrew and Greek, the names of the show's principal characters can be converted to numeric values, all of which share at least one of three common factors. Moreover, the names are often connected thematically, and their factors reflect key elements in the first five books of the Bible.

Along with contributions from fellow collaborators Larry Gelbart and David Hahn, Yeston appears to be the most likely candidate to have included these numeric features, the intention of which is expressed in the words of the antagonist Romer, who draws particular attention to Kabbalah's use of numbers: "There is something about the number forty. This *Cabal* guy could be right" (2.4.65; emphasis added). The character only skims the surface of the number 40's implications and misses entirely the deeper meanings that further reflection offers, but having drawn some attention to the matter, the script seems to have left the question open for any observant director, performer, or audience member familiar with such things and with sufficient interest to investigate further. In the case of this article's author, his background in theatre, literary criticism, and gematria provided the key to unlock a rich subtext of the writing that until now had lain otherwise dormant and awaiting discovery.

Keywords: Gematria, Isopsephy, Number, Numeric Value, Standard Value, Ordinal Value, *In the Beginning*, Hebrew, Greek, Musical Theatre

Maury Yeston's *In the Beginning* has been described as a work in progress that is not yet ready for a Broadway stage. One critic holding such an opinion is Richard Connema who says the show is better suited for regional theatre. However, Connema also compliments certain aspects of the production he saw at the Willows in 2000:

> Mr. Yeston has fashioned an old fashion Broadway musical with toe tapping songs, romantic ballets (sic), songs of hope, and vaudeville routines . . . The score does have some beautiful romantic songs . . . "Till the End of Time" . . . is lovely[,] and . . . "No Man's as Wonderful" . . . is one of the most memorable moments of the show.

Most of Connema's praise is reserved for the music and represents the view of much of the industry. Stephen Sondheim, for instance, named "New Words" one of "the songs he wishes he had written himself" (Pogrebin E1). Likewise, in an interview with Pat Cerasaro, Yeston says that Alan Jay Lerner decided to mentor him on the merits of that song alone, and in a review of *The Maury Yeston Songbook*, Matthew Murray declares that "You're There, Too" is "perhaps the most perfect expression of Yeston's talent . . ." Consequently, most admiration for the show is based on its score.

Not so much ado, however, has been made over the book, which was originally drafted by Larry Gelbart and later revised by David Hahn. Speaking about a 2001 production, which included Hahn's revisions, Connema admits to being somewhat entertained by the writing: "There is some good material here with zingers and corny routines." Less amused, however, is Albert Williams, who flatly states of the *History Loves Company* iteration, ". . . what [the show] sorely lacks right now is a good book." Though Yeston does not address the writing per se, he does classify the show as one of his "misses." In the interview with Cerasaro, he attributes the show not being Broadway-ready to very talented people not sharing a common vision. Citing Peter Stone, he says,

> "the reason shows don't click sometimes is because everyone on the team at the same time isn't necessarily doing the same show." I think that's very true. That would be true of a number things. Well, in that particular show I think we all wanted to get a very funny take on the Bible. I think everyone just wasn't on the same page in terms of the tone of the show.

Yeston's sentiments are reflected in Hahn's comments about the book, which foretell the show's enduring struggles to be deemed Broadway-worthy: "No one has ever left a musical saying, 'Wow! What a book!' . . . You never hum the book. But if a musical doesn't work, you blame the book" (Price 2E).

Despite Yeston's brilliant compositions, Gelbart's mastery of comic writing, and Hahn's worthy efforts at revision, we can rely on the critics' assessment that *In the Beginning* is not yet ready for Broadway success and requires further work before it can be received as a truly great show. There are, however, reasons to reconsider its status as a "miss," primarily due to a book that never measured up to the score. In fact, there is evidence of something concealed in the text that evokes the themes of the show in a way that is entirely unlooked for. This becomes clear when we apply two methods. Commonly employed in the interpretation of literature, the first is to analyze the meanings of characters' names, most of which are derived from either Hebrew or Greek in this case, and then consider how they correlate thematically. The second is used in biblical interpretation and involves calculating the numeric values of each Hebrew or Greek name using *gematria* or *ispopsephy* and then considering any correlations between the factors thereof. In the end, the application of these methods will reveal that the show, while not exactly Broadway-ready, has received somewhat short shrift critically and merits more consideration as a piece of theatre that has not been fully understood or appreciated.

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF LETTERS AND THEIR NUMERIC VALUES

Analyzing the meanings of names in fiction and how they might represent certain themes is a common practice in interpreting literature. However, as part of such an analysis, using gematria and isopsephy—that is, converting Hebrew and Greek names and words to numeric expressions, noting any common factors between them, and deriving meaning from such correspondences—is rare outside biblical exegesis. Still, the textual conditions present in *In the Beginning* are ideal for viewing the show through such a lens as most of the characters' names are derived from the biblical languages. While the use of these methods does not necessarily lead to a final judgment on which interpretations of the story are exclusively true, we can see with a high degree of certainty how particular interpretations have their foundations in the numeric values that sets and subsets of names share.

To arrive at a firmer understanding of how these values are determined, we need to review the foundations of gematria and isopsephy. As most of the characters' names are Hebrew in origin, a Hebrew alphabet and numeric values table is included below.

Table 1

Numeric Values of the Hebrew Alphabet[a]

Name	Letter	Standard	Ordinal	Name	Letter	Standard	Ordinal
Aleph	א	1	1	Lamed	ל	30	12
Bet	ב	2	2	Mem	מ	40	13
Gimel	ג	3	3	Nun	נ	50	14
Dalet	ד	4	4	Samekh	ס	60	15
Heh	ה	5	5	Ayin	ע	70	16
Vav	ו	6	6	Pey	פ	80	17
Zayin	ז	7	7	Tsadi	צ	90	18
Chet	ח	8	8	Quf	ק	100	19
Tet	ט	9	9	Resh	ר	200	20
Yod	י	10	10	Shin	ש	300	21
Kaph	כ	20	11	Tav	ת	400	22

Source: Alter, Michael J. *Why the Torah Begins with the Letter Beit*. Aronson, 1998, p. 8.
Munk, Michael L. *The Wisdom in the Hebrew Alphabet: The Sacred Letters as a Guide to Jewish Deed and Thought*. Mesorah, 2010, p. 42.
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a. Those interested in the Greek alphabet and the corresponding values of each letter may refer to the appendix.

As reflected in the numeric value columns above, each of the 22 Hebrew letters has standard and ordinal values assigned to it. In the case of standard values, letters are assigned numbers based on succeeding decimal places increasing from ones to tens to hundreds. In the case of ordinal values, the numbers assigned reflect the placement of the letter within the alphabet. With this in mind, consider the following example of how Hebrew words and their numeric values combine to produce insights and interpretations that go well beyond the simple meaning of the words themselves.

Table 2

Words Numerically Equivalent to the Word for God

Name/Word	Hebrew	Translation	Standard	Ordinal
El	אֵל	God	31	13
Al	אַל	No/Not	31	13
Lo'	לֹא	No/Not	31	13

Source: Strong, James. *The Strongest Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Revised by John Kohlenberger and James Swanson, rev. ed., Zondervan, 2001, p. 387; p. 3773.

In the first row, we see the word for "God" transliterated in English and spelled in Hebrew. Likewise, we see that the standard value is 31 (א = 1 + ל = 30) and the ordinal is 13 (א = 1 + ל = 12). By looking at the two values together, we recognize that the word's standard and ordinal values are numeric reflections of each other as the first calculates to 31 and the second to 13. We may also note that both are prime.

If we consider this word and its numeric values in light of other Hebrew words that have the same values, we begin to see connections between them that would not otherwise be apparent. In the case of those listed, when we reflect on how they relate, we are struck by the synchronicities among them. As the Hebrew words for "no" and "not" have exactly the same standard and ordinal values as the word for "God," we may conclude that, without God, there is only negation, and no one and nothing can exist outside the context of a divine creator.

Gematria and isopsephy are esoteric means of interpreting the Bible and not widely employed. Such methods are even more rare for interpreting texts originated in English. In the case of *In the Beginning*, however, we have a unique set of circumstances in which most of the principal characters have been given Hebrew or Greek names. Therefore, we are able to calculate both their standard and ordinal values and determine whether any numeric relationships exist. In some cases, we can even translate a name from one biblical language to another, calculate its value, and note numeric correspondences. After converting all the names into numbers, we find that each value can be derived using 11, 13, or 40 as a factor. As Yeston, Gelbart, and Hahn all contributed to the work, it is difficult to surmise exactly which character was named by whom, but the fact that all ten names correspond numerically indicates that this feature of the text is intentional.

Yeston's influence on the text seems very likely as he has the appropriate educational background to use gematria as described. As Mary Kalfatovic reveals in *Contemporary Musicians*, Yeston attended Hebrew school in his youth, and his grandfather was a cantor in a synagogue (251). She also says he taught religion at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania (252). Additionally, Sarah Douglas, the vice president of Abram Artists Agency, writes in private email correspondence, "It is perhaps not generally known that Mr. Yeston attended an Orthodox Jewish Yeshiva for the first 10 years of his education—learning the Hebrew and English alphabets simultaneously at the age of 5. That education did indeed include Biblical studies, Commentary, Mishnah, Gemmorah, folklore, a smattering of Gemmatria and all other manner of Hebraic learnedness." Gelbart and Hahn possibly contributed to naming the characters, too, but there is little evidence to suggest that they had the requisite background to coordinate the names numerically. In fact, just three principal characters retained their original names from Gelbart's initial draft to Hahn's final—that is, Avi, Arielle, and Romer (Dietz 338; Williams; Martin H10). During the intervening years, only Yeston remained a constant on the project as its creative team changed from production to production and its characters developed in the revision process (Dietz 338; Williams; Martin H10).

THE NUMBER 13

We will begin this analysis with the names of characters whose values either equal 13 or are multiples thereof as they provide the thematic foundation on which the rest of the story is based. There may be more than one interpretation of how these characters correlate, but the evidence is strong that they have been named according to certain themes. The names, along with their values and factors, are summarized in the following table.

Table 3

Names of Characters Whose Values Share 13 as a Factor

Name	Hebrew	Translation	Value	Factors
Avi	אָבִי	My Father	13	13 x 1
Ben	בֵּן	Son	52	13 x 4
Zymah	זִמָּה	Wickedness	52	13 x 4
Romer/*Roma*[a]	רומא	Rome	247	13 x 19

Source: Strong, James. *The Strongest Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Revised by John Kohlenberger and James Swanson, rev. ed., Zondervan, 2001, p. 1467; p. 1481; p. 1495.
Waldstein, A. S. *English-Hebrew Dictionary*. Mizpah, 1939, p. 443.
a. Though Romer serves as antagonist to Avi's protagonist, he fits the discussion best in the sections covering the numbers 11 and 40.

It may be too much to hope that a direct relationship exists between all names that share the same factor. However, many of the characters' names seem to have been chosen based on both their meaning and numeric correspondence. Perhaps the best examples are Ben and Avi. On the one hand, we note the thematic connection in that the former's name means "Son" and the latter's "My Father." On the other, we see the numeric association (Avi = 13 x 1 and Ben = 13 x 4). Taken together, the two correspondences are compelling features of the text that suggest a conscious decision in storytelling (see fig. 1).

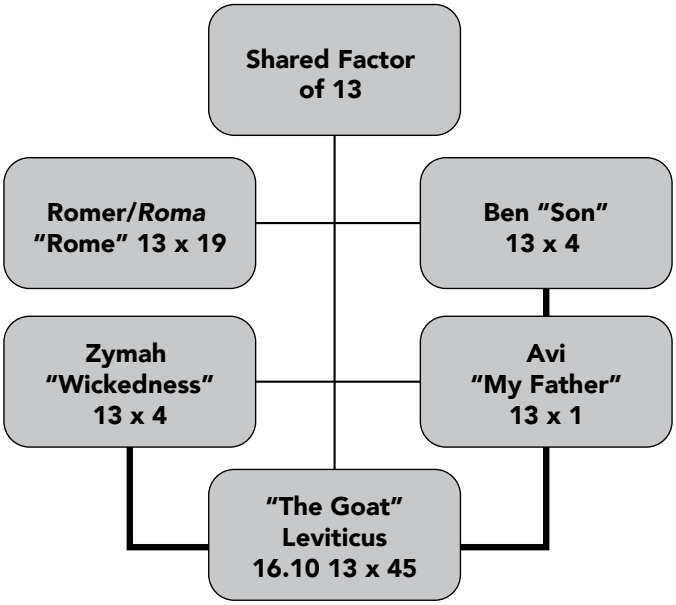

Fig. 1. Chart depicting numeric and thematic relationships between Avi, Ben, Zymah, Romer, and Leviticus 16.10

Even correlations within the biblical literature can be called on to support the conclusion that gematria was used to select character names. In the case of Avi, who is hiding his true identity as Cain, we find a correlation with Genesis 4.1: "And she conceived and bore Cain…" (*The Interlinear Bible*). If we calculate the

value of this passage, we find it is a multiple of 13 (or 13 x 124 = 1,612). Also, Cain's genealogy calculates to 2,223 (or 13 x 171) (see table 4).

Table 4

The Cain Line of Names

Name	**Value**
Adam	45
Cain	160
Enoch	84
Irad	284
Mehujael	95
Methushael	777
Lamech	90
Jabal	42
Jubal	48
Tubal Cain	598
Total	13 x 171 = 2,223

Source: Bullinger, Ethelbert W. *Number in Scripture: Its Supernatural Design and Spiritual Significance*. Martino, 2011, p. 207.

As the number 13 is so well represented in the record of Cain's birth and genealogy, the name "Avi," which calculates to 13, seems a fitting alias.

Understanding the numeric connection between Avi and Cain, as well as between Avi and Ben, helps us also see Avi's connection to Zymah, the character representing God. Like Ben, Zymah's name calculates to 52 (or 13 x 4). As the Hebrew word from which the name Zymah derives means "Wickedness," diverse opinions on the authorial intent behind the name could be offered. On the surface, one might wonder if the name is meant to express a Gnostic view of the Old Testament God—that is, the Demiurge that created matter, which, according to Gnostic thought, was inherently evil (MacRae 258; Powell 230). This is possible, but the use of gematria, combined with Romer's assertion that "[t]his Cabal guy could be right," suggests a more direct relationship to Kabbalistic tradition than an indirect one to Gnosticism (2.4.65). Also, while Kabbalah does parallel Gnostic doctrines, it does not go so far as to accept the premise that matter was produced from an evil source (Ginzberg 477).

A more consistent view is that, like Avi, Zymah himself is a scapegoat who bears the "wickedness" of immature humanity as represented by the members of the tribe. In fact, this interpretation can be supported both numerically and thematically. In Leviticus 16.10, we read the following: "And the goat [*ha sa`iyr*] on which the lot for a scapegoat [*`aza'zel*] fell shall be caused to stand living before Jehovah to make atonement by it, to send it away for a scapegoat into the wilderness." The Hebrew word for "the goat" calculates to 585 (or 13 x 45) (see fig. 1). Also, though not a multiple of 13, we find that both the name Cain and the Hebrew word for "scapegoat" calculate to the ordinal value 43.

We can see a clear connection between the number 13, the theme of the scapegoat, and how they apply specifically to Avi/Cain, but how exactly do they relate to Zymah? The answer is to be found in Romer and Lydia's frequent refrain of who is to blame for their misfortunes, a question invariably followed by Zymah's appearance or a veiled reference to him. Below are instances in which this is employed most clearly:

1. After being expelled from the garden, Romer says, "I want to know whose fault it was" (1.3.11). Lydia

and the group point to Adam, Eve, and the serpent when Zymah enters with the intention of teaching the tribe to hunt and gather.

2. In the flood aftermath, Lydia asks, "Who's [sic] fault is it?" (1.8.37). After some tribal infighting and delusion about the garden returning, Zymah appears again, this time to teach them the principles of agriculture.

3. During the drought scene, Romer superstitiously identifies Avi's son as the cause of the tribe's suffering. Sarcastically, Ben responds by leading the group in their ritual chant: "Avi's fault. Avi's fault" (1.10.48). If we refer back to the translation of Avi's name, we see the pattern with Zymah repeated: "My Father's fault. My Father's fault."

On the one hand, we see how Avi represents Zymah, the Father of All Things, and the responsibility he shoulders for the tribe's welfare. On the other, we observe Avi perverting this responsibility into blame and unconsciously shifting it from Zymah to himself when he indicates that Romer may be right (1.10.48). Because he believes the group's suffering is a direct result of God's judgment on him, Avi offers himself as a scapegoat, providing for their desire to blame someone for the troubles they experience along the path to maturity. The scenes cited above reinforce the various associations discussed in that Avi (13 x 1) represents Zymah (13 x 4). Likewise, both take on the role of "the goat" (13 x 45) assigned to bear the collective guilt of others (see fig. 1).

When Avi and Zymah appear alone together in the final act, their identification with each other is completed and theatrically most obvious. In this moment, Avi realizes who Zymah is and, recognizing he is quite literally "meeting his maker," prepares to be struck dead. When Zymah corrects his assumption on this, Avi explains his reason for thinking it in the first place:

> **AVI**. You already took everything I love.
>
> Upon hearing this, Zymah denies taking responsibility for Avi's misfortune and reverses the running theme of bearing such burdens for others:
>
> **ZYMAH**. I took? Well, I like that. Romer blackmailed you and you caved in. How does
>
> that become my fault? You want your son and your wife, go fight for them. (2.8.75)

Avi's persisting belief that he is being punished for his crime against Abel is revealed to be an unjust scapegoating of God. It is during this conversation that Avi finally realizes Arielle is justified in her faith that all things have a purpose and it is his responsibility to finish strong in the life he has been blessed with, despite his past wrongdoing.

The Number 11

If the evidence informing these interpretations ended with the foregoing correspondences, the results could be coincident. However, what we have seen is only the beginning, so please consider the following as further evidence of authorial intent.

Table 5

Names of Characters Whose Values Share 11 as a Factor

Name	Hebrew/Greek	Translation	Value	Factors
Lydia/*Lud*	לוּד	Strife	22 (*ord*)[a]	11 x 2
Arielle	אֲרִיאֵל	Lion of God/Jerusalem	242	11 x 22
Zeke/*Zechariah*	זְכַרְיָה	The LORD Remembers	242	11 x 22
Dottie/*Da'ati*	דַּעְתִּי[b]	My Knowledge	484	11 x 44

Romer/*Rhomaios*	Ῥωμαῖος	Roman	1,221	11 x 111

Source: Strong, James. *The Strongest Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Revised by John Kohlenberger and James Swanson, rev. ed., Zondervan, 2001, p. 1476; p. 1491; p. 1495; p. 1519; p. 1641.
a. Ordinal values are distinguished by the abbreviation *ord*.
b. This spelling of Da'ati may be found in Proverbs 22.17 with particular attention to the Masoretic Text (MT).

The set in Table 5 can easily be subdivided according to character relationship (e.g., Zeke and Dottie). In other cases, such relationships are not immediately apparent but, nonetheless, present. For instance, Arielle's and Zeke's values are identical (11 x 22 = 242). This suggests that Arielle, whose name means "Lion of God" and refers to the city of Jerusalem (Isa. 29.1-2), is in some way related to Zeke, whose full name Zechariah means "The LORD Remembers." These characters rarely interact, so the identical values of their names seem at first coincident. However, further investigation into the characters, as well as into the themes that emerge through them, reveals much.

Both, for instance, are staunch advocates of Avi. While Romer and Lydia continuously blame him for the tribe's suffering, Arielle and Zeke repeatedly demonstrate their trust in him. Arielle, for example, seems to see Avi as more than just himself, apparently perceiving the divine through him. On the one hand, her song "Is Someone Out There" foreshadows Avi's imminent advent onto the scene. On the other, we are keenly aware that she is yearning to understand herself and the world outside the context of the garden. She wants to know if someone transcending her physical experience is guiding events and if she can depend on that someone now that the garden and its low-hanging fruit are gone. Avi's introduction to the story appears to answer these questions on some level, and Arielle seems vaguely aware that he represents a response to her previous petition to the unknown "Someone Out There." Perhaps seeing Avi as a pledge of her initial act of faith, Arielle becomes more and more convinced that there is a divine purpose to the group's trials, never losing faith that this purpose is for their benefit. Therefore, even when learning that Avi is Cain, she continues to see the good in him, apparently looking past his recently revealed identity to what he represents on a divine level.

Zeke demonstrates a level of trust similar to Arielle's. Though his lines are few, he spends a good number of them defending Avi and his judgment. When Avi is first introduced to the tribe, for instance, Zeke immediately requests that he join them, setting off a heated debate over whether he should be included (1.5.23). In other examples, Zeke seconds Avi's aversion to following the people of Abraham into Egypt (1.10.49), and when Romer begins to blame Avi for the tribe being sealed in an Egyptian tomb, Zeke jumps to his defense (2.2.61). Even after learning Avi is actually Cain returning with the Ten Commandments, or what Romer perceives to be only a bag of broken rocks, Zeke counters that they are rocks "with writing on them" (2.9.77).

In addition to trust, another thematic connection between Zeke and Arielle exists. Bearing the name of the "eleventh" minor prophet, Zeke seemingly takes on such an office when seeking answers through Arielle on two occasions. On the first, he asks the reason for the drought (1.10.48). On the second, he inquires how crossing the Jordan is different from the tribe's previous wanderings, a question echoed by others as well (2.9.79). These examples of inquiring through the medium of Arielle, who represents Jerusalem, very much parallel a prophet making inquiries at the house of God.

Finally, a curious correlation with the biblical literature should be considered in the case of Arielle and Zeke. While "Arielle" is used as another name for the city of Jerusalem, it also refers to one of the exiles returning from the Babylonian captivity as recorded in Ezra 8.16: "And I sent for Eliezer, for *Ariel*, for Shemaiah, and for Elnathan, and for Jarib, and for Elnathan, and for Nathan, and for *Zechariah*, and for Meshullam, head men; also for Joiarib, and for Elnathan, men of understanding (emphasis added)." There are several curious points about this passage. First, the list includes the names of both characters under observation. What compounds this curiosity is that the name Ariel appears only six times in scripture—five times in Isaiah 29, referring

to Jerusalem, and once in Ezra 8, referring to one of the chief men. Were Ariel's and Zeke's names selected from this list because their values are identical and the only two that factor to 11? The fact that there are also exactly eleven men named and that the entire passage totals to a multiple of 11 (11 x 511 = 5,621) suggests that someone was indeed aware and meticulously selected these names for thematic purposes (see fig. 2).

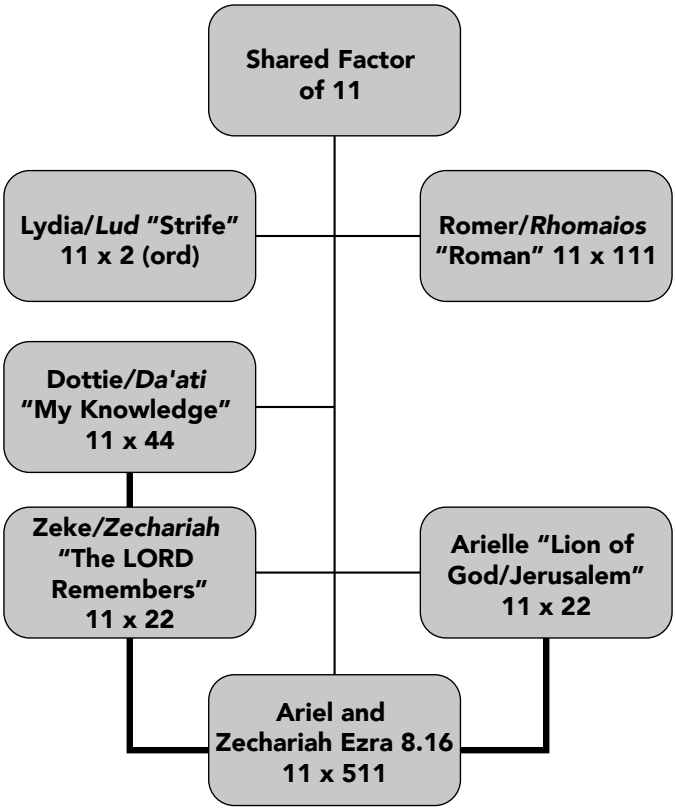

Fig. 2. Chart depicting numeric and thematic relationships between Arielle, Zeke, Dottie, Romer, Lydia, and Ezra 8.16

As multiples of 11, the values of Romer's and Lydia's names are not as closely aligned as those of Arielle and Zeke. However, they bear special recognition. Romer means "Roman" in German (Martini 352). In Greek, "Roman" is translated as *Rhomaios* and has a numeric value of 1,221 (or 11 x 111). The Greek name Lydia corresponds to the Hebrew name *Lud*, which has an ordinal value of 22 (or 11 x 2). In both languages, the meaning of her name is similar ("Strife" in Hebrew and "Travail" in Greek).

Allegorically, Romer and Lydia's relationship seems to parallel that of the western and eastern regions of the Roman Empire. Lydia was a kingdom in the ancient world whose borders were within what is now the modern state of Turkey. In antiquity, it eventually became a province of the Persian and Greek Empires and was finally bequeathed to Rome by the last king of the Attalid dynasty (Herodotus 51; Freeman xvi-xvii; Allen 84). In other words, the Attalid Kingdom, which seems related to the character Lydia, was legally transferred to Rome, which is clearly represented by Romer. The ease with which Romer acquires Lydia as his wife parallels Rome's acquisition of the Attalid Kingdom and stands in direct contrast to the resistance he faces in Arielle, who represents Judea's capital city Jerusalem struggling bitterly to remain an independent state married to God.

These interpretations can be extended to include the Christian conversion of Rome, too. In the final scene, Romer claims the Ten Commandments as "Romer's Rules" (2.9.79). On the one hand, he seems to

undergo a kind of conversion to Avi's (or "My Father's") code of ethics. On the other, he supplants the Father and declares the code his own. Just as papal Rome is often accused of usurping God's position, Romer seems ready to supersede Zymah and his chosen agent Avi and to use the Commandments for his own personal gain.

This reading is further supported by the Romer-Lydia connection. Thematically, Romer has obvious ties to Rome, including its imperial and papal manifestations. Less obvious, however, is Lydia's relationship to Rome ecclesiastically. During the imperial period, the region once named after the former kingdom of Lydia and ultimately given to Rome came to be known as Asia Minor and included the seven churches mentioned in Revelation (1.4). The part the region played in church history provides a clear connection between Lydia and the churches most important during the apostolic period.

Later in the 4th century, Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity. Following his defeat of Licinius and becoming sole emperor, he united the western half of the empire with the eastern (MacMullen 138). As a result, Rome in the West (as represented by Romer) was united with Asia Minor in the East (as represented by Lydia). In so doing, both formed a political and ecclesiastical corpus that would dominate most of the known world, a development very much reflected in the ambitions of the tribe's power-couple, Romer and Lydia.

The Number 40

The final value addressed in this paper is 40. This value is explicitly highlighted in the text when Romer says, "There is something about the number forty. This Cabal guy could be right. I mean, the flood was forty days and forty nights. It's been forty years in the desert. And Moses has been up on that mountain for how long? Forty days and forty nights. There's something fishy in it" (2.4.65). The fact that Romer invokes the number 40 as one invested with Kabbalistic implications strongly supports the view that the characters' names have been selected because they correlate numerically. In light of this, consider the following names, all of which either calculate to 40 or are multiples thereof.

Table 6

Names of Characters Whose Values Share 40 as a Factor

Name	**Hebrew/Greek**	**Translation**	**Value**	**Factors**
Lydia/*Lud*	לוּד	Strife	40	40 x 1
Romer/*Roma*	רומא	Rome	40 (*ord*)	40 x 1
Aaron	אַהֲרֹן [a]	Light Bringer	40 (*ord*)	40 x 1
Mavis	Μαβής	Purple	40 (*ord*)	40 x 1
Cain	קַיִן	Possession	160	40 x 4
Ben/*Huios*	υἱός	Son	680	40 x 17

Source: Spilias, Thanasis. *Greek Phrasebook and Dictionary*. Edited by Brigitte Ellemor, 5th ed., Lonely Planet, 2013, p. 229.
Strong, James. *The Strongest Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Revised by John Kohlenberger and James Swanson, rev. ed., Zondervan, 2001, p. 1469; p. 1519; p. 1561; p. 1650.
Waldstein, A. S. *English-Hebrew Dictionary*. Mizpah, 1939, p. 443.
a. This particular spelling of Aaron may be found in Numbers 16.50 (MT).

Here we see a much closer connection between Lydia (as represented by the standard value of her Hebrew name *Lud*) and Romer (as represented by the ordinal value of his namesake "Rome" spelled in Hebrew). The fact that "Rome" calculates to 40 speaks directly to Romer's conclusion that there is "something fishy in it" (2.4.65). Practically all the examples he lists of the number evoke cataclysm, judgment, and testing, a common understanding of how the number is applied biblically. This is ironic as Romer and Lydia themselves are so often the agents of trouble, whether they are oppressing the tribe in the town, which is ultimately washed away by the flood, or leading them to Egypt, where they are all enslaved.

In fact, Romer and Lydia's destructiveness is mirrored in Avi's alter ego Cain, so it is not surprising

that the name Cain is also a multiple of 40. And yet, we can see Arielle's purpose even in Cain's fall when we realize that the standard value of his name correlates with the ordinal value of Aaron. In the first act, Avi ("My Father") brings Aaron ("Light Bringer") into the tribe. In the second, a reformed Cain brings them the light of Torah (see fig. 3). In the numeric correlation between the names "Cain" and "Aaron" then, we see that the number 40 is not confined to expressing simply trial and testing, but also two other themes—that of bringing forth children through the bodies of their parents and bringing forth good fruit through a spirit governed by God.

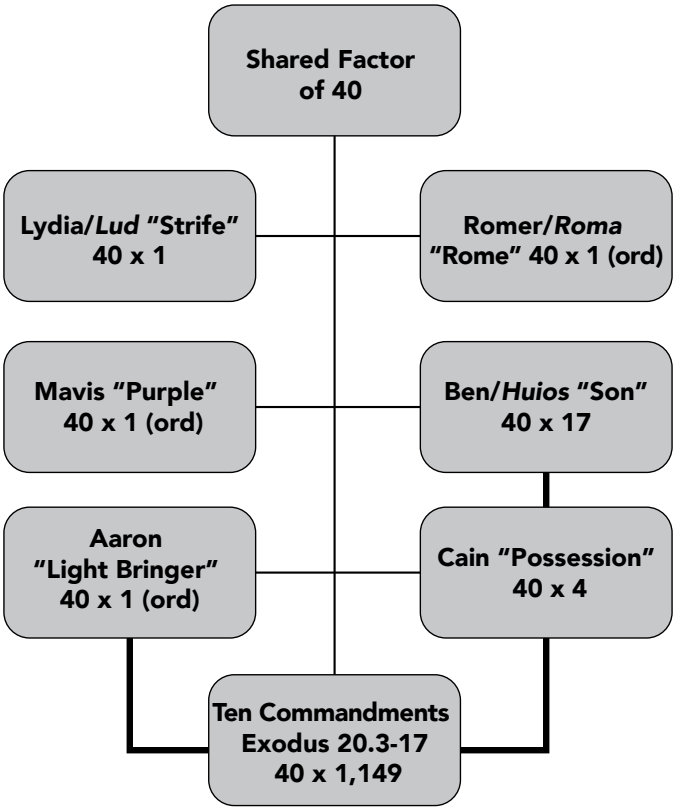

Fig. 3. Chart depicting numeric and thematic relationships between Lydia, Romer, Ben, Mavis, Cain, Aaron, and Exodus 20.3-17

For one, the theme of bringing forth children is expressed by 40 in that the number reflects the average length of pregnancy in terms of weeks. Likewise, the Talmud applies the number to the 40th day of gestation, which marks the transition to fetal viability, whereas prior to this, "the semen . . . is only a mere fluid" (*The Babylonian Talmud*, b. Yev. 69b). Therefore, the number 40 is understood as applying to the duration of time leading to something brought into being, whether an embryo on its 40th day, a newborn in its 40th week, or even a nation in its 40th year.

Moreover, when we reflect on the fact that Ben ("Son") and Avi ("My Father") are thematically connected to birth and that Ben's name in Greek (*Huios*) and Avi's original name Cain share the factor of 40, we are all the more impressed with such authorial attention to detail. Even with these realizations, however, we do not appreciate the fuller scope of this vision until we recognize that the number 13 is connected to 40. In other words, the 13th letter of the Hebrew alphabet is Mem and has a standard value of 40. With this in mind, compare the following names and factors in the table below.

Table 7

Avi/Cain and Ben

Name	Factors	Name	Factors
Avi	13 x 1	Cain	40 x 4
Ben (Hebrew)	13 x 4	Ben (Greek)	40 x 17

Here we see that Ben, whose name means "Son," and Avi, whose name means "My Father" and who is otherwise known as Cain, share the factors 13 and 40. This correlation not only punctuates the relationship between the two characters' names, but also further develops the theme of begetting and birth (see fig. 4).

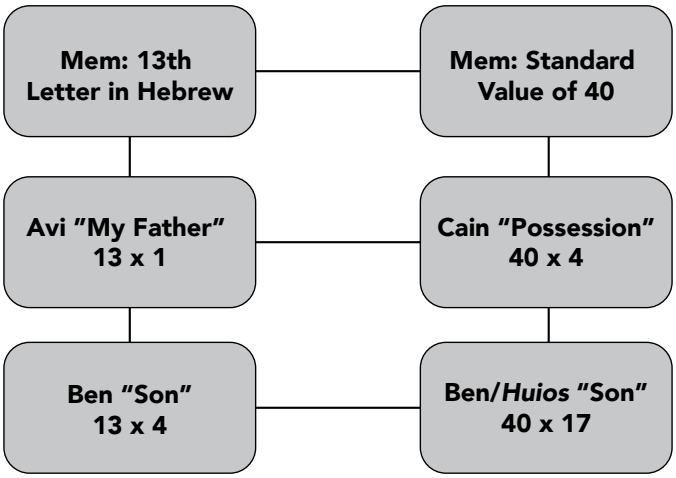

Fig. 4. Chart depicting numeric and thematic relationships between Ben, Avi, Cain, and Mem (13th letter in Hebrew with a standard value of 40)

The related theme of bringing forth good fruit through a spirit governed by God is revealed when we consider how the use of the number 40 reflects the show's literary progenitor—that is, the Bible and, more specifically, the Ten Commandments (see fig. 3). The original title of *In the Beginning* was *1–2–3–4–5* (Kalfatovic 253). In one sense, this sequence of numbers relates to the first five books of the Bible. However, its significance runs much deeper than this in that it suggests a factorial equation of all five numbers (i.e., 1 x 2 x 3 x 4 x 5 = 120). The number 120 is divisible by 40 and can be read as a multiple thereof (40 x 3 = 120). With this in mind, we may recall that Moses lived until the age of 120 and his life was divided into three periods of 40 years each. At the age of 40, he fled Egypt (Acts 7.23; *The Midrash*, Ex. R. i.27), at 80 he returned to lead Israel out of bondage (Exod. 7.7), and at 120 he died (Deut. 34.7). This may seem just an interesting coincidence to some, but when we learn that the Ten Commandments themselves can be calculated using 40, 80, and 120 as factors, we discover a compelling numeric relationship between the Commandments (Exod. 20. 3-17) and the life of Moses. With this in mind, consider the following table, which accounts for the individual value of each commandment and the sum total.

Table 8

The Value of the Ten Commandments

Commandment	Value
I	696
II	12,573
III	4,451
IV	17,303

V	2,783
VI	729
VII	562
VIII	486
IX	1,522
X	4,855
Total	45,960

Source: *The Interlinear Bible*. General Editor, Jay P. Green, Sr., 2nd ed., Hendrickson, 1985.
McGough, Richard. "The Holographic Decalogue." *The Bible Wheel*,
www.biblewheel.com/GR/GR_TenC.php. Accessed 14 Nov. 2014.

As a complete set, the Commandments may be divided by either 40 or 120; subdivided from I to III and IV to X, they may be divided by 40 and 80 respectively. The relevant factors and divisions are summarized in the following table.

Table 9
The Ten Commandments: Divisible by 40, 80, and 120

Commandments	**Factors**	**Value**
I-X	40 x 1,149	45,960
I-X	120 x 383	45,960
I-III	40 x 443	17,720
IV-X	80 x 353	28,240

Source: McGough, Richard. "The Holographic Decalogue." *The Bible Wheel*,
www.biblewheel.com/GR/GR_TenC.php. Accessed 14 Nov. 2014.

The numeric significance of the Ten Commandments goes far deeper than what we can develop here. However, we can easily discern from the original title of the show read as a factorial equation, from the prevalence of 40 as a factor in certain characters' names, and from Romer's Kabbalistic invocation of the number that *In the Beginning* correlates with the Commandments and the life of Moses on a highly profound level.[1] More specifically, we can see in Avi's response to the Commandments a genuine conversion experience in which the spirit of a lost soul bears fruit once it becomes subject to the law of God.

A Possible Connection Between 11, 13, and 40

The foregoing evidence demonstrates how all the names of the principal characters are divided into sets sharing 11, 13, or 40 as a factor. Depending on whether names are calculated using standard or ordinal values, a name can fall into more than one of the numeric categories represented (e.g., the factors 11 and 40 are reflected in the ordinal and standard values of Lydia's name in Hebrew). Likewise, a similar correlation may be seen even in a translation of a name from one biblical language to another (e.g., the factors 13 and 40 are reflected in the standard values of the name Ben in Hebrew and its translation in Greek). Furthermore, the evidence shows how 13 and 40 are related and how certain characters' names sharing both factors correlate with each other thematically (e.g., Avi/Cain and Ben share both factors and reflect the themes of begetting and birth).

However, can a case be made which ties 11, 13, and 40 together? It may be that there is a connection between the Ten Commandments and God's very first commandment to humanity in Genesis 1.28: ". . . and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply . . ." The value of the verb phrase "Be fruitful" (*p'ru*) is 286 (or 2 x 11 x 13), and that of "multiply" (*r'vu*) is 208 (or 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 x 13). Consequently, we see the role that the numbers 11 and 13 play in God's very first commandment in Genesis. Moreover, the sum of 11 and 13 is 24, which represents the product of the factorial equation preceding 5! = 120. That is, 24 is the product of the sequence 1

x 2 x 3 x 4, while 120 is the product of the sequence multiplied by the next factorial number 5. If we reflect on the significance of this, we can see that God's first commandment, which is expressed by 4! = 24 (or 11 + 13), precedes his commandments to Israel, which are expressed by 5! = 120 (or 40 x 3). Accordingly, these numeric correlations interconnect in ways that help tie *In the Beginning* to its original source of inspiration—God's commandments to humanity in general and to Israel in particular.

CONCLUSION

Despite being an esoteric means of expounding on musical theatre, interpreting *In the Beginning* in such a way reveals a kind of hidden wisdom locked inside what is so often deemed an unremarkable book. While the show would almost certainly benefit from another revision and further workshopping, seeing these numeric and thematic correlations helps us expand our appreciation beyond the score so as to include certain features of the writing that have been otherwise unobserved. The fact that all the principal characters' names in *In the Beginning* can be grouped into at least one of three numeric categories is compelling. Likewise, evidence of thematic correlations between names that share common factors supports the conclusion that an elaborate subtextual framework has been built into the writing.

Under Yeston's leadership, the creators have not simply lampooned the Bible, but developed, on one hand, a Mishnah of their own, and on another, a parallel set of scriptures. This blend of Mishnah and scripture includes not only narrative and psalm, but also underlying numeric strata that reflect the themes being developed. This effort is notable in that, even in the midst of its amusing dialogue, the text goes to great pains to mimic its literary parent's more mystical qualities. The high degree of emulation evident in the writing, all the way down to the numeric foundations, belies a deep love for the original source material, even while the creators have sought to poke as much fun as possible in the process.

APPENDIX

Table 10

Numerical Values Ascribed to Greek Alphabet

Name	Letter	Value	Ordinal	Name	Letter	Value	Ordinal
Alpha	A	1	1	Xi	Ξ	60	14
Beta	B	2	2	Omicron	O	70	15
Gamma	Γ	3	3	Pi	Π	80	16
Delta	Δ	4	4	Qoppa	ϙ	90	--
Epsilon	E	5	5	Rho	P	100	17
Digamma	Ϝ	6	--	Sigma	Σ	200	18
Zeta	Z	7	6	Tau	T	300	19
Eta	H	8	7	Upsilon	Υ	400	20
Theta	Θ	9	8	Phi	Φ	500	21
Iota	I	10	9	Chi	X	600	22
Kappa	K	20	10	Psi	Ψ	700	23
Lambda	Λ	30	11	Omega	Ω	800	24
Mu	M	40	12	Sampi	ϡ	900	––
Nu	N	50	13				

Source: Barry, Kieren. *The Greek Qabalah: Alphabetic Mysticism and Numerology in the Ancient World*. Weiser, 1999, pp. 206-207, table 2 THE GREEK QABALAH © 1999 by Kieren Barry used with permission from Red Wheel Weiser, LLC Newbury Port, MA www.redwheelweiser.com.

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ENDNOTES

[1] The curious reader may wish to consult Richard McGough's more involved calculations in "The HoloDec: Two Divisions of the Law" and "The HoloDec: The Spirit Shines" to see how the numbers 11 and 13 are also reflected in the Ten Commandments.

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Leonard Vandegrift teaches composition, argument, and research in the English and Foreign Languages Department at Cal Poly Pomona and serves as program coordinator of the campus' University Writing Center. In his leisure time, Leonard has performed in various musicals and plays and pursued the study of gematria and isopsephy. In 2014, he had the rare privilege of portraying Avi in a local production of *In the Beginning*, which ultimately led to the current study.

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Dumbledore's Uncertain Past: A *Harry Potter* Approach to Evaluating Sources

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ABSTRACT

Teaching students to evaluate sources—for accuracy, bias, and agenda—and to use them effectively despite their weaknesses, presents a challenge, and yet is essential in today's crowded media landscape. Most humanities and social science teachers spend at least some class time helping students develop a critical eye for documentary evidence. Using the fictional informational sources J.K. Rowling presents in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* to understand Albus Dumbledore's troubled youth can provide students the analytic skills they need through an entertaining exercise. The Harry Potter stories intrinsically value the past, though Rowling is not naïve about the difficulty of understanding the truth from flawed sources. Throughout the series, but particularly in the last book, characters must weigh evidence and gain important information from biased sources to help them determine their future actions. Conflicting views of Albus Dumbledore in *The Daily Prophet*, Rita Skeeter's book *The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore*, and Aberforth Dumbledore's eyewitness testimony about his brother, raise questions about the Hogwarts headmaster's motivations and moral integrity. Only by sorting through these contradictory accounts can Harry, Ron, and Hermione defeat the evil Lord Voldemort. When muggle students sort through these fictional accounts from the wizarding world, they nevertheless gain experience needed for navigating real-world sources to determine their own future paths. As a result, this exercise allows students to develop their critical thinking skills and their sense of historical consciousness.

Keywords: Critical Thinking, Historical Consciousness, Source Evaluation, Analysis, Evidence, Harry Potter, Albus Dumbledore, Pedagogy

With cries of "fake news" at every turn, the urgency for teaching critical reading skills has mounted in recent months. Teaching students to evaluate sources for quality and usable content remains a constant challenge at almost every educational level. Despite the topic's relevance, students are likely to approach the material with either an indifferent shrug or rolling eyes, chin in palm. For historians, the ability to analyze sources of information about the past and to use them appropriately has always been a central requirement of the discipline. But any educated person must have these abilities. Most humanities and social science teachers spend at least some class time discussing how to regard documents and other evidence with a critical eye. Although today we find ourselves inundated with information, most of our sources are not vetted by experts, are partisan (with varying degrees of openness about their bias), or have entertainment instead of accuracy as the top priority. Given this crowded yet flawed information landscape, evaluation of the quality and content of source materials has become a more essential skill than ever before. Students will find even more valuable the knowledge of how to use inherently biased sources effectively as evidence.

Pop culture approaches to source materials can make this rather workmanlike topic more immediately interesting to students. A useful and suitably complex exercise asks students to evaluate sources within the wizarding world of Harry Potter, particularly focused on the topic of Albus Dumbledore's uncertain past. It may seem counterintuitive to base an assignment about source accuracy on a fictional text—and fictional informational texts within it—but the key is the thinking process behind discerning source limitations and strengths. By developing the analytic skills to examine and effectively use documentary evidence about past events, even imaginary ones, students can apply this critical thinking to real-world situations. Developing critical evaluation in a relatively politically neutral subject area helps students and faculty focus on the skill itself instead of politicized content. J.K. Rowling possesses a surprisingly strong critical sensibility about historical (and other) sources, which makes her books ideal for this kind of exercise. Requiring thoughtful decision-making about what happened in Dumbledore's youth, this assignment helps students develop the essential skills needed to assess the quality of sources, identify the role played by their own expectations and biases, and even determine how to use imperfect accounts by biased authors in nevertheless responsible ways.

J.K. ROWLING'S PERSONAL, POLITICAL PAST

In the *Harry Potter* universe, the past is never far removed from present-day problems. Rowling builds into the fabric of her stories an urgent need to know what really happened in history. In "Hermione Raised Her Hand Again: Wizards Writing History," Anne Rubenstein examines the way that socially accepted history (what historians call "social memory") butts up against scholarly sources in the wizarding world, with very serious consequences. She notes, "A historian who asks just the right question and uncovers just the right evidence to answer the question and interprets the evidence in just the right way can end up challenging what everyone believed the story of the past to be. And once in a while, changing the official story of the past changes the present as well" (310-311). Rubenstein examines the variety of sources wizarding-world characters use to discover information about the past, including official ones and counter-cultural or hidden ones. Her most significant take-away is the value Rowling places on historical knowledge and the ability of her characters to sort through many different kinds of accounts of the past in order to solve current problems.

In underscoring the usefulness of the past to the present, Rowling acknowledges what scholars of history and pedagogy have learned in recent years: that people intuitively know that the past is relevant and useful to the present, but that their confidence about where to find accurate information is low. In *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*, Roy Rosenzweig and Daniel Thalen explain the results of a survey of Americans about their sense of history's relevance, and where they might find the most accurate sources. Their study revealed that Americans have a strong sense of the usefulness of the past to the present,

but that they distrust both commercial sources of historical information and official ones (like textbooks and school teachers). Instead, they tended to value most the personal testimony of people who have lived through historical events. This connection people feel to the past (if not to historians or history books) is vital to human endeavors. Klas-Göran Karlsson refers to "historical consciousness" as "a time compass that assigns meaning to past events and directs us to future projects" (129-130). As such, it is an essential tool for all citizens to be able to use. Rowling's depiction of a highly personal past demonstrates this same sensibility. In the final book in the Harry Potter series, Harry uses his conclusions about Dumbledore's youth as a "time compass," pointing him to the next steps on his quest.

Harry's detachment from his own roots makes his development of critical thinking about the past more difficult, yet also more necessary. His status as an orphan targeted by the evil Lord Voldemort and the Death Eaters stems from a past of which he has no memory, his parents' involvement in a conflict that continues from their generation to his, and living friends and foes among those who experienced the prior conflicts. As a result, Harry must become adept at uncovering valid sources of information about what occurred before he was born. His friends assist him in this regard. Ron Weasley, as a wizarding-world insider, inherits and absorbs common knowledge (social memory) about the past from his family. Hermione Granger is an outsider like Harry who learns of the past through authoritative sources like their history teacher Professor Binns and books, specifically *Hogwarts: A History.*

Harry must also identify and exclude invalid sources of information. Some presumably authoritative sources, like the *Daily Prophet*, reveal how easily they may be manipulated by either government censorship or the desire to pander to a fearful paying customer. Hermione also becomes wise to the (to her, unforgiveable) omissions in *Hogwarts: A History* when she learns of the role house-elves' unpaid labor played in the school's history; she claims the book should be renamed *A Highly Biased and* Selective *History of Hogwarts, Which Glosses Over the Nastier Aspects of the School* (*Goblet of Fire* 238). Harry's very survival in the present depends on the ability to analyze sources of history. But, importantly, so does the ultimate victory of good over evil. For the most part, Harry gleans relevant details from conversation with adults who lived through past traumatic events (the favored historical source of respondents in Rosenzweig and Thalen's study), Hermione's research, and occasional magical intervention like the Pensieve, which recreates the historical memories of individuals.

A crucial conflict emerges, however, when Albus Dumbledore dies in the sixth book. Harry has lost one of his chief and most credible sources of information about the past, present, and future. Indeed, the end of every prior book in the *Harry Potter* series involved a usually lengthy commentary on past events and how they relate to the present, either by Dumbledore himself or facilitated by him (as with Barty Crouch, Jr.'s *veritaserum* revelations at the end of Book 4). Now that authority is silent. Harry will have to go forward with Dumbledore's plans to defeat Voldemort without his mentor's reassuring presence or valuable historical perspective. Harry will have to find his own perspective on the past in the last book in order to complete his quest.

Unfortunately, in the seventh book Harry discovers that perhaps Dumbledore was not the man he thought. He encounters sources about Dumbledore's youth that seem to contradict Harry's personal understanding and that consequently call into question his mission in the present to fulfill Dumbledore's quest for the horcruxes. Harry will have to decide how to weigh these sources about the past in making his own decisions in the present. He will find truth in unexpected, undeniably biased sources, ones that contradict his personal understanding of Dumbledore's role in wizard history. He will agonize over the idea that Dumbledore's past was complex and perhaps tainted by impure motives and aims. The end of the last book will show Harry confronting his own memory of Dumbledore and coming to terms with his mentor's uncertain past. In the process of revealing these personal struggles that will determine whether good triumphs over evil in the end, Rowling provides readers with an opportunity to consider how to evaluate a variety of sources about the past.

DUMBLEDORE: THE HISTORIES

Dumbledore is mostly silent about his own past. What Harry knows about the Hogwarts headmaster he knows from other sources. His first knowledge comes from what we might call a pop culture source of history, Dumbledore's chocolate frog card:

> Considered by many the greatest wizard of modern times, Dumbledore is particularly famous for his defeat of the dark wizard Grindelwald in 1945, for the discovery of the twelve uses of dragon's blood, and his work on alchemy with his partner, Nicolas Flamel. Professor Dumbledore enjoys chamber music and tenpin bowling. (*Sorcerer's Stone* 102-103)

Harry comes to accept uncritically what we might think of as the social memory of Dumbledore, based on his heroic defeat of Grindelwald, especially when it is confirmed by Dumbledore's mission to defeat Voldemort in the present. Importantly, this understanding of the headmaster conforms to the image shared by the adults around Harry—Mr. and Mrs. Weasley and the other Hogwarts faculty, for example—and therefore preserves an uncomplicated, heroic image of his mentor.

But in Book 7, *The Deathly Hallows*, Harry encounters new sources of information that tell him unexpected, important details about his deceased mentor. One he is inclined to agree with: Elphias Doge's starry-eyed eulogy appearing in the *Daily Prophet*, which Harry reads early in the book. The other comes from shady journalist Rita Skeeter: a salacious exposé entitled *The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore*. Harry hears unsavory rumors about Dumbledore's past from Ron's Aunt Muriel, and then reads Skeeter's promotional interview in which she heavily criticizes Doge's account. He reads an excerpt from the exposé much later that, despite its scandal-mongering, nevertheless throws into question everything that Harry thinks he knows about Dumbledore's character and ambitions. Toward the end of the last novel, when the children meet up with Albus's brother before the Battle of Hogwarts, Harry will hear Aberforth Dumbledore's eye-witness testimony, another undeniably biased account that nevertheless contains important elements of truth.

Rowling presents these sources for her readers so that we are similarly drawn to question their accuracy as well as what we thought we knew about Albus Dumbledore. Each of these accounts describes occurrences at the Dumbledore household shortly after Albus's completion of Hogwarts and in between the deaths of his mother and his sister Ariana. For this exercise in source evaluation, students should read the documentary source excerpts Rowling provides in the text of the seventh novel. The two main sources are published documents: the first, the *Daily Prophet's* eulogy, and the second, an unauthorized (and, we are told, lengthy) biographical book.

1. "Albus Dumbledore—Remembered": Doge's eulogy of his friend mostly confirms Harry's perspective on Dumbledore's life, but reveals that there were complexities in his youth of which Harry has been unaware. As a former schoolmate, Doge portrays Dumbledore as the heroic defender of muggle rights, the powerful victor over the dark wizard Grindelwald, and a modest man who remained active in the politics of the wizarding world without seeking its highest office, Minister of Magic (*Deathly Hallows* 16-20).

2. "The Greater Good": the chapter excerpt from Skeeter's exposé, *The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore,* throws Harry's understanding of Dumbledore into serious question. Students should read a little before the excerpt in order to see the note that accompanied this copy of the book, which Skeeter gave to Bathilda Bagshot as "thanks" for being interviewed ("You said everything, even if you don't remember

> it" (*Deathly Hallows* 352)) as well as the caption for the picture of Dumbledore standing with "his friend" Gellert Grindelwald (353). This except dwells with malicious glee on Albus's "missing year," during which he befriended the young dark wizard and penned a letter (also excerpted) advocating for wizard dominance over muggles "FOR THE GREATER GOOD" (352-359).

Students will evaluate these two main sources for their quality and should compare them to see where they corroborate each other and where they disagree. To facilitate questions about bias, students should also examine "Dumbledore—The Truth at Last?," the *Daily Prophet's* interview with Skeeter as a promotion of her soon-to-be published book (*Deathly Hallows* 22-28). This interview appears in *The Deathly Hallows* immediately after Doge's eulogy, and allows us to see both Skeeter's view of "Dodgy" Doge's limitations as a judge of Dumbledore's life and character, as well as her particular biases and quite unsavory journalistic methods.

HISTORIC DETECTION: FINDING DUMBLEDORE'S MISSING YEAR

On the basis of these three excerpts—all printed material available to a mass wizarding audience—students should determine the relative value of these sources and what might be useful about them despite their biases. Here's an example of a homework assignment that may be used to prime the students for class discussion:

> Based on these three readings, evaluate the quality and reliability of the two main sources (by Elphias Doge and by Rita Skeeter). What are their perspectives, what evidence do they have, how useful is that evidence, and how well do you think they represent the truth about Dumbledore's past? Ultimately, explain what you think a person reading these two descriptions <u>can know</u> about Dumbledore's youth. What does this tell us about historical biography in general?

A short assignment like this allows the students to wrestle with the material outside of class and bring their own impressions, supported by evidence, into the discussion. This exercise may, of course, be done entirely in class, with students given this charge individually or in groups. The benefit of coming in with prior preparation is that students will have considered the documents at more length and probably in a more deliberate fashion. The benefit of carrying out the whole assignment in class is that students who have not previously formed an opinion may be more open to persuasion by other points of view. Either way, students will grapple with the key questions of what makes a source useful and whether biased sources (which each of these obviously is) can provide "true" information.

Whether they have prepared in advance or not, students in discussion should consider some of the following questions.

- Why did Doge and Skeeter write their accounts? How do their purposes affect the validity of their versions of Albus Dumbledore's life?
- What are Doge's and Skeeter's personal perspectives on Dumbledore, where do their perspectives come from, and how to do they show themselves in these documents?
- Do these perspectives amount to a detrimental "bias"? Why or why not?
- On what authority do Doge and Skeeter claim to know the truth about Albus

Dumbledore? Are these believable claims? How might they be challenged?

- What sources do Doge and Skeeter rely on? Which of these has the most authority as evidence? Which are, therefore, the most believable?
- How do Skeeter's methods of getting information affect the reliability of her evidence? Do you find Skeeter's implication that she used *veritaserum* believable and does this enhance her credibility or detract from it?
- Based on this analysis, what can a savvy reader determine to be *likely true* from these accounts? How can we reconstruct at least parts of Albus's "missing year"?
- What questions remain that cannot be satisfactorily answered by these sources? Where might wizards look for answers to these?

Once students have evaluated these written sources, show them the "oral" testimony of Albus's brother Aberforth Dumbledore for comparison (*Deathly Hallows* 563-567). Harry, Hermione, and Ron ask Aberforth about the events of that pivotal year and listen to his version of events. Bitterness toward his high-achieving older brother colors Aberforth's description of Albus's friendship with Grindelwald and treatment of their sister Ariana. Students should consider whether this eyewitness account constitutes a more authoritative source of information than Doge's or Skeeter's and evaluate Aberforth's biases, some of which were pointed out in Skeeter's interview and book. Aberforth's motives for talking about these episodes—for the first time, we're told—should be a part of the discussion, as well.

- Does this testimony confirm or undermine the version of events we determined from the published accounts?
- Do we see Aberforth as a better source, given that he was an eyewitness to many of the events discussed? Or do those standing at a remove from history have better access to "the facts"?
- What does this tell us about who can speak authoritatively about historic events?
- Does this show that we value oral testimony more or less than we should?
- Do Harry, Ron, and Hermione consider this to be a definitive account? How does hearing from Aberforth affect their course of action?

Students who have read the *Harry Potter* series will have an advantage in some respects in this last part of the conversation, but their knowledge of the larger story may also play into their judgment on these accounts. In the last book, even after his death, Albus Dumbledore has laid out a course of action for Harry, Ron, and Hermione: for them to seek and destroy the horcruxes so that they may defeat the evil Voldemort. Dumbledore's own youth, however, reveals that he, like Voldemort, searched for the Deathly Hallows instead—the elder wand, the resurrection stone, and the invisibility cloak, which together defeat death. Harry must decide whether to seek the hallows or the horcruxes, and his doubts about his mentor's moral purity make him question Albus Dumbledore's direction. Aberforth tells his version of events in order to discourage Harry, Ron, and Hermione from entering Hogwarts to seek the remaining horcruxes. The three protagonists will have to sort through the varied accounts of Dumbledore's youth in order to decide their course to victory. Ultimately accepting a less-heroic image of the Hogwarts headmaster, the Trio will nevertheless pursue his path in seeking horcruxes instead of hallows. This does, indeed, lead to the victory of good over evil. Knowing

this result in advance may cause students to look at the documents differently. It may be useful to ask students about whether they think their prior knowledge of the *Harry Potter* story influenced their decision-making in this exercise.

To cap off this exercise, students may be encouraged to read Harry's conversation with the deceased Albus at King's Cross station toward the end of the novel, in which they discuss his guilt and temptation by dark magic (707-723). This passage contains clues that this is not the actual Dumbledore, but rather represents Harry's cohering understanding of this complex man (Perez). Students might consider the degree to which various sources influenced Harry's perspective in the end, and whether they arrived at conclusions similar to Harry's from a critical reading of all the available sources.

TOWARD A USEABLE (MUGGLE) PAST

Although this exercise uses fictional sources in a fantasy universe, it can—paradoxically perhaps—help students find the unexpected relevance of sources about the past. Ask students who know the larger *Harry Potter* story how a different interpretation of Dumbledore's past might have changed Harry, Hermione, and Ron's actions, and thereby changed the story's outcome. How are interpretations of the past in the present, muggle world affecting both personal and political decisions? Where do they see this in their own lives? Have they ever had the experience of learning something new about the past that shook their understanding of themselves in the world or their sense of what they should do in the future?

As students navigate research projects of various kinds, they will need to be able to evaluate the quality and usefulness of their sources. More than that, they must be able to find what is useful even in problematic sources. Rare indeed are pure and unbiased sources of information. In their absence, we are all called upon to find what is true and important even in flawed materials. This exercise can help students to go even further than identifying bias; it can help them to determine how to use biased sources for valid research anyway. What could be more useful in our often unfair and unbalanced world today?

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Considering Ethical Questions in (Non)Fiction: Reading and Writing about Graphic Novels

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ABSTRACT

Teachers often feature graphic novels in college courses, and recent research notes how these texts can help make the process of reading more engaging as well as more complex. Graphic novels help enhance a variety of "literacies"; they offer bold representations of people dealing with trauma or marginalization; they explore how "texts" can be re-invented; they exemplify how verbal and visual texts are often adapted; they are ideal primers for introducing basic concepts of "post-modernism." However, two recurring textual complications in graphic novels can pose difficulties for students who are writing about ethical questions. First, graphic novels often present crucial scenes by relying heavily on the use of verbal silence (or near silence) while emphasizing visual images; second, the deeper ethical dimensions of such scenes are suggested rather than discussed through narration or dialogue. This article will explain some of the challenges and options for writing about graphic novels and ethics.

Keywords: Graphic novels; ethics; literacies; Art Spiegelman; *Maus*; Alison Bechdel; *Fun Home*

I am committed to using graphic novels in my English courses. This commitment can be a heavy one--in my case, it sometimes weighs about 40 pounds. If one stopped by my Introduction to Literature course at Kingsborough Community College (the City University of New York), one could see exactly what I mean.

A substantial part of the course focuses on Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (and *Meta-Maus*); these texts are often paired with excerpts from Elie Wiesel's *Night* and recent critical commentaries about constructing the "canon." During one class in the *Maus* sequence, I bring two large bags of books, *all* of them graphic novels.[1] I leave class with a lighter load, since ALL of the students browse through the texts and choose one as an independent reading. Certain texts get snatched quickly: Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta*, Kejii Nakazawa's *Barefoot Gen*, Marisa Acocella Marchetto's *Cancer Vixen*, Daniel Clowes' *Ghost World*, Adrian Tomine's *Shortcomings*, Frank Miller's *Sin City* and Brian Vaughn's *V:* T*he Last Man*. Other texts usually require a bit more "selling": Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan,* Shaun Tan's *The Arrival*, Joe Sacco's *Palestine*, Mariko and Jillian Tamaki's *Skim*, Mat Johnson's *Incognegro*, Gene Luen Yang's *American-Born Chinese*, Harvey Pekar's *American Splendor*, Emmanuel Guibert's *The Photographer* and, of course, Will Eisner's classic, *A Contract with God*.

REASONS FOR FEATURING GRAPHIC NOVELS IN A COURSE

Graphic novels tend to create converts, and converts often get a bit carried away. This sort of enthusiasm is often evident when students browse through graphic novels. The students can and often do take more than one text, and they soon realize that there is a wide and surprising world of "literary" texts out there. While I surely appreciate their engagement, I have also been investigating whether and how graphic novels will remain an essential component of my teaching practices. Why bring bags of graphic novels to a college Introduction to Literature course? At least five criteria seem crucial. Graphic novels:

- Help students of many different readings levels and backgrounds develop a wide range of "literacies." This process relies on a very broad and nuanced approach to how people and groups "read" and construct meaning.[2]
- Encourage innovative texts for encouraging dialogues about "otherness," about illness, about marginalized groups and outsiders, about the ways in which both individuals and groups use images and narratives to create, assign and/or challenge identities.[3]
- Provide concrete examples of how texts are "constructed" or "re-invented," since even simple matters such as fonts and punctuation and pages are often radically re-imagined.[4]
- Represent an on-going shift toward "visual culture," and allow students to get a clearer sense of how verbal and visual texts are adapted for different media and how they have they own distinct discursive expectations.[5]
- Serve as ideal primers for introducing students to some basic concepts and binary tensions of "post-modernism": construction and deconstruction, chance and design, irony and intertextuality, high art and pop culture, linear and non-linear texts.[6]

My research about graphic novels also led to an innocuous blog entitled "Getting Graphic." The blog is primarily a basic review of recent scholarship on teaching such texts, yet one of its concluding claims led to writing this article: "Graphic novels have received attention for their ability to motivate reluctant readers and support multiliteracies. However, graphic novels are not only for readers who struggle. Sequential art benefits already motivated students and supports the *examination of ethical issues* with gifted students" (4; italics added). I am convinced that graphic novels can present some serious challenges for all students, for "reluctant readers" as well as "already motivated students" and "gifted students." Yet I will be direct about my concern: a series of problems can arise when writing assignments about graphic novels encourage students to engage in an "examination of ethical issues."

Of course, the previous sentence demands some immediate clarifications. As for "writing assignments," I will focus on writing courses in community colleges, especially those courses known as WAC and/or WI sections: the acronyms stand for Writing-Across-the-Curriculum and/or Writing Intensive. I have been tutoring and teaching at CUNY (the City University of New York) since 1983, and I have been a full-time English professor at KCC (Kingsborough Community College) in Brooklyn since 1993. While at KCC I've often taught ENG 30, an "Introduction to Literature" course, also listed as a Writing Intensive / Honors course. In practical terms, we do numerous revised and in-class essays, and roughly 30 percent of the students will be affiliated with the college's Honors Program. I have often taught texts such as *Maus,* Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis,* David Small's *Stitches*, and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* in ENG 30, and while doing so, I have had to remain aware of a basic fact. I am teaching a Writing Intensive course about Literature in which very, very few students—even those in the Honors program—are potential English majors. As I write this, no program for an English major or minor is available at KCC, so for the great majority of students, "Introduction to Literature" is their first and *last* English elective. Roughly 60 percent of our incoming students speak English as their second language, many represent the first generation in their family to attend college, and many have a family income below $30,000 a year. The challenge of teaching such courses has become a serious issue at many other colleges, and an intriguing study of such courses appears in a 2015 article from *The CEA [College English Association] Forum*. The article "'You are asking me to do more than just read a book': Student Reading in a General Literature Course" makes a series of claims about how a literature course for non-majors can and should work. The authors state:

> Study findings indicate that both students and teachers find students to be most engaged in literature when given some autonomy to direct their reading choices and when prompted to identify the relevance of texts to their lived experiences; that a literature course for non-majors offers opportunities for students to develop or reclaim reading habits; and that both students and teachers perceive such a course to offer students opportunities to learn transferable reading and writing skills. (Amicucci et al. 2-3)

This statement serves to identify a few crucial ways in which teachers and students alike can make active decisions about finding readings that are both serious and appealing. As I consider the article's references "autonomy" or "relevance" or "reclaiming" certain "transferable" skills, they seem both familiar and convincing; they neatly summarize much of what I aim to do in my daily practice as a teacher.

Graphic novels would thus appear to be a helpful resource in a course for non-majors. Yet the term "graphic novel" also deserves clarification, since "graphic novels" are so varied that generalizing about them would be pointless. Thus, my argument will focus on four well-known graphic memoirs: I will directly discuss Spiegelman's *Maus* and Bechdel's *Fun Home,* and I will briefly note the relevance of Satrapi's *Persepolis* and Small's *Stitches.* All are memoirs in which an adult tries to reconstruct how the traumas of his or her youth are paired with very painful or contentious family matters. While teaching these texts, I've seen ample evidence in support of the five criteria previously noted: improving literacies, discussing otherness, deconstructing texts, analyzing visual culture, and contextualizing post-modernism. Reluctant and struggling readers have eagerly asked for my personal copies of *Persepolis II* and *Maus II*, even though these sequels are not assigned. Other students have shared their interests in comics and other forms of visual culture, such as anime and manga, providing us with accessible examples of how terms such as "literature" and "literacy" are far from self-explanatory.

Students from highly diverse (and potentially divisive) backgrounds have worked together to explain, for example, how and why religious "veils" are significant or how societies have created complex (and often vicious) associations between people and animals. Noting how these associations are often *visualized* has

lead in turn to discussions of how seemingly neutral and objective images, such as a newspaper photograph, draw from a deep well of assumptions. Such discussions became concrete when we considered two seemingly simple concepts, namely "page" and "scene." We read *Meta-Maus* and noted how Spiegelman often drew many different versions of the same page, or we chose a single scene from a text and watched as it is then adapted, as one can see in the film version of *Persepolis*; after this, students needed little convincing that artists and authors actively "construct" their texts. We have had vigorous discussions of what qualifies as a "literary/non-literary" or "fiction/non-fiction" texts. Can a "comic" (or a Campbell soup can or an upturned toilet bowl) be considered "art?" Can they explain why the best-seller list of the *New York Times* initially listed *Maus* as "fiction?" Also, students were often highly motivated when other students spoke boldly of how their experiences inform their reading. Examples abound in the highly diverse microcosm of KCC classrooms, and when students speak of the Holocaust survivor in their family or the reasons why they wear hijab or a decision to "come out" to their family, one can almost feel the room spin as the students' attention and voices shift to become more attuned to a new revelation.

KCC teachers continually try to navigate the various and shifting cultural codes in a college where a "typical" class of twenty-five students might feature a dozen nationalities/ethnicities, an even higher number of bilingual students, and a fascinating range of religious beliefs. It would require a far longer text than this to try to register even a partial set of these cultural variables and to suggest some methods for addressing them in a class setting. My goals are more modest, and will focus on certain distinct formal aspects of graphic novels that may become a crucial part of the process of writing a complex "examination of ethical issues." Graphic novels surely share numerous formal characteristics with traditional prose narratives; for example, both a graphic novel and a traditional novel might feature multiple narrative lines as well as distinct narrative voices and perspectives. These multiple viewpoints might in turn encourage readers to consider a more nuanced and multi-faceted discussion of ethical issues. However, there are certain features of graphic novels—such as presenting crucial scenes by relying heavily on visual images while offering little or no verbal contexts—which might engage students as readers while also presenting them with a potentially frustrating occasion for doing academic writing.

WHAT DO WE WRITE ABOUT WHEN WE WRITE ABOUT ETHICS?

The term "ethics" comes pre-loaded with assumptions and associations that often lead people to the sort of impasses mentioned by David Foster Wallace: "Am I a good person? Deep down, do I even really want to be a good person, or do I only want to seem like a good person so that people (including myself) will approve of me? Is there a difference? How do I ever actually know whether I'm bullshitting myself, morally speaking?" (257). In an attempt to settle on a practical way to frame these debates, I have focused on how "ethics" might be discussed in WAC (Writing-Across-the-Curriculum) courses. One current option is to use the term "ethics" to refer to a prescribed code of professional conduct. This choice is more likely for students in fields that lead to some sort of licensing: graphic novels (or at least very reductionist versions of them) have already been recommended for use by students of medicine and law. Columbia University's School of Continuing Education is developing a more innovative version of this process. It offers an M.S. in "Narrative Medicine," and courses such as "Giving and Receiving Accounts of Self" focus on medical ethics while also reviewing texts by Henry James and Hannah Arendt and Judith Butler, as well as graphic texts such as *Stitches* (www.narrativemedicine.org). Other teachers have considered employing graphic novels (or other literary texts for that matter) as a redemptive means of building character or morals or making students "better people." Scholars such as Martha Nussbaum have long argued that literature can and should have a crucial place in a society's discussion of ethics. She is very direct in calling for the humanities to play a strong role in directing

the moral development of today's college students. As she states in "Compassionate Citizenship," "Through stories and dramas, history, film, the study of philosophical and religious ethics, and the study of the global economic system, they should get the habit of decoding the suffering of another, and this decoding should deliberately lead them into lives both near and far" (3). Other scholars, such as Richard Rorty, are suspect of the over-arching narratives that govern the "moral work" that remains implicit in such ethical contexts. As Rorty claims, societies "might work better if they stopped trying to give universalistic self-justifications, stopped appealing to notions like 'rationality' and 'human nature,' and instead viewed themselves simply as promising social experiments" (193). I am not offering this statement as a one-sentence encapsulation of post-modernism, yet it may help to frame one basic issue facing teachers who try to introduce ethical terms into various assignments. Teachers who try to introduce and clarify traditional terms (perhaps "liberty" or "human rights") may feel a sense of both urgency *and* hesitancy while doing so. If one invokes Derrida and places such terms *sous rature* (that is, ~~liberty~~), or cordons them off inside quotations marks, or literally erases such terms from the board while teaching, then what replaces them? At the risk of generalizing about KCC students, many seem to prefer their metaphysics and universal values delivered without a chaser of irony or contingency. How then can one speak to students of "ethics" when the term calls forth so many different and contradictory meanings?

One particular statement from John Rothfork has helped frame the debate about the contentious status of post-modern ethics. His phrasing seems well-suited for describing how teachers negotiate the many and varied "contact zones" in their classes: "There is currently a fight in America over the operational logic or vocabulary which enables public or ethical discourse to proceed. The fight is over how we—as women, Native American Indians, Buddhists—talk about our ethical performative knowledge" (18). This search for an "operational logic" is indeed crucial, and the reference to "we" suggests how tenuous this process can become. In this case, Rothfork's initial use of "we" seems to indicate a unified group, but the next phrase reminds us of our shifting and multiple allegiances. As I have read and re-read Rothfork's statement, I've found it hard to isolate and name "*the* operational logic or vocabulary" that guides the "performative" aspect of ethical discussion (18; italics added). KCC students represent such a diversity of backgrounds that it seems more likely we'll discuss pluralities—that is, "logics" and "vocabularies" rather than some singular and comprehensive term. When I do ask students to consider ethical questions, I've found that there are crucial places in graphic novels that leave us wondering about how this might be done, and both the students and I have found this to be problematic.

WRITING THE ETHICAL: AN ASSIGNMENT ABOUT A "TRADITIONAL" NOVEL

What might I consider to be a text which provides students with a challenging option for writing about ethics? My ENG 30 course usually features Edwidge Dandicat's 2004 novel *The Dew Breaker*, a series of nine interwoven stories. The "dew breaker" is an unnamed 65-year-old Haitian immigrant who lives with his wife (Anne) and daughter (Ka) in East Flatbush near the Brooklyn Museum. A reader need not wait long to find that this man has committed and hidden horrific crimes—namely torturing and killing both political prisoners and completely innocent civilians—during the revolutions in 1960's Haiti. He had semi-confessed to some of his crimes to his wife years ago when their daughter was born. Now his secrets are causing all sorts of trouble. His daughter, an artist who had fully believed her father's stories about being a political prisoner, has created an evocative sculpture in his honor that is about to be sold to a prominent Haitian TV star; his tenant in the basement apartment has recognized the "dew breaker" as the man who killed his parents years ago in Haiti; the Haitian community is openly seeking for retribution against the killers among them; a young college student and rookie journalist named Aline devoted herself to telling the stories of the victims of these

crimes; his wife, who had found some consolation in prayer and faith, now believes that she is living a soul-destroying lie.

By the end of the book, there's no clear resolution of the braided narratives sketched above, just a scenario in which every character must soon act, each knowing full well that most of these actions could lead to their own downfall. This ending, of course, presents a reader with much more than just a narrative "cliffhanger," and in one of my writing assignments I ask the following:

> During the final pages of the book, Anne is left wondering whether "reparation and atonement are possible"—and the book then ends *without* clarifying this for a reader. What do the terms "reparation and atonement" mean in general, and what specific meanings might these words have for these five characters in the book: Ka, Anne, Dany, Aline, and "the dew breaker" himself? Please analyze the varied responses of at least TWO characters. What key criteria or terms would seem most important to these characters? Please make sure to refer to specific scenes and/or statements from the book and to explain their significance.

Students generally do not find it hard to start a response, since the characters have often studied the contours of their own entrapments and silences. One story within the novel, "Book of Miracles," features one scene that students often cite. Anne is in church for midnight Mass on Christmas Eve with her husband and daughter. During a moment when the entire congregation is hushed, Ka urgently whispers to her mother that she has spotted—or thinks she has spotted—a notorious torturer also known to be living a shadowy life in Brooklyn. Faced with the ethical dilemma of speaking or remaining silent, the two women frame their choices using very different vocabularies. Ka (who does not yet know of her father's crimes) is furious, and barely restrains herself from shouting out. Anne is having other thoughts :

> What if it were Constant? What would she do? Would she spit in his face or embrace him, acknowledging a kinship of shame and guilt that she'd inherited by marrying her husband. How would she even know whether Constant felt any guilt or shame? What if he'd come to this Mass to flaunt his freedom? To taunt those who'd been affected by his crimes? What if he didn't even see it that way? What if he considered himself innocent? Innocent enough to go wherever he pleased? As a devout Catholic and the wife of a man like her husband, she didn't have the same freedom to condemn as her daughter did. (81)

As the students reply to the essay prompt, I am not looking for a firm prescriptive answer about what a character should finally "do," nor am I expecting that the students will take Anne or Aline or Dany's dilemmas as a means of achieving some personal epiphany about their own ethical bearings. If I have any particular theoretical framework for my writing courses, it would be that of a socio-linguist, one who is intrigued and compelled by the "code-switching" that we all do while assuming various discursive roles. As James Paul Gee states in *Social Linguistics and Literacies*, "Any time we act or speak, we must accomplish two things: we must make clear who we are, and we must make clear what we are doing. We are each not a single *who*, but different *whos* in different contexts" (124). The conflicting arguments of Nussbaum and Rorty and Rothfork indicate that the ability to firmly define "ethics" remains elusive—yet the deep and recurring desire to try to share even a provisional public exchange of ideas about ethics is undoubtedly what keeps this conversation going at all. Which "vocabularies" are in play in *The Dew Breaker*, and just *who* is employing them? Might one start with Anne's tortured silence as a believer and a cowardly co-conspirator? Or Ka's hip art-school atheism and activism? Or Dany's return to Haiti to learn how his parents' pastoral community deals with their own members' transgressions? Or the declarations of universal principles from human rights' groups that are

directly quoted in the novel? Or might it be Aline's decision to look past her academic training as a journalist intern and to now write as an advocate for those "men and women chasing fragments of themselves long lost to others?" (137).

While dealing with texts such as *The Dew Breaker*, students usually can write their way into a fairly nuanced discussion of how ethical decisions can be shaped and informed by culture and language, by images and symbols, by legal codes and social customs. Traditional prose narratives often encourage this process. One reads of a character and notes how their ideas arise in a sequence, one that may not be quite rational and consistent, but one that has its own cadence, structure, phrasing, evasions, echoes. It is this process of speaking and restraining from speech, one that Dandicat calls "coded utterances," that demands careful attention. How might a similar process take place while reading (and then writing about) a graphic novel? How might the reading of graphic novels complement, and perhaps complicate, the ways in which students read more traditional prose narratives? And finally, how might the reading of a graphic novel present students with a strikingly *different* perspective? For example, what if Dandicat's description of Anne's tormented self-examination featured few or no words? What if readers were presented instead with a few close-ups of Anne's face and hands as she glanced again and again at the man she believed to be Constant? How might they write their way into a discussion of the ethical contexts for that moment?

WRITING THE ETHICAL: ASSIGNMENTS ABOUT GRAPHIC NOVELS

"Every act committed to paper by the comics artist is aided and abetted by a silent accomplice" (68).
— from Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*

As we read Spiegelman's *Meta-Maus*, students can work on various topics about trauma, about post-modern memory, about adapting and re-adapting, about the careful composition of every page. The publication of *Meta-Maus*, with its archival pictures and video and interview transcripts, allows students to see how memory is both retrieved and re-created in a survival tale. How then might students write about moments in a graphic novel when a character/person finds themselves at the edge of an ethical cliff?

Maus certainly features many such moments. One obvious context for reading most "survivor tales" is that the author cannot rely too much on suspense. We all know from the start that Art Spiegelman and his father Vladek lived to tell this tale, so the question "Did they eventually survive?" is almost immediately displaced by the question "What did they do to survive?" and some version of its implicit corollary: "And did they lose their souls/compromise their dignity while doing so?" The latter chapters feature a series of almost unbearable decisions facing the Spiegelman family and their friends as they move from one "hole" to the other. In class, we generally focus on three distinct scenes. In the first, the Spiegelman family must decide whether to turn over their elderly relatives to the Nazis for deportation (or be taken away themselves); in the second, a group of Jews hiding desperately in a secret bunker must decide whether to kill a fellow Jew who has found them, and who may also be a Nazi informant. The third scene is given the most careful attention. The Nazis have overrun a town, and they are rapidly approaching the home of Vladek's sister Tosha. She then faces a horrifying decision, as she must quickly decide whether to allow herself, her two young children, and her nephew Richieu (Art's older brother) to be captured—or to poison herself and the children (109). Students often respond very strongly to these scenes when we discuss them in class, since they present such painful and irrevocable choices. Yet there are two recurring textual complications in many graphic novels that can pose difficulties for students who are writing about these texts. First, graphic novels often present crucial scenes by relying heavily on the use of verbal silence (or near silence) while emphasizing visual images; second, the deeper ethical dimensions of such scenes are suggested rather than discussed.

Students soon notice that Speigelman often uses relatively long and patiently detailed series of panels

for seemingly minor events (Vladek's complaints about his glass eye or his pills or Vladek's joking with Anja about losing and finding a pillow during a refugee march) while retelling more disturbing events (the death of his own father or even the arrival at the gates of Auschwitz) in very terse and compressed sequences. Perhaps the most extreme example of this is the death of Tosha and Richieu, which Vladek calls *the* "tragedy among tragedies." The entire sequence fills less than a page (see Image 1). It's a very painful and evocative scene, and students are quick to notice how the elimination of details forces one to be attentive to what remains. For example, imagine the tone and volume of the word "NO!" Just note what her face and her collapsing shoulders convey as panels 5, 6 and 7 zoom in closer and closer. Or shudder as she quickly turns from the window, calls the children to her, and _____. (Dare we imagine the details of what follows?) It also challenges the whole premise of the book, that is, how one needs to both "retrieve" and "create" memory. (The news of Richieu's death was gathered in fragments. *Maus II* mentions how Vladek and his wife Anja spend months after the war looking for Richieu, unaware of the scene described above.) When I've met students again in subsequent semesters, it is often *that* scene which has formed their sharpest recollections of graphic novels, of representations of the Holocaust, of "the creation of memory," of our course in general.

Image 1: *Maus*

Yet can they then *write* about the scene's ethical dimensions? For example, as we read *Maus*, we often read related scenes from Elie Wiesel's *Night,* including one in which Wiesel considers throwing himself into a ditch filled with burning bodies. He does not, yet he is devastated to realize that the men around him are reciting the mourner's Kaddish as they continue walking. Wiesel presents his ethical anguish in much bolder terms and closes this section with his famous invocation: "Never shall I forget that night..." While writing about that section, students often notice the seven repetitions of "Never," the imagery of children being turned into "wreaths of smoke," the implications of a "silent" sky, the despair which "murdered my God" (30-31). As one of their writing options, students are asked to consider the differences between these two types of texts:

COMPLEX COMMIX?: The graphic novel Maus obviously challenges a reader's

> assumptions about whether a seemingly simple form can fully convey the complex emotions and ideas of people or characters. The book feature a series of scenes in which people must make very difficult ***ethical*** decisions. To what extent and in what ways might a graphic novel be more or less convincing or insightful than a traditional literary text while trying to represent the ethical conflicts of such scenes? You may refer to any of the texts we've read (or will read), or you may choose your own examples.

Here's where a recurring issue has arisen--students often find it not just difficult but almost impossible to develop a sustained analysis of the ethical contexts for a scene such as the death of Richieu. It's not that this moment lacks an ethical charge. Yet students have grave difficulties getting past the obvious points that Tosha has two horrifying options (infanticide and suicide vs. handing over herself and the children to face unspeakable violence) and that she is feeling desperate, hesitant, tormented, resigned. Students often struggle to provide an analysis which moves beyond these obvious points How might they move past their initial obvious statements, or, as I might ask in somewhat more technical terms, "What do you/we imagine to be in the gutter?" Don't look at the text for some rain-filled trench--in the terminology of comics, the "gutter" refers to the literal/imagined "spaces" between panels or other distinct sections of the text, and as Scott McCloud says in his classic text *Understanding Comics*, "Despite its unceremonious title, the gutter plays host to much of the magic and mystery that are at the very heart of comics" (66). In this scene, the "gutter" between panels 7 and 8 seems especially resonant---the first panel features Tosha in near-collapse from the burdens now upon her, while in the next panel she has straightened up, wheeled around, and started an irrevocable act. "Gutters" get filled with all sorts of things besides basic assumptions about *narrative* continuity or what some comic artists simply call "closure." Gutters invite us to fill them with allusions and voices-that is, they become intertextual. As teachers we may need to resist the urge to *presume* this knowledge of other texts and contexts that lead to a nuanced analysis. As an obvious example, a reference to suicide or infanticide may remind experienced readers of various characters and authors and texts: Hamlet, Sylvia Plath, Henry Scobie, Ernest Hemingway, Rebecca Harding Davis' "Life in the Iron Mills," Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Gwendolyn Brooks' "The Mother." Many literary associations may be unfamiliar, and even if they are, that brings up a further impasse. My students and I (and dare I say *any* other readers?) are the ones *projecting* these assumptions into the lacunae between these panels, rather than actually analyzing the contexts most crucial to Tosha. Might we be vaguely "right" while making certain assumptions about her doubts and terrors? Probably--but as I ask "What's in the gutter?", the ethical contexts generally become vague or even remain inaccessible.

One should not immediately be dismissive of the use of "silence" in a text, and many readers will already know of Foucault's dictum that "There is not one but many silences." However, for writers who are still struggling with the nuances of academic discourse, such "silences" in the "gutter" can lead to a lot of vagueness and potential confusion, and in courses where the development of precise language is so very crucial, this surely matters. *Maus* is surely not an isolated example, and it is almost chatty compared to *Persepolis* or *Stitches*. For example, a pivotal sequence in *Persepolis* depicts Marjane's visit to the jail cell of her beloved Uncle Anoosh on the eve of his execution for being a political dissident. During this full-page sequence of panels, the two are alone in his cell—and Marjane says not a word (69). In *Stitches*, Small is a told a devastating truth about his place in his family—and this is followed by eleven pages (often referred to as the "rain sequence") in which not a single word appears (257-268).Of course, this silence is an intentional effect, and an interview with David Small suggests a crucial distinction about visual and verbal communication. He notes, "I like to say that images get straight inside us, bypassing all the guard towers. You often go to the movies and see people with tears streaming down their cheeks, but you don't see this in libraries, not in my experience at least." He adds, "If told in words—even if I could have—the story would have lost that visceral impact" (2). Small's

memoir seems to both confirm and challenge some of the suggestions made in the previously cited article from *The CEA Forum* about assigning reading for non-majors. The text allows for students to find "relevance" in Small's depictions of family, alienation, trauma, therapy, imagination, and a text that is able to "bypass the guard towers" often gives credence to deeply felt personal narratives. It can be used as a way to move from a "visceral" text to the more verbally oriented texts often found in academic disciplines. Yet teachers still need to be attentive about the "transferable writing skills" that non-majors might learn from these crucial sequences from texts such as *Stitches*. To be direct, what can we ask students about what Marjane and David are thinking in the sequences mentioned above? If there are "vocabularies" for their dilemmas, how might one know them and comment on them?

So could I name a graphic novel which might be less "evasive," which might employ "gutters" in a way that allows for a fuller discussion of ethical discourse? I would suggest Alison Bechdel's acclaimed 2006 memoir *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*. The book itself is all about evasion after evasion, primarily about how a closeted gay father and lesbian daughter "speak" of their own sexuality. Both seem to "know" that the other's public identity is a shadow-play, but for the greater part of the book neither ventures to speak directly of their presumptions--instead, we read of their mumbling and code words and knowing glances. Above all, father and daughter "speak" through books, some given as gifts that seem more like invitations for dialogue, others that are discussed in English courses, others used to suggest what cannot yet be said. Toward the end of the book, Bechdel becomes increasingly aware that these silences are not just awkward but damaging, and she resolves to speak out. A crucial exchange appears on pages 218-219 (see Image 2). In a panel near the top of the page 218, Alison is lying on the couch as her father approaches and asks her to help polish some silver.

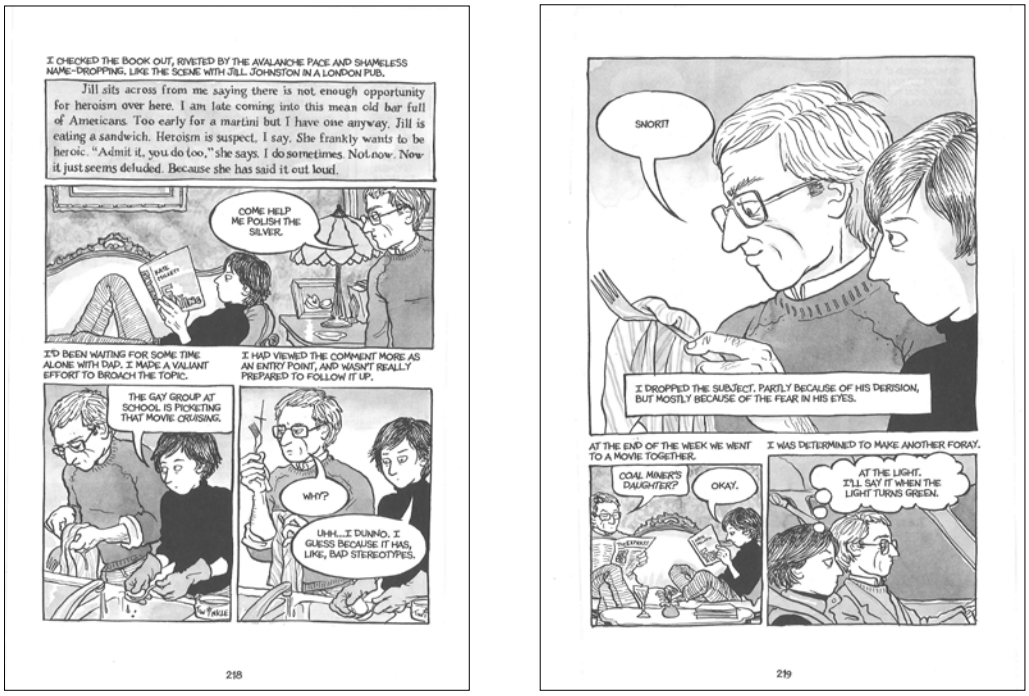

Image 2: *Fun Home*

While in the kitchen they have yet another failed dialogue about the movie *Cruising*, and the scene could easily be read as a pair of missed chances—the chance for Alison to speak, and the chance for readers to know more of what Alison is really thinking. It should be noted that none of the four books I've mentioned use extended dialogues, and nor do the vast majority of graphic novels; often this choice isn't a rejection of dialogue but

simply a recognition that the visual format of most graphic texts simply does not leave much space for verbal exchanges. Also, while memoirs rely heavily on voices, the voices of Vladek Spiegelman, Taji Satrapi, the Small family, and Bruce Bechdel are generally terse and understated. The key difference is that the "gutters" of *Fun Home* are like over-flowing baskets of interior monologue and literary allusion. Neither of these terms is really adequate here. "Interior monologue" is a barren label for a memoir in which self-conscious over-writing appears on almost every page. Readers need to engage with lines such as "I was adrift on the high seas, but my course was becoming clear. It lay between the Scylla of my peers and the swirling, sucking Charybdis of my family" (213). These brief allusions are often paired with lengthy and direct quotations from writers such Proust, Fitzgerald, Wilde, Joyce, and so many others, which in turn may be contrasted with both images and text from movies, letters, album covers, news headlines, dictionary entries, and her own somewhat neurotic diary. The effect of these methods is that they allow for a much more substantial discussion of an ethical issue.

To be honest, my description of the previous dialogue was intentionally incomplete. Before the conversation starts, Bechdel adds a key reference. As her father is talking, Alison is reading a section of Kate Millett's *Flying*, and this excerpt is quoted in full:

> Jill sits across from me saying there is not enough opportunity for heroism over here. I am late coming into this mean old bar full of Americans. Too early for a martini but I have one anyway. Jill is eating a sandwich. Heroism is suspect, I say. She frankly wants to be heroic. "Admit it, you do too," she says. I do sometimes. Not now. Now it just seems deluded. Because she has said it out loud.

This brief excerpt from Millett introduces the themes underlying the strained conversation that follows: the desperate need to speak, the desire or fear of the "heroism" that this entails, the rising tension between "now" and not now," the choppy declarations and the continued retreats into a veiled silence. All of these are given resonance, so that even Bruce Bechdel's derisive "Snort!" becomes significant (219).

Non-majors who are becoming familiar with reading more complex literary texts can also learn a great deal about the form of an ethical argument or question simply by analyzing the ways in which Bechdel challenges the very idea of a "page." In some ways, pages 100-101 are not that surprising: a splash page features a photograph overlaid by eight distinct text boxes containing questions, captions, and loose associations. The photograph is of a young man named Roy who had often done both child-care and landscaping for the family. Yet the underlying question is surely a resonant one: why would her father have taken—and kept—a photograph of Roy lying almost naked on a hotel bed? What was the father trying to reveal or conceal? What may she as an author now assume or reveal about her father's semi-hidden past? The answers are neither immediate nor conclusive. Instead, the text boxes are arranged almost chaotically, both forcing and allowing a reader to create some sort of logical sequence—or a variety of sequences. In David Small's terms, the image of Alison's hand holding this picture does "bypass all the guard towers" and create a very "visceral" response while *also* using the text boxes to voice themes that echo throughout the book. As the "final" text box states, "In an act of prestidigitation typical of the way my father juggled his public appearance and private reality, the evidence is simultaneously hidden and revealed" (101). Bechdel provides a suggestive—but far from prescriptive—context for judging her father's life and her own reactions, and this sort of context is quite helpful for writers who are still trying to learn academic discourse. The following is a writing question I use about *Fun Home*, one based loosely on the prompt that I use about *The Dew Breaker*:

> One of the most pressing issues in contemporary society is that of being "silent." What are some situations in which being "silent" develops into a complex ethical dilemma? Please refer to the choices of TWO or more people from *Fun Home*. How and why do they remain "silent?" What, if anything, do they *reveal* about their silence, how do they

> reveal it, and what conflicts arise from such revelations? Please make sure to refer to specific scenes or statements from *Fun Home* (and/or other texts you've read) and to explain their significance.

In this case, students have ample options besides projecting personal associations into the "gutters" of *Fun Home*. In academic terms, the students now have more than compelling visual imagery--they *also* have complex verbal contexts for the sort of investigation that one would hope they will engage in as they take Introduction to Literature. (Or as Spiegelman would say, they have "commix" to draw upon.) Whether the scenes from Bechdel rely on relatively straight-forward bits of narration or on more intertextual references, the students have a much fuller opportunity to write and to analyze, while also reading a very bold, timely and innovative text!

"DEEP THINKING" AND HONEST QUESTIONS

"There is no philosophical area that cannot potentially be given a graphic novel treatment" (49).
— from Jeff McLaughlin's "Deep Thinking in Graphic Novels"

Perhaps I have wound up arguing that graphic novels are best at confronting ethical quandaries when they rely upon seemingly traditional fictional techniques such as dialogue and narration. If that does wind up to be the case, then that might prove to be unhelpful, since there are not many graphic novelists who use the densely allusive *verbal* references and echoes of *Fun Home*.8 Of course, those who prefer to use traditional prose texts in a Literature course can find ample support for that choice. One might start with Mark Kingwell's claim that "On Cartesian principles, we cannot directly know the mind of another; *but words printed on a page give us the best possible chance at coming close*, better even than interacting with others" (5; italics added). It would seem obvious that graphic artists would soundly reject this premise, and the scholarly articles cited earlier generally presume that this notion of "the best possible chance" is exactly what graphic artists are trying to usurp. However, I was surprised by a comment from Scott McCloud about "gutters" and "closure." As he states, "Closure in comics fosters an intimacy *surpassed only by the written word*, a silent, secret contract between the creator and audience" (69; italics added) Consider the various "gutters" that were discussed above. When Tosha turns to face the children, when Marjane sits silently in a jail cell, when David withdraws into his own drawings, when Alison's attempt to speak is met with "Snort!," there surely is an "intimacy" created. What can one say about moments? As Kingwell reminds us, this question may be merely speculative, since directly "knowing the mind" of another simply can't happen. Yet we can at least glimpse a tentative map of that interior by reading what our students *write*, and if they can't write much about Tosha's last thoughts, for example, then perhaps that "intimacy" remains hesitant and amorphous; it is often one based primarily on personal assumptions rather than textual analysis.

What then might teachers keep in mind as we ask students to *write* about situations that *demand* a consideration of ethical issues while also *denying* readers many of the narrative techniques (such as dialogue, omniscient narration, interior monologue, allusion, etc…) that they may expect to find? If readers, especially those who may be still learning the basics of college-level academic discourse, must rely instead on a great deal of inference based on non-verbal cues, then what are some possible compromises that arise, and how might teachers work through these compromises? It might seem to be petty and even self-defeating to raise such challenges when I've already decided that graphic novels have much to contribute to the study of reading and writing--of course, one could just settle for the obvious disclaimer that there is no form/genre that lends itself to all types of writing assignments. Yet in discussions among fans and scholars of graphic novels, there remain nagging doubts, and students surely are not shy about sharing their own suspicions. During the sequence of lessons on *Maus*, I ask them to do an in-class assignment based on Daniel Correia's article "A Novel Idea,"

in which he asks students and teachers at the University of California at Santa Cruz for their thoughts about reading graphic novels in Literature courses. Most of the article's commentators are supportive, and some of them even read graphic novels as their own academic declarations of independence. The students are also quick to note a section of the article in which a graduate student named David Namie expresses the reservations that he and some of his students had. As Correia explains:

> "Namie admitted that his students found something lacking in the graphic novel he used for his course. 'Although there wasn't resistance to the idea of reading a graphic novel, there was the feeling that something wasn't there,' Namie said. 'Students expect more substance or something more intellectual from traditional texts like *Wuthering Heights*.'" (4)

There are usually a few critical students who agree with him, but the obvious problem is that claims about "something lacking" or "something wasn't there" or "something more intellectual" can sound suspiciously like the disengaged comments given by someone who doesn't care for cricket or rap. I am not trying to shame Namie or my students here—I have been fumbling around with my own phrasing for awhile as well. So I have arrived at the tentative conclusion that this absent "something" is not about the five reasons that I mentioned at the beginning of the essay. It is not about literacy or identity or meta-narratives or visual culture or post-modernism--the elusive "something" seems to be the ethical dimensions of reading and writing about such texts.

For the many reasons that I outlined earlier, I will be teaching graphic novels again in ENG 30. I will keep in mind Jeff McLaughlin's article, while also be questioning his basic assumption. There are fascinating things that one can find in the "gutters" of graphic texts, but a fully realized "examination of ethical issues" remains an elusive one. Of course, McLaughlin is careful to qualify his statement with the word "potentially"--and the "potential" of graphic novels to do so many others things is quite strong. When a graphic novel such as *Fun Home* allows for such a discussion, I will be glad to encourage it, but I will also be wary of assigning students to make such "examinations" of ethical dilemmas when I find myself having trouble doing so.

ENDNOTES

[1] Many writers and teachers have noted the inadequacy of this term. Many graphic "novels" are actually non-fiction memoirs, and others read more like novellas or short stories. Many have little similarity with more traditional definitions of the "novel." Yet it remains the most commonly-used term to refer to texts such as *Maus*, so I will use it for convenience. For a fuller discussion of this issue, see Hatfield, "Defining Comics."

[2] For a basic review of literacy issues, see Schwarz, "Expanding Literacies."

[3] More specialized uses of graphic novels can be found in MacDonald, "Hottest Section in the Library," and Smetana, "Using Graphic Novels." Also see Redford, "Graphic Novels Welcome Everyone," and Gerde and Foster, "X-Men Ethics."

[4] For an overview, try Aldama's *Multicultural Comics* and Royal, "Introduction." For more focused discussions, see Boatwright, "Graphic Journeys" and Squire, "So Long As They Grow Out of It."

[5] McCloud's *Understanding Comics* is a classic tour of these innovations. Also see Almond, "Deconstructed—Chris Ware's Innovation."

[6] Courses that analyze visual culture are proliferating. Simply google "CUNY courses on visual culture" for a sampling. See Drucker, *Graphesis* for broader contexts.

[7] See Roeder, "Looking High and Low"; Chute, "Comics as Literature."

[8] Readers might try Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Gorazde: The War in Eastern Bosnia* or the obscure *Gemma Bovary* by Posey Simmonds or even *Radioactive: A Tale of Love and Fallout,* Lauren Redniss' stunning graphic biography of Marie Curie. Of course there remains Alan Moore's classic *V for Vendetta*, which has enough allusions and speeches to keep a graduate seminar busy. Moore's *Watchmen* is even more complex, and gives preferences to long-winded dialogues rather than subtle silences; as a colleague once remarked to me, this text doesn't have "gutters," it has *canyons* of highly self-conscious prose interspersed among the graphic passages. Yet these texts are the exceptions, and many recent graphic novels are featuring less and less dialogue and/or interior monologue.

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