



DIALOGUE

*The Interdisciplinary Journal of
Popular Culture and Pedagogy*

The background of the cover is a large, abstract painting of a face. The face is rendered with thick, expressive brushstrokes in a vibrant palette of yellow, orange, red, blue, and purple. The eyes are dark and intense, looking slightly to the left. The overall style is reminiscent of expressionist or abstract portraiture. A red diagonal band runs from the top left corner across the top of the page.

On Confronting Identity and Global Challenges through Popular Culture and Pedagogy

Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy

Volume 11, Issue 2 | August 2024 | www.journaldialogue.org



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. *Dialogue* is committed to creating and maintaining a scholarly journal accessible to all—meaning that there is no charge for either the author or the reader.

The Journal is interested in contributions offering theoretical, practical, pedagogical, and historical examinations of popular culture and pedagogy, 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, please visit www.journaldialogue.org or email Dr. Anna CohenMiller, Editor in Chief, at editors@journaldialogue.org.



Editorial Team

Anna CohenMiller, PhD

Editor in Chief, Founding Editor

Anna CohenMiller, PhD, is an award-winning educational leader, TEDx and keynote speaker who addresses systemic issues of equity and inclusion in teaching and learning. She specializes in arts-based decolonial research and innovative pedagogy, including addressing critical media literacy (in)formal learning through popular culture. For eight years, CohenMiller worked in Kazakhstan (Central Asia) leading education and research at an emerging flagship university. During that time she co-founded the Consortium of Gender Scholars and led the development of The Motherscholar Project, an online platform promoting and advocating for inclusion of mothers in higher education across the academic pipeline. Today, Professor CohenMiller is a Full Professor at Nord University (Norway) where she brings together her international experiences to empower and promote justice-centered research and education. Professor CohenMiller's contributions can regularly be seen in popular outlets such as *InsideHigherEd*, *Medium.com*, as well as in over 100 research and educational journals and books, including the award winning *Leading Change in Gender and Diversity in Higher Education from Margins to Mainstream* and *Questions in Qualitative Social Justice Research in Multicultural Contexts*. Her recent book integrating research and adult learning, *Transformative Moments in Qualitative Research: Method, Theory, and Reflection*, has been termed a "must read." Since 2011, Professor CohenMiller has been involved with SWPACA in developing *Dialogue* and then as an Executive Team member..

Karina Vado, PhD

Associate Editor

Karina A. Vado (she/her/ella) is an Assistant Professor of Latinx Studies in the Department of English at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, FL, and affiliate faculty in the university's Center for Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies. She earned her Ph.D. in English from the University of Florida as well as an M.A. in Women's Studies from UF's Center for Gender, Sexualities, and Women's Studies Research and a Graduate Certificate from UF's Center for Latin American Studies. Karina's research interests span the fields of Hemispheric American Studies (especially Afro-Latinx, Chicana, Latin/x American, and African-American literary and cultural studies), Science and Technology Studies (especially Critical Race & Feminist Science Studies), and Science Fiction and Utopian Studies. Her scholarship has been supported by several competitively awarded fellowships including the Florida Education Fund's McKnight Doctoral Fellowship, the University of Texas at Austin's Gloria E. Anzaldúa Summer Research Fellowship, and Penn State University's Diversity Pre-Doctoral Fellowship. You can find samples of Karina's scholarly writing in edited collections such as *Race and Utopian Desire in American Literature and Society* and in *Human Contradictions in Octavia Butler's Work*. For more information on current research projects and opportunities for collaboration, visit vadokarina.com.

Barbara Perez, MA

Managing Editor

Barbara Perez (she/her) is a third year doctoral student in the Culture, Society, and Politics track of the Comparative Studies Program at FAU. Her research areas of focus are Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (esp. ecofeminism & environmental feminisms, and feminist epistemology and STS), as well as Latinx Environmentalisms. She is also interested in political ecology, critical animal studies, and feminist pedagogy. Prior to coming to FAU, Barbara completed an MA program in Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies, and an advanced certificate in LGBTQ+ Studies at San Diego State University. Her MA thesis was a feminist epistemological critique of comparative cognition research. Before that, Barbara worked for three years as the research coordinator of a comparative cognition lab in San Diego. Prior to that, Barbara earned her BA and BS degrees at the University of Florida in English and Psychology, respectively. During her undergraduate career, Barbara conducted behavioral research with cetaceans and canids.

Tyler Robert Sheldon, PhD, MFA

Assistant Managing Editor

Tyler Robert Sheldon is the author of seven books including *Everything is Ghosts* (Finishing Line Press, 2024) and *When to Ask for Rain* (Spartan Press, 2021), a Birdy Poetry Prize Finalist. He is Editor-in-Chief of *MockingHeart Review* and Assistant Managing Editor of *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Pop Culture and Pedagogy*, and his work has appeared in *Dialogue*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Ninth Letter*, *Pleiades*, *Slant*, and other places. His research interests include poetry and poetics, comics studies, pedagogy, and World War II. A recipient of several awards for his writing and teaching, Sheldon earned his PhD at LSU and his MFA at McNeese State University, and spends his days teaching, writing, and catering to the whims of his impish cats, Chai and Scruffy.

Elizabeth Gonzalez, MFA

Musings Editor

Elizabeth Gonzalez was born and raised in the lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas, often referred to as the 956, El Rio Grande, El Valle. She is a multimedia artist who graduated from Edinburg High School and earned a Bachelor's in Fine Arts and a Bachelor's in Mexican American Studies from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. She also holds a Master's in Fine Arts and a Master's Certificate in Mexican American Studies from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Her work serves as a personal narrative/visual testimonio, exploring family stories, cultural identity, history, language, border culture, and the community that surrounds the Rio Grande Valley. Currently, she is in her second year as a doctoral student in Leadership Studies at Our Lady of the Lake University. She has been recognized as a 2024 HSF Scholar, 2024 Schoenecke Institute Fellow, 2022 Chautauqua School of Art Resident, and 2021 Warren and Spector Fellow. She is currently an adjunct at Texas Southmost College.

Miriam Sciala, MA**Book Review Editor and Copy Editor**

Miriam Sciala has been teaching Academic English internationally for over 25 years. She holds an MA in Geography from York University in Toronto and an MPhil in Second Language Studies from Stellenbosch University in South Africa. Born in Switzerland and raised in Zambia, she now carries a Canadian passport. She considers writing and editing her second career, having written and published numerous articles and short stories and has a first novel in progress.

Roxanne Henkin, PhD**Children's Critical Media Literacy Editor**

Dr. Roxanne Henkin is a Professor Emeritus in the Department of Interdisciplinary Learning & Teaching at The University of Texas at San Antonio. Dr. Henkin's research interests include multiliteracies and multimodal digital literacies, children's literature, confronting bullying through literacy, critical literacy for social justice, writing process and instruction, and global in-service staff development in literacy. She has published many articles and two books, *Who's Invited to Share: Using Literacy to Teach for Equity and Social Justice* and *Confronting Bullying: Literacy as a Tool for Character Education*, both published by Heinemann. Dr. Henkin is a Past-President of Literacies and Languages for All. She was also the lead co-editor of the journal *Voices from the Middle* (2006-2011). She has received many awards including the 2020 Literacies and Languages for All Lifetime Membership Award, the 2020 Distinguished Alumni Award from Niles North High School in Skokie, Illinois, and the 2020 NCTE LGBTQ+ Advocacy and Leadership Award, and the 2022 Literacies and Languages for All Service Award. Dr. Henkin created and is Director Emeritus of the San Antonio Writing Project. She has helped to create and teach writing projects in the US, South Africa, India, the Philippines, and Kazakhstan.

Douglas CohenMiller**Production Editor and Creative Director**

Douglas CohenMiller is a graphic designer and founder of Umbrella Works design studio (www.umbrella-works.com), where he is the principal graphic designer and creative director. His practice focuses on long-term branding and identity for clients in the US and internationally. Since 2011, Doug has been involved with the SWPACA; first spearheading a rebranding effort and helping to launch *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*. Alongside this work, he has been developing unique conference identities and material each year and producing and creative directing each issue of *Dialogue*. His other clients range from fields of academic institutions, non-profits organizations, as well as small businesses. Beyond graphic design, Douglas is an active photographer. His photography and essays can be found at <http://fotografica.umbrella-works.com>. Currently, Douglas is living in the mountains of southern Spain with his family.

Robert Gordyn, MPhil, MA**Copy Editor**

Robert Gordyn has been an English Language Instructor since 1995, mostly teaching internationally in a variety of countries and regions of the world. Originally from and now based in Canada, he

is a freelance editor and part-time English instructor. His academic background includes graduate degrees in Geography and Second Language Studies. Along with being an avid reader of philosophy and history, Robert has ongoing interests in communication, both in terms of the written word and in public speaking.

Arlyce Menzies, MFA**Copy Editor**

Arlyce Menzies was raised in the Rust Belt, educated in the Bluegrass and New England, and now teaches writing in the windy steppe of Kazakhstan. She got her MFA in Creative Writing, Poetry at Boston University, where she enjoyed studying and practicing translation from Russian to English, copyediting for Agni, and honing her writing craft. In addition to teaching at Nazarbayev University, Arlyce facilitates translation workshops through OLS@NU and is an Art Editor for Angime, Kazakhstan's first trilingual arts and literary magazine.

April Manabat, MLIS**Reference Editor**

April Manabat is an Expert Librarian at Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan. She is currently the Subject Librarian for School of Sciences and Humanities and the coordinator for the Ask-A-Librarian Service of the NU Library. A Filipino licensed librarian, she finished her Masters of Library and Information Science at the University of the Philippines Diliman. She has more than a decade of experience in academic librarianship. Her research interests include academic librarianship, digital humanities, and information literacy.

Joseph Yap, MLIS**Reference Editor**

Joseph Yap is a registered librarian from the Philippines and is earning his Ph.D. at Eotvos Lorand University in Budapest, Hungary. He serves as a Project Team Member of the Nazarbayev University Integrity Initiative and is an Organizing Team Member of the Consortium of Gender Scholars. He is a faculty member teaching Library and Information Science courses at the University of Perpetual Help System Laguna. As part of his extension services, he acts as the Adviser of the Association of Special Libraries of the Philippines and Social Media Manager of the Special Libraries Association - Asian Chapter. His research works can be found here: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7852-1047>.

Yelizaveta Kamilova, MLIS**Reference Editor**

Yelizaveta Kamilova is a Masters of Library and Information Science and an Expert manager at Nazarbayev University Library in Kazakhstan. She is currently the Subject Librarian for Graduate School of Education and the coordinator for the Interlibrary Loan Document Delivery Service, also responsible for the Department Documentations as well. She has more than a decade of experience in academic librarianship. Her research interests include academic librarianship, library virtual services and information literacy.

Advisory and Editorial Board

ADVISORY BOARD

Lynnea Chapman King

Adams State University, USA

Ken Dvorak

Northern New Mexico College,
USA

Marc Ouellette

Old Dominion University, USA

Alison Macor

Texas State University, USA

Laurence Raw

Baskent University, Turkey

Jerry Bradley

Lamar University, USA

Stephanie Brownell

Bentley University, USA

Tamy Burnett

University of Nebraska-Lincoln,
USA

Melissa Vossen Callens

North Dakota State University,
USA

Geoffrey Carter

Saginaw Valley State University,
USA

Natasha Chuk

Independent Scholar, USA

Elizabeth Morrow Clark

West Texas A&M University,
USA

A. S. CohenMiller

Nazarbayev University,
Kazakhstan

Tobi Collins

New Mexico State University,
USA

Brian Cowlshaw

Northeastern State University,
USA

Becca Cragin

Bowling Green State University

Byron Crape

Nazarbayev University,
Kazakhstan

Janet Brennan Croft

Rutgers University, USA

Adam Crowley

Husson University, USA

Julie DeLong

Independent Scholar, USA

Kurt Depner

New Mexico State University,
USA

Diana Dominguez

University of Texas at
Brownsville, USA

Laura Dumin

University of Central Oklahoma,
USA

Brad Duren

Oklahoma Panhandle State
University, USA

Lance Eaton

Brandeis University/North Shore
Community College, USA

David Emerson

Independent Scholar, USA

Justin Everett

Independent Scholar, USA

Susan Fanetti

California State University -
Sacramento, USA

Carly Finseth

Boise State University, USA

Draga Gajić

University of Novi Sad, Bosnia
and Herzegovina

Robert Galin

University of New Mexico,
Gallup, USA

Clayton Garthwait

West Chester University, USA

Bridget Goodman

Nazarbayev University,
Kazakhstan

Robert Gordyn

Nazarbayev University,
Kazakhstan

Kelly Grace

Nazarbayev University,
Kazakhstan

Jimmy Guignard

Mansfield University

EDITORIAL BOARD

Aaron Adair

Massachusetts Institute of
Technology, USA

Maria Alberto

University of Utah, USA

Donna Alden

New Mexico State University,
USA

Mark Allen

South Texas College, USA

Jenn Avery

Southern New Hampshire
University, USA

Lexey Bartlett

Fort Hays State University, USA

Michelle Bedeker

Nazarbayev University,
Kazakhstan

Chris Bell

University of Colorado,
Colorado Springs, USA

Justin Bendell

University of New Mexico -
Valencia, USA

Kelli Bippert

Texas A&M University-Corpus
Christi, USA

Valerie Guyant
Montana State University-
Northern, USA

Chuck Hamilton
North Texas Community
College, USA

Darrell Hamlin
Fort Hays State University, USA

Roxanne Henkin
University of Texas at San
Antonio, USA

Brent House
PennWest California, USA

Michael Howarth
Missouri Southern State, USA

Jenna Hunnef
University of Saskatchewan,
Canada

Lutfi Hussein
Mesa Community College, USA

Roxie James
Northwestern Oklahoma State
University, USA

Jennifer Jenkins
University of Arizona, USA

Jamie M. Jones
Grays Harbor College, USA

Nancy Kay
Merrimack College, USA

Warren Kay
Merrimack College, USA

Hyein Amber Kim
State University of New York at
Buffalo, USA

Brad Klypchak
Texas A&M Commerce, USA

Jane Kubiesa
University of Worcester, UK

Kim Lacey
Saginaw Valley State University,
USA

Carmela Lanza
University of New Mexico -
Gallup, USA

Samantha Lay
University of West Alabama, USA

John Lepley
Independent Scholar, USA

Dalyn Luedtke
Norwich University, USA

Jessica Maerz
University of Arizona, USA

Julienne McGeough
Liverpool Hope University, UK

Liz Medendorp
Pueblo Community College, USA

Richard Mehrenberg
Millersville University, USA

Michael Miller
University of Texas at San
Antonio, USA

Iulian Mitran
University of Bucharest, Romania

Mona Monfared
University of California - Davis,
USA

Erika Tiburcio Moreno
Complutense University, Spain

Rikk Mulligan
Longwood University, USA

Angelique Margarita Nairn
Auckland University of
Technology, New Zealand

Barbara Perez
Florida Atlantic University, USA

Deirdre A. Pettipiece
Lehman College, USA

Timothy Ray
Independent Scholar, USA

Shelley Rees
University of Science and Arts,
Oklahoma, USA

Pamela Rollins
Southwestern Oklahoma State
University, USA

Tim Rupert
Slippery Rock University, USA

Tiffany Scarola
Bowling Green State University,
USA

Miriam Sciala
Nazarbayev University,
Kazakhstan

Kelli Shapiro
Texas State University, USA

Gregory Stephens
University of Puerto Rico-
Mayagüez, USA

Joy Sterrantino
Southern Utah University, USA

Karen Tatum
University of Texas at Arlington,
USA

Robert Tinajero
University of Texas at El Paso,
USA

Deanna Tomasetti
Independent Scholar, USA

Shane Trayers
Macon State College, USA

Pat Tyrer
West Texas A&M University, USA

Karina Vado
University of Florida, USA

Margaret Vaughn
Metropolitan State University,
USA

Erik Walker
Plymouth (Mass.) South High
School, USA

Rob Weiner
Texas Tech University Library,
USA

Ryan Windeknecht
University of Tennessee,
Knoxville, USA

On Confronting Identity And Global Challenges through Popular Culture And Pedagogy

Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy
Volume 11, Issue 2 | August 2024 | www.journaldialogue.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial

On Confronting Identity and Global Challenges through Popular Culture and Pedagogy

Tyler Robert Sheldon and Anna CohenMiller

Articles

Revisiting Paradise Lost Through K-Pop: A Global Approach to Teaching Writing

Nayoung Bishoff

Examining Adolescence and Agency in the Midst of International Crisis: Pandemics, Pandemonium, and Zombie Young Adult Literature

T. Hunter Strickland

Ways of Decoloniality by the Painted Lady: Avatar: The Last Airbender's Katara Demonstrates How to Revive a Community in Ecological distress Brought by the Colonial Expansion of the Fire Nation

Jose Santos P. Ardivilla

Three Characters and Me: Positioning Popular Culture to Unpack Emerging Teacher Identity

Gillian E. Mertens and Henry "Cody" Miller

Book Reviews (Online Only)

Book Review: The International Politics of Superheroes

Fatima Qaraan

Book Review: From Manjunath to Manjamma: The Inspiring Life of a Transgender Folk Artist

Marjana Mukherjee

Game Review (Online Only)

Game Review: Hogwarts Legacy as an Exemplar of Immersive Fantasy

Mayank Kejriwal

Musing (Online Only)

Teaching Oral Communication and Critical Thinking Skills Through Friendships

David Powers Corwin, Casey Klemmer, Julia Timpane

On Confronting Identity and Global Challenges through Popular Culture and Pedagogy

How can we make sense of the world? How do we reconcile who we are with global socio-environmental and socio-political issues? Popular culture offers us one direction, a guide towards unpacking an understanding of ourselves and for making sense of the world. In formal setting, instructional practices can support diverse perspectives, facilitating equity and inclusion (CohenMiller et al., *forthcoming*). As Jubas and colleagues note (2023), adult learning can be seen individually and collectively in formal and informal ways through “everyday engagement with popular culture” (p. 168).

The articles in this issue grapple with concerns that are at once very modern and as old as popular culture itself. In previous issues of *Dialogue*, we have seen a depth of discussion around zombie literature and shows (e.g., Crowley, 2016; Gartley, 2018; Neely, 2014; Nuruddin, 2019; Strickland, 2019) as well as an exploration into coming of age themes (e.g., Antuna et al., 2018; Johnson-Guerrero & Combs, 2023). Yet, when we speak of zombies, coming of age, and ways of learning, we confront concepts of identity and global events. As such, in the following volume 11, issue 2 of *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, “On Confronting Identity and Global Challenges through Popular Culture and Pedagogy,” we are pleased to share a robust set of works including four full length articles, two book reviews, a film review, a game review, and a Musing, unearthing a simultaneity of topics familiar yet *ad* examined in new ways.

Within the issue, we get a chance to explore familiar topics in new ways, seeing the continued expanding potential for teaching and learning through popular culture. These topics are treated in a way both strikingly fresh and strikingly germane to the hyper-politicized current moment. Metaphors abound, and readers will find not just messages borne of authorial intent, but also parallels to their own experience in our delicate 21st century.

The first article of the issue begins with Nayoung Bishoff’s “Revising *Paradise Lost* Through K-Pop: A Global Approach to Teaching Writing.” In it, ideas of coming of age and sociopolitical tensions are explored through considering Korean youth culture. Bishoff writes that “Young students are taught to honor older people’s opinions as part of their culture,” which is certainly respectful—but that it also “lead[s] to the silencing of their new ideas or thoughts due to the cultural expectation to defer to parental or teachers’ suggestions.” Bishoff proposes that when K-Pop group BTS pushes back on these strictures through their music in film, they surmount the more-typical intimate interpersonal tension and push this ideological clash into mainstream global awareness:

Milton depicts how the lost innocence of Adam and Eve does not lead to an absolute downfall; rather, their newly obtained knowledge becomes a resource for experiencing God’s grace through the coming of the Son of God. Through this paradoxical message—growing through loss—BTS encourages youths to expand their edges by growing through the innocence of strict South Korean social norms and the competitive educational environment imposed on them by the parental and adult generations.

Readers will notice through Bishoff's insightful work that the old and the new are indeed a bridge—a chance to move beyond a binary.

Continuing with a theme of coming of age, in the second article, “Examining Adolescence and Agency in the Midst of International Crisis: Pandemics, Pandemonium, and Zombie Young Adult Literature,” Hunter Strickland emphasizes the potential for meaning for youth in making sense of crisis. The link between the COVID-19 pandemic and zombies is sharply depicted. Strickland addresses how teachers can help their students through this natural tendency of turning to “modern tragedy lit” by working to dismantle assumptions about students, and by empathizing more with their struggles. Strickland writes:

Breaking down the stereotypes of youth is a great benefit of studying YAL at large, but one of the most important reasons for studying ZYAL during the time of the national pandemic is the overwhelming message of hope amidst struggle that so many adolescent (and adult) readers long for.

Showcasing a means for facilitating youth through struggle, Strickland offers insight through a highly sought after genre into formal and informal learning within and beyond the classroom.

Then in the third article, themes of youth continue as Jose Ardivilla discusses “Ways of Decoloniality by The Painted Lady: *The Last Airbender's Katara* Demonstrates How to Revive a Community in Ecological distress Brought by the Colonial Expansion of the Fire Nation.” Ardivilla explores difficult cultural cross-sections through a deceptively accessible medium of TV cartoons. The unpacking of *Avatar: The Last Airbender*” and how it interfaces with analogized cultures touches on perhaps one of the show's more sensitive story arcs: the character of Katara helping a small fishing village by assuming the personage of its people's revered deity, the Painted Lady. In the show, this choice becomes touchy for the anticipated reasons, but it also allows viewers to get beyond their comfort zones and ask hard questions about how they think belief systems ought—and *not*—to operate. Ardivilla writes,

Katara's experience with the Fire Nation's atrocities [toward her own people] provides her an arsenal for decolonizing and disruption . . . In her donning The Painted Lady, she is transmuting her informed ways of defiance to suit the needs of the fishing village.

This article's focus on decolonization through reinforcing the importance and power of Indigenous belief systems resonates today, as cultures globally continue to face repression and colonization by domineering regimes.

Then moving into the fourth article of the issue, coming of age shifts to thinking about engaging young students in the classroom, exploring identity. Gillian Mertens and Henry “Cody” Miller offer a creative direction for how teachers and students can envision education (and educator identity) through the lens of fictional educators. The authors grapple with the problematic and all too common tendency of popular media to lionize the “white savior” as a teaching ideal. Additionally, Mertens and Miller engage with the inverse side of this focus: how pop culture too often ignores the more insidiously negative side of education, which can harm students without those students being cognizant of the process. The authors suggest, “depiction[s] of education as comprised of ‘saviors’ severely neglects the structural impacts of schooling as an institution to enact social harm.” These ideas—whether foregrounded or shrouded—have an impact on future teachers too, who can easily buy into and perpetuate the favoring of idealism over pragmatism. This becomes complicated, the authors argue, when teachers interface with students. The authors suggest, to wit: “Several students reported an affinity for experienced, calm, expert teachers.” Ultimately, and particularly in our current, fraught world, it can be easy to wish for an idealized educational space modeled on heroic fictional templates. And as Mertens and Miller remind us, mirroring these ideas in the real world is difficult.

In addition to the full length articles, this issue continues its exploration of identity and global challenges,

delving into essential humanistic endeavors such as politics, gender identity, and friendship through Reviews and a Musing. In Fatima Qaraan's review, there is a discussion of the metaphorization and global influential power of superheroes in the review of Mariano Turzi's book *The International Politics of Superheroes*. Qaraan unpacks Turzi's argument that the fictional trajectories of superheroes mimic the global movements of the real world: their changing of self and surroundings "resembles the symbolic path that present nation-states 'seem to be undergoing.'" The second book review, by Marjana Mukherjee, shares insight around the poetry by Manjamma Jogathi and Harsha Bhat, in "From Manjunath to Manjamma: The Inspiring Life of a Transgender Folk Artist." The "transformative power of art" is highlighted through the story of resilience, identity and growth.

Our identity development as navigated and negotiated through and with popular culture continues this issue. In "Cinema in Color," Christina Masuda and Yih Reh offer an unique integrated review of two books, highlighting youth identity development through Giroux (2009) and the idea of "media's powerful pedagogical force, shaping people's understanding of the world." The reviewed book showcase the cross-over between identity and socio-political forces, bringing together Justine Gomer's "White Balance: How Hollywood Shaped Colorblind Ideology and Undermined Civil Rights" and Zachary Ingle and David Suter's "The 100 Greatest Superhero Films and TV Shows."

The ways we interact with popular culture is epitomized by the final review of this issue, a game review by Mayank Kejriwal discussing the "immersive fantasy" of *Hogwarts Legacy*. Tensions abound in this review, as Kejriwal intricately details ways young growing up with Harry Potter could be drawn into the entertaining game, while facing global issues such as anti-Semitic themes and weaponized directions.

Lastly, a common theme of this issue around confronting identity can be seen through the topic of friendship as taught within the classroom. In a Musing, David Powers Corwin, Casey Klemmer, and Julia Timpane investigate the uses of friendship as a form of rhetoric. They ask their students, "Why do friendships matter in pursuit of social change?" The authors' students are guided through critical reflection, through reading classic works by Aristotle and contemporaries such as Mia Birdsong and Stephen Braden, come to see cooperation and friendship as a tool more versatile than they may have realized.

Across the articles, reviews, and Musing, the authors of these works provide novel ways to consider popular and pedagogy around themes of confronting identity and global issue through film, tv, literature, poetry, and music. Whether on a personal or global level, world dynamics remain in a state of delicate flux—and the work in this issue is a testament to how we can engage with those shifts.

We're grateful for the robust work of the full team who makes each issue possible, to each of the peer reviewers who offered deeply considered and meaningful feedback to these works, and to each of you who engage with these works. Without these efforts, this issue would not have been possible. Thank you to Associate Editor - Karina Vado; Managing Editor - Barbara Perez; Production Editor and Creative Director - Douglas CohenMiller; Book Review Editor and Copy Editor - Miriam Sciala; Copy Editors - Robert Gordyn and Arlyze Menzies; and Reference Editors - April Manabat, Joseph Yap, and Yelizaveta Kamilova. Welcoming in a new team member, we are pleased to share our new Musings Editor - Elizabeth Gonzalez.

We look forward to hearing your thoughts on this newest installment of *Dialogue*.

Tyler Robert Sheldon
Assistant Managing Editor

Anna CohenMiller
Editor in Chief

REFERENCES

- Antuna, M., Harmon, J., & Henkin, R., Wood K., & Kester, K. (2018). The Stonewall Books: LGBTQ-themed young adult novels as semiotic beacons. *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, 5(2). <http://journaldialogue.org/issues/v5-issue-2/the-stonewall-books-lgbtq-themed-young-adult-novels-as-semiotic-beacons/>
- Crowley, A. (2016). The roots of authoritarianism in AMC's *The Walking Dead*. *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, 3(2). <http://journaldialogue.org/issues/the-roots-of-authoritarianism-in-amcs-the-walking-dead/>
- Gartley, E. (2018). We all have jobs here: Teaching and learning with multiple intelligences in *The Walking Dead*. *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*. 5(3) <http://journaldialogue.org/issues/v5-issue-3/we-all-have-jobs-here-teaching-and-learning-with-multiple-intelligences-in-the-walking-dead/>
- Johnston-Guerrero, M. P., & Combs, L. D. (2023). Mixedness comes of age: Learning from multiracial portrayals in young adult TV series. *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, 10(1). <http://journaldialogue.org/issues/mixedness-comes-of-age-learning-from-multiracial-portrayals-inyoung-adult-tv-series/>
- Jubas, K., Sandlin, J. A., Wright, R. R., & Burdick, J. (2023). Adult learning through everyday engagement with popular culture. In T. Rocco, M. C. Smith, R. Mizzi, L. Merriweather, J. Hawley, *The Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education* (pp. 168—176). Taylor and Francis.
- Strickland, T. H. (2019). Zombie literature: Analyzing the fear of the unknown through popular culture. *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*. 6(3). [www.journaldialogue.org/issues/v6-issue-3/zombie-literature-analyzing-the-fear-of-the-unknown-through-popularculture/](http://journaldialogue.org/issues/v6-issue-3/zombie-literature-analyzing-the-fear-of-the-unknown-through-popularculture/)
- Neely, A. (2014). Girls, guns, and zombies: Five dimensions of teaching and learning in *The Walking Dead*. *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*. 2(1). <http://journaldialogue.org/issues/issue-2/girls-guns-and-zombies-five-dimensions-of-teaching-and-learning-in-the-walking-dead>
- Nuruddin, S. M. (2019). “No te voy a dejar nunca” — Culture and Second Language Acquisition for Survival in Fear *The Walking Dead*. *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*. 6(3). <http://journaldialogue.org/issues/v6-issue-3/no-te-voy-a-dejar-nunca-culture-and-second-language-acquisition-for-survival-in-fear-the-walking-dead/>



Revisiting *Paradise Lost* Through K-Pop: A Global Approach to Teaching Writing

Nayoung Bishoff
George Washington University
Washington DC, USA
nayoung.seo@gwu.edu

ABSTRACT

The short film series *Wings* (2016) by the Korean musical group BTS (Beyond the Scene) revisits John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. BTS reinterprets Adam and Eve's leaving of Eden as youths' self-discovery process, overcoming a binary mindset. BTS emphasizes how experiences—trials, pains, and the struggle of youths to walk out of black-and-white perspectives—turn out to be “all so beautiful” as resources to grow. *Wings* demonstrates how the themes and elements in *Paradise Lost* can be used as a tool not only to explore Biblical concepts, but also to understand what pedagogical environments youths need to fully express themselves as writers. Inspired by Hermann Hesse's *Demian*, BTS emphasizes this process of breaking through binary perspectives as a process of “metamorphosis” for youths. This study, therefore, aims to reveal the pedagogical importance of the self-discovery of youths, especially in higher education. BTS demonstrates how *Paradise Lost* not only relates to Western adaptations and theological approaches, but also carries pedagogical value to Eastern societies, encouraging South Korean youths' self-expression. Furthermore, BTS's emphasis on youths' freewill can encourage a supportive environment in the writing class, which empowers them to overcome the fear of “making mistakes” and encourages them to discover their multifaceted selves.

Keywords: global pedagogy, popular culture, self-discovery, teaching writing, K-Pop, *Paradise Lost*

INTRODUCTION

As a South Korean musical group (K-pop group), BTS (Beyond the Scene) conveys a message of youths' self-discovery through their short film series *Wings* (2016). In *Wings*, BTS portrays youths' challenging journey of self-discovery within a stagnant world constructed by previous generations. As youths transition into adulthood in South Korea, they typically lose the opportunity to express their own ideas or opinions. Young students are taught to honor older people's opinions as part of their culture, often leading to the silencing of their new ideas or thoughts due to the cultural expectation to defer to parental or teachers' suggestions. By comparatively analyzing *Wings* and John Milton's (1658) *Paradise Lost*, this essay reveals the value of self-exploration for youths as they leave behind the mindset of Eden—the binary mindset—and freely express themselves through writing, transcending the boundaries of good and evil, right and wrong, and light and darkness. Through comparisons between *Wings* and *Paradise Lost*, this paper will demonstrate how the themes and elements in *Paradise Lost* can be used as a tool not only to interpret Biblical themes and symbolism, but also as a pedagogical tool which encourages the self-expression of youths outside of a binary frame. This article will begin with an analysis of the *Wings* film series, including its relationship with Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Hermann Hesse's (1919) *Demian*, and then branch out to examine the educational system in Korea and internationally.

BEYOND THE SOUTH KOREAN BINARY SCENE

In a 2023 article from *The Guardian*, Raphael Rashid highlights the high suicide rate among young people in South Korea: "In 2021, South Korea recorded a suicide rate of 26 per 100,000 people, the highest among OECD countries. Suicide was the main cause of death for those aged 10 to 39, with 44% of teenage deaths." Rashid further explains that feelings of "worthlessness and discrimination for not conforming or for being different" are among the main factors contributing to the high suicide rate among young people in South Korea. Through their short film series *Wings*, BTS delivers a message on how to overcome such high pressure to "conform" to the norms that previous generations have imposed upon youth. They deliver a message of what it means to challenge the binary, black-and-white perspectives embraced by older generations, which restrict their ability to push beyond established social norms and hinder their autonomy. Through their intertextual work with Milton's *Paradise Lost*, BTS emphasizes the importance of encouraging youths to find their own paths against harsh social norms, underscoring the significance of free will. The musical group sheds light on how mistakes resulting from following their own paths ultimately allow youths to experience "grace" instead of downfall. Their message has resonated not only with young people in South Korea—selling over one million copies nationally—but also with youths worldwide, as evidenced by their 74.7 million international followers on Instagram ("Posts," 2024).

USING K-POP'S INTERTEXTUALITY TO REVISIT CLASSICS

The value of using K-pop culture to understand classics like *Paradise Lost* lies in K-Pop's intertextuality and transmedia networking. In "Thinking Through Intertextuality in Korean Pop Music Videos," K-pop scholar CedarBough T. Saeji supports this idea by explaining how "BTS encodes their work with complex intertextuality," enabling fans to "identify and compile BTS references, engage with complex philosophical texts, and explain these references to other fans" (57). Saeji further elaborates on how "Korea's close relationship with and long acceptance of America as a cultural benchmark has meant that American and other Western classics are available in Korea in every medium," (51) thereby "welcom[ing] everyone to enjoy K-pop not as a foreign language but as a new field of cultural play" (60).

Such intertextuality ignites significant interest in the stories and concepts present in BTS's works among young people, fostering transmedia networking. In "Success Story: How Storytelling Contributes to BTS's Brand," BTS scholar Courtney Lazore argues that BTS's incorporation of intertextuality triggers "numerous discussion posts, tweets, and videos with in-depth deliberations about BTS's stories and concepts" (56). She further describes such phenomena as follows: "There are entire Twitter accounts and websites dedicated to analyzing and connecting BTS's stories, such as the ARMY Theorists Society (@ARMY_society) account on Twitter, which currently has over 51,000 followers. Theory posts are also popular enough to have their own flair tag on the BTS subreddit" (56). This emphasizes how BTS's works have sparked interest among young people in analyzing the different "stories and concepts." It suggests how BTS's intertextuality can serve as a valuable resource for young students in cultivating their interest in literary and philosophical concepts through their visual and vocal art.

BTS's intertextuality is also evident in their short film series *Wings*. As indicated by the title, which symbolizes angels or Heavenly beings, BTS draws upon Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Milton depicts how the lost innocence of Adam and Eve does not lead to an absolute downfall; rather, their newly obtained knowledge becomes a resource for experiencing God's grace through the coming of the Son of God. Through this paradoxical message—growing through loss—BTS encourages youths to expand their edges by growing through the innocence of strict South Korean social norms and the competitive educational environment imposed on them by the parental and adult generations. Through their *Wings* series, BTS, with its huge global popularity, further inspires young people worldwide to embark on a journey of self-discovery and become fully-formed individuals.

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF BTS'S WINGS AND MILTON'S PARADISE LOST

BTS challenges binary, black-and-white perspectives, which have been embraced by and imposed onto youths by older generations, and that hinder youths' freewill from exploring themselves outside of the fixed social standards. To begin with, just like in *Paradise Lost*, opposing imageries abound in *Wings*. *Paradise Lost*'s contrasting concepts include Heaven and Hell, God and Satan, Good and Evil, and Right and Wrong. To deliver these opposite concepts, Milton uses the imagery of light and darkness to express their contrasts. For instance, in *Paradise Lost*, angels are physically described in terms of light, while devils are generally depicted by their shadowy darkness. Milton also uses light to symbolize God and God's grace as seen in Book III:

Hail holy light, of spring of Heav'n first-born,
Or of th' Eternal Coeternal beam
May I express thee unblam'd? since God is light,
And never but in unapproach'd light
Dwelt from Eternitie, dwelt then in thee,
Bright effluence of bright essence increate. [Book III, 1-6]

With this depiction that "God is light," Milton asks that he be filled with this "light" so he can tell his divine story correctly and skillfully. Through this, Milton not only focuses on depicting the characteristics of God as "light" but also gets himself involved in the poem. He uses the poem as his personal prayers as a writer of *Paradise Lost*. This demonstrates how Milton is struggling between the world of light and darkness—God and Satan. Shown by this confession of Milton, *Paradise Lost* provides the inner struggles of human beings, who stand between the choices of good and evil, depicted by the images of light and darkness. This theme of inevitable inner conflict is intertwined throughout the whole story, and this conflict is present within each character in *Paradise Lost*, especially Adam and Eve, who are in their youth. Just as Adam and Eve represent mankind, Milton mirrors the inner conflicts that mankind goes through. Considering the social development

of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*, the inner struggles that Milton depicts are clearly associated with the theme of BTS's *Wings*—a child challenging themselves to trespass their original world to the new world as a grown being. In “The Social Psychology of Adam and Eve,” Jack Katz (1996) depicts the story of Adam and Eve as “their metamorphosis into mature social beings” (557). Interestingly, the title of BTS's *Wings* also can be interpreted as “the metamorphosis” of youths’ ideas. This can refer to how a bird goes through a metamorphosis in the egg and breaks the shell and flies out of it with “wings.” The wings, therefore, symbolize how a child comes out of the binary mindset (inside of the egg) to challenge themselves to move outside of it by reforming their ideology, different from the older generation. Just like Adam and Eve go through metamorphosis by moving from the garden of Eden (the familiar world) to the outside world (the painful reality as grownups) after the Fall, BTS depicts youths facing a new world which cannot be interpreted through the black-and-white lens.

In BTS's “WINGS Short Film #7 AWAKE” (directed by YongSeok Choi), Seokjin, the oldest of the members, symbolizes the grownup. Wearing a white shirt and black pants, he wakes up from the bed and walks towards the door. This white shirt and black pants symbolize the inner conflict that a child goes through standing between what he has learned as “good” and “evil” norms, defined by their parents and the adult generations. When Seokjin reaches the door, which bears scratches, it opens by itself. The scratches symbolize the process of a bird hatching—how a bird beats the shell of the egg with its beak to be able to break through it. The background music says, “I want to stay more and dream more, but it's time to leave.” These lyrics show how a child's development does not depend on someone else's enforcement but relies on a child's agency to break out of their shell. The song emphasizes the meaning of “time,” which suggests that all youths will inevitably have to face their time to hatch.

Followed by these two scenes, Seokjin leaves the light behind and walks to the darkness—the world outside warmth and comfort. This later scene shows the clear parallels between “WINGS” and the section of *Paradise Lost* when Adam and Eve leave Eden in Book XII:

They, looking back, all the eastern side beheld
Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,
...
They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,
Through Eden took their solitary way. [640-641, 648-649]

Departing from Paradise—the realm of light—Adam and Eve “took their solitary way.” Light can symbolize what is visible and intelligible. They depart from what has been familiar and head towards the shadowy unknown—the domain of darkness. The “solitary way” of Adam and Eve resonates with BTS's interpretation of youths’ self-determination, which is related to free will. Their growth does not occur through any external power or authority, but rather, it must be a “solitary way,” implying that they must make their own decisions. BTS highlights free will similarly to how Milton emphasizes it in *Paradise Lost*.

Walking from the door and reaching the end of the hallway, Seokjin gazes at a bird frame hanging on the wall adorned with Abraxas-patterned wallpaper. Lazore argues that *Wings* contains references to Hermann Hesse's novel *Demian* (54). *Demian* is a German coming-of-age novel that delves into protagonist Emil Sinclair's journey of inner exploration guided by his enigmatic friend, Max Demian. Sinclair grapples with his own identity, morality, and the duality of human nature. In *Demian*, abraxas is introduced as follows: “The bird is flying to God. The name of the God is called Abraxas” (100). Abraxas is one of the Egyptian gods. It is known for being able to represent truth and lying, good and evil, light and darkness in the same word and in the same act. This imagery therefore suggests that all of the above—and more—are possibilities for young people to discover for themselves. Through showing Abraxas with the bird's frame, BTS therefore emphasizes how what “Abraxas” symbolizes is needed to become a fully-realized being. Furthermore, by emphasizing

“Abraxas” as a big bird that fills a frame, BTS shows how it too has to break “the frame” to fly as a real bird. This idea mirrors Adam and Eve’s departure from Paradise. Though they once belonged to Eden, which was all that they knew and needed, they must eventually leave—or break—that “frame,” to journey to a new place where they will be able to use their free will to make their own decisions. Milton depicts how Adam and Eve become acquainted with exercising their agency for the first time after being cast out from the Garden of Eden in Book XII:

Some natural tears they dropt, but wiped them soon;
The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide [Book XII, 647-649]

First, it is a painful step for them to leave Eden. Milton talks about how “some natural tears they dropt.” By describing their grief as “natural,” he suggests that feeling this kind of tearful pain is not limited to Adam and Eve, but rather is a growing pain that is generalizable to all of humankind.. Milton emphasizes their newly acquired freewill by saying that “the world was all before them, where to choose / Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.” Alongside mentioning “Providence their guide,” acknowledging the possibility of predestination by God, Milton notes that they must face “the world” and must now decide “where to choose their place of rest.” They now have “choices” to make, after leaving their familiar “frame” of Paradise. Milton, therefore, shows how this journey out of the garden of Eden into the world positions them as independent beings.

This relationship between Adam and Eve’s decision-making process, social development, and growth is also reflected in the lyrics of *Wings*. At the point that Seokjin looks at the bird in the frame, the song says:

Yeah, it’s my truth.
It’s my truth.
I will be covered with wounds all over.
But it’s my fate.
It’s my fate.
Still, I want to struggle and fight.

Through this song, Seokjin, the oldest among the members, confesses how youth moving forward into adulthood require “fated” pain, which in his case, causes him to “be covered with wounds all over.” But he emphasizes his free will to “struggle and fight” even though the growing process is painful. This message of growing pains can be applied to the learning process of youths. They need a classroom environment where they can learn to “struggle and fight” to find themselves.

To describe such a “fight” of youths in the process of finding their true colors, BTS’s *Wings* and *Paradise Lost* use dark imagery to demonstrate the opposite world from Paradise. Although “true colors” or “true self” can have various meanings, I am referring to one’s ability to pursue dreams/fulfill desires, apart from the demands or expectations of society. It gives a vivid contrast to the light imagery of Paradise and God. To depict Satan, in contrast to the luminous image of God, Milton uses darkness—the absence of light—to describe Hell and Satan to represent the absence of God and his grace:

From Chaos and th’ inroad of Darkness old,
Satan alighted walks: a Globe farr off
It seem’d, now seems a boundless Continent
Dark, waste, and wild, under the frown of Night
Starless expos’d, and ever-threatening storms
Of Chaos blustering round, inclement skie; [421-426]

In a clear opposite to the depiction of Heaven and God, “unapproached light,” Milton uses “Darkness,” “Night Starless,” and “Chaos” to describe Hell and Satan. These opposite poles of Heaven and Hell, God and Satan, that Milton emphasizes in *Paradise Lost* can also be found in BTS’s *Wings*. These two opposite worlds appear in “WINGS Short Film #1 BEGIN” (dir. YongSeok Choi) through how they use the black-and-white color contrast. The music film begins by showing the title, “#1 BEGIN,” in black with a white background behind it. This black-and-white color contrast is also shown through the album’s cover.

After showing the letter “#1 BEGIN,” the film starts with how Jungkook, the youngest member of BTS, sleeps on his white bed with his white shirt on in a dark room. As the youngest member, he symbolizes a youth who has not been through the process to become a grown-up yet. To symbolize that a child will grow up, or metaphorically undergo the process to become a bird, the film depicts a black bird pattern on the left chest side of the white shirt. In a dream, with a loud sound that is reminiscent of a car accident and the breaking of windows, he sees the image of a white bird against a black background. The sound of the car accident is notable by the loud squeal of the car’s brakes. This means Jungkook, who now belongs to the world of comfort and familiarity on the white bed, will no longer be able to dwell there and now has to go through the process to face the real world outside of that comfort place. After he wakes up, the film says: “Because the dawn right before the sun rises is the darkest.” Next, Jungkook looks at a portrait of himself, painted with a black-and-white contrast, and finds a red stain on his left eye. The red stain can symbolize the intervention of another element that cannot be defined by his perspective of seeing the world as a child. This red color also symbolizes temptation that leads him to be away from the world that he once belonged to. This idea can be supported by how his white bed moves away and leaves him alone in the center of the dark room when he stares at the red spot.

This color of red also appears in Book II of *Paradise Lost*:

What if the breath that kindl’d those grim fires
Awak’d should blow them into sevenfold rage
And plunge us in the flames? or from above
Should intermitted vengeance arm again
His red right hand to plague us? [170-174]

In these lines, Milton shows how the “red right hand” symbolizes the “vengeance” of God. In the same way, when Jungkook finds a red spot on his left eye on the painting, the world of Paradise (the white bed he once lay on) moves away from him, and he is left alone in the darkness. After this happens, it suddenly starts to rain in *Wings*. Heaven, which is symbolized by light and the sun. When Jungkook is left alone in the dark rainy room, a bigger painting of himself moves toward him. The painting looks straight at him. Now his painting has various colors mostly around his hair and eyes and his chest where the bird was, on his white shirt.

When Jungkook looks at the shirt, he feels afraid and uncomfortable and begins to cry. Jungkook’s fear demonstrates the emotional struggles that youths face when they encounter the different identities within themselves that cannot be described as white or black—the perspectives that the older generation have imposed upon them. The tears from his eyes also flow from the painting’s eyes and colors spread all over his face.

This shows how his world is no longer defined by a perspective of black-and-white. His tears, which symbolize growing pains, ultimately lead him to find the true and varied colors inside of himself. Jungkook’s world of familiarity and comfort falls apart with a red stain that symbolizes the Fall, leading him to experience the “solitary” steps to become a grown-up similarly to how Adam and Eve take their “solitary” path after the Fall, experiencing the vengeance of God represented by the “red right arm” (174). Through this tearful process of challenging himself to walk outside “the shell,” the childhood world that he once belonged to, he finally has real wings on his back. This shows how his metamorphosis to become a bird is achieved through his fall, failures, and tears—or lost innocence. Losing innocence can symbolize a rite of passage that is scary

but necessary. Only by losing innocence can Adam and Eve become grown up or “mature” enough to survive in the “real world.” Adam and Eve lose their innocence by gaining knowledge. They “fall,” but they also gain the ability to explore the world beyond the (garden) scene.

This transition from one world to the other also appears in BTS’s “WINGS Short Film #2 LIE” (dir. YongSeok Choi). In the film, Jimin, the second youngest in the group, sits on one of the white beds in a small room covered by white curtains. The white room seems filled with a light blue color, which symbolizes the sky. Although the color white dominates the frame, Jimin’s pants and shoes are black. As symbols of movement, his legs and feet indicate the use of free will. This characterization represents how he is tempted to move in an opposite way from where he belongs. As if trying to reach to the other side of his world, he stretches out his left hand to the other bed. After this scene, Jimin says, “tell me the way, please stop me, please let me breathe.” This statement shows how Jimin is tempted to explore “the way,” of the new world. He says how strong that temptation is by asking for help to “stop” him and “let him breathe.” This scene also parallels what happens to Eve after she encounters Satan, disguised as the snake when she sees and hears about the forbidden fruit. After this scene, Jimin holds a fruit, which shows a clear similarity with *Paradise Lost*, and finally eats the “red” fruit, which again symbolizes the Fall and “vengeance of God.” Building upon this action, after eating the fruit, he says “I am stuck in myself. I am dead.” These two lines clearly show how Jimin, who once asked to “stop” him from entering the new world, now feels “dead” because he has transcended a line and moved on to a new place from which there is no return—as if he defends the reason that he ate the fruit.

Along with these scenes from Jimin, in “WINGS Short Film #7 AWAKE,” BTS shows more scenes related to Eve. One scene shows Seokjin, the oldest among the members, looking at himself in the water before he walks to a bird’s painting, where he stares at the reflection of himself. Attracted by it, he tries to touch it with his finger. When he touches the water, thunder rolls behind him, and he becomes alarmed. Seokjin breaks away from looking at the reflection and looks back behind him. This depiction of self-awareness as a child and temptations of self-obsession clearly reminds us of how Milton describes Eve, who looks at the reflection of herself in Eden and goes through the process of becoming self-aware in Book IV:

As I bent down to look, just opposite
A shape within the wat’ry gleam appear’d,
Bending to look on me. I started back,
It started back; but pleas’d I soon return’d
Pleas’d it return’d as soon with answering looks
Of sympathy and love. There I had fix’d
Mine eyes till now, and pin’d with vain desire [460-466]

These lines depict how Eve first sees her image reflected in a body of water. Because she feels “pleas’d,” she “return’d” to see the reflection again. Full of “sympathy” and “love,” she stares at it until God calls to her. The scene exposes how Eve’s self-love ultimately distracts her from loving God. Her desire to continue to stare at her own reflection foreshadows the temptation in her newly rising self-awareness. In “Milton’s ‘Paradise Lost’: Eve’s Struggle for Identity,” Shari Zimmerman, a psychologist, notes that: “In a world where outside and inside are still one, indistinguishable and undifferentiated, Eve is strikingly unaware of the fact that the reflection in the water is her own” (248). This shows how Eve strongly parallels a child that is in the middle of the process of finding her true self. Thus, Eve’s reaction to her reflection in the water parallels BTS’s depiction of this stage of youth. This depiction supports the theory that youths need to go through the process of becoming self-aware, which can be crucial to pedagogical approaches in the classroom. Instead of teaching them to follow “right” examples, youths should be exposed to an environment wherein they can discover their own colors and freely express them. In *Milton Studies*, Don Norford notes that “Eve still lives in the oceanic womb-like state in which

one does not distinguish between self and world” (12). This supports the idea that the water reflection scene both in *Paradise Lost* and *Wings* symbolize a young child, who is not fully aware of themselves yet. After this similar scene with Eve’s water reflection scenario in *Paradise Lost*, the narrator in the film says: “we cried a lot and laughed a lot, but it was all so beautiful.” Instead of dividing moments of youths into good and evil, right and wrong, and black and white, BTS emphasizes how all the trials, pains, and struggles as youths turned out to be “all so beautiful” as resources to grow. Through this message, BTS highlights how important it is for youths to embrace every moment without biases or stereotypes.

The film ends by showing six photos on the floor: a boy standing alone with a long shadow behind him, a child and a mother hugging each other, a red apple on the ground, a brown piano, a bird in a frame, and a closed door. These images represent various moments in life, such as a young boy being cared for by his parents, times of temptation and yielding to it, and dreams of becoming a bird. These photos can be related to the journey of Adam and Eve: being in Eden, yielding to temptation by eating the forbidden fruit, and heading towards the gate towards the unknown world. Through these images, BTS conveys the message of transcending from the familiar to the unknown as youths. By showing the pictures one by one, BTS paints how all the moments are “so beautiful.”

BTS also highlights the youths’ collective efforts for companionship with each other. BTS uses “we” as the subject of the sentence: “we cried a lot and laughed a lot, but it was all so beautiful.” They encourage young people to walk (and support each other) through the painful journey together. This is also evident from the last two lines of *Paradise Lost*: “They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow, / Through Eden took their solitary way” (648-649). Milton concludes *Paradise Lost* by showing how Adam and Eve hold their hands and leave Paradise. Their transition from the familiar world to the new world happens not through a one-sided effort but through teamwork. Both Milton and BTS conclude their work by highlighting the collectivism and companionship of youths to challenge themselves from the biased standards of “good and evil.”

WINGS IN THE SOUTH KOREAN EDUCATIONAL SCENE

In South Korea, such a binary mindset of either “good” or “bad” is prevalent in the education system. Students are easily judged as either successful or failing based on grades. In this process, youths often lose the opportunity to express their own ideas or opinions, conforming instead to the mold created by teachers’ definitions of success. Honoring older people’s opinions, as part of their culture, also contributes to these expectations toward students. Consequently, young students’ new ideas or thoughts are often silenced by the cultural expectation to follow the definitions of success set by parents and teachers. In a 2015 NPR article, Elise Hu explains such a success-oriented education system of South Korea. Hu states that “[e]verything here seems to ride on a single college entrance exam — the *suneung* — taken in November. It’s so critical that planes are grounded on test day for fear of disturbing the kids. Results determine which universities students can get into, and since there are as few as three colleges considered top tier by future employers, the competition is fierce and the stakes are sky high.” Hu further quotes Tom Owenby, who spent five years in Seoul teaching English and AP history classes and is now a professor at Beloit College in Wisconsin. Owenby comments on the Korean educational system: “It’s not about finding your own path or your own self, as it is about doing better than those around you. It’s in many ways a zero-sum game for South Korean students.”

In the national South Korean news platform *Yonhap News*, Kim Soo-yeon echoes Owenby’s observations, discussing how this competitive environment in schools contributes to a high suicide rate among South Korean students: “Academic pressure to get good grades and enter better universities or financial difficulties caused by the economic slowdown have been cited as the main causes for the suicides by teens and young people here” (Kim 2022). Examination results determine which universities students can

attend, and with only a small number of colleges considered prestigious by prospective employers—the older generation—the competition becomes life-consuming. This intense competition leads to a lack of recognition and understanding of individuals under society’s harsh expectations to be “successful” by the standards set by the adult generation.

Through *Wings*, BTS confronts such binary perspectives of success and failure by emphasizing how mistakes allow youth to experience “grace.” This has enabled BTS, which now has worldwide influence, to deliver a message of hope to youth. As an Asian musical group that highlights the importance of finding one’s own way in life against harsh social norms, they emphasize the significance of free will, as depicted in *Paradise Lost*. In depicting grace, Milton shows how the Fall ultimately becomes the graceful resource for the Son of God to save the world. The angel Michael explains this idea in Book XII:

O Goodness infinite, Goodness immense!
That all this good of evil shall produce,
And evil turn to good; more wonderful
Than that which by creation first brought forth
Light out of darkness! Full of doubt I stand,
Whether I should repent me now of sin
By me done, and occasioned; or rejoice
Much more, that much more good thereof shall spring;
To God more glory, more good-will to Men
From God, and over wrath grace shall abound. [469-478]

Through these lines, Milton reveals how “evil turn[s] to good” (471). He highlights how “wrath” becomes the source that “grace shall abound” (478). Even though by Adam and Eve lose their innocence and get cast out from Eden when they eat the forbidden fruit, the Fall does not end in misery, but rather a source of “much more good-will to Men / from God,” which means it opens the door for grace to abound through the coming of the Deliverer: “The great deliv’rance by her Seed to come / (For vy the woman’s Seed) on all mankind” (600-601). Milton exposes this irony wherein Adam and Eve’s Fall eventually leads to the good fortune of “all mankind.”

In “Milton and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall,” Arthur Lovejoy notes that “This, though for the greater part a most unhappy story, concludes with a prediction of the Second Coming and the Final Judgment, when Christ shall reward” (161). In a similar fashion, irony is also beautifully used in BTS’s *Wings*. They argue that growing up is ideally achieved by challenging oneself to be tempted to be away from the expectations from adults. BTS thus demonstrates how a child’s journey toward adulthood involves finding the true and varied colors inside of themselves. By paralleling *Paradise Lost*, BTS thus shows how a metamorphosis through “lost innocence” is significant for a child’s self-discovery process. BTS therefore revisits *Paradise Lost* to highlight the value of youths’ self-discovery through their contemporary artwork.

APPLICATION TO TEACHING WRITING

BTS’s emphasis on youths’ self-exploration is not only related to their individual choices, but is also pertinent to social and pedagogical change. In *BTS: ONE*, Nam-joon, BTS’s leader, articulates why they write songs for today’s young people: “Honestly, from our standpoint, every day is stressful for our generation. It’s hard to get a job, it’s harder to attend college now more than ever” (76). He also mentions that “Adults need to create policies that can facilitate that overall social change. Right now, the privileged class, the upper class needs to change the way they think” (76). This message of Nam-joon reveals how BTS’s *Wings* is related to the educational change needed for young people to break the social “shell” built by adults and become free

“birds” as individuals. Another band member, Yoon-gi, supports the leader’s thoughts by saying: “And this isn’t just Korea, but the rest of the world. The reason why our music resonates with people around the world who are in their teens, twenties, and thirties is because of these issues” (76). BTS highlights the importance of educational, political, and social change for youths to challenge themselves from social expectations to find their various dispositions across the globe.

BTS’s emphasis on the self-learning process of youths can be applied to higher education, especially to teaching writing. Even though writing is a form of self-expression of youths’ thoughts and ideas, students often struggle with writing. They are often asked to read sample writings and compare those to their own to judge if theirs are “good” enough. Yet, such a binary lens can hinder students from expressing their various thoughts and ideas without fear. The writing skills should not be a standard to divide between a correct or wrong piece of writing. They can be cultivated through students’ own personalities and practices.

In John Warner’s (2018) *Why They Can’t Write*, Warner mentions how grading can function as something that can intimidate students and hinder or altogether keep them from writing. He emphasizes how the continuous practice of “reading and writing” itself can contribute to bringing out students’ “inner writer” more effectively than judging them through grading (217). Even though writing requires technique and skill, these can be gained through students’ “solitary walk”; they can learn these skills by themselves through their practice. They need a friendly environment not to be afraid of “making mistakes” according to the black-and-white perspectives.

Instead of imposing a teacher’s thoughts or ideas of what it means to write better, students need time and opportunities for their own self-expression in writing classes. The “shell” of the egg cannot be broken by the forces imposed by the outside of it. It should be the youths themselves who have to break it and find the “better writer” in themselves. Through giving students freewill to write and express their unconventional ideas, the fixed frame of thoughts established by older generations can be challenged, leading to social change. Instead of insisting on an exemplary way of expressing students’ thoughts or ideas, teachers ought to be more open-minded and wait for students to express their reforming ideas in their writing, artwork, or speech.

WORKS CITED

- BTS official [@Bts.bighitofficial]. “Posts.” *Instagram*. <https://www.instagram.com/bts.bighitofficial/>. Accessed 21 May 2024.
- Hesse, Hermann. *Demian*. Penguin Books Ltd, 2017.
- Hu, Elise. “The All-Work, No-Play Culture Of South Korean Education.” *NPR*, 15 Apr. 2015, www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/04/15/393939759/the-all-work-no-play-culture-of-south-korean-education. Accessed 20 May 2024.
- Katz, Jack. “The Social Psychology of Adam and Eve.” *Theory and Society*, vol. 25, no. 4, 1996, pp. 545–82.
- Kim, Soo-yeon. “Deaths in S. Korea hit record high last year amid rapid aging, pandemic.” *Yonhap News*, 27 Sept. 2022, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20220927003100320>. Accessed 20 May 2024.
- Lazore, Courtney. “Success Story: How Storytelling Contributes to BTS’s Brand.” *Asia Marketing Journal*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2021, pp. 47–62.
- Lovejoy, Arthur O. “Milton and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall.” *ELH*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1937, pp. 161–79.
- Milton, John, and Gordon Teskey. *Paradise Lost: Authoritative Text, Sources and Backgrounds, Criticism*. W. W. Norton, 2005.
- Norford, Don Parry. “THE SEPARATION OF THE WORLD PARENTS IN ‘PARADISE LOST.’” *Milton Studies*, vol. 12, 1978, pp. 3–24.

- Rashid, Raphael. "South Korea may look perfect, but behind the facade lies a devastating suicide crisis" Raphael Rashid." *The Guardian*, 29 Apr. 2023, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/apr/29/south-korea-suicide-crisis-k-pop-young-people. Accessed 20 May 2024.
- Saeji, CedarBough T. "THINKING THROUGH INTERTEXTUALITY IN KOREAN POP MUSIC VIDEOS." *Translation Review*, vol. 108, no. 1, 2020, pp. 48–63.
- Sprinkel, Katy. *BTS: ONE*. Triumph Books, 2021.
- Warner, John. *Why They Can't Write: Killing the Five-Paragraph Essay and Other Necessities*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020.
- YongSeok Choi. dir. "BTS (방탄소년단) WINGS Short Film #1 BEGIN." *YouTube*, uploaded by HYBE LABELS, 4 Sept. 2016, <https://youtu.be/yR73I0z5ms0>. Accessed 21 May 2024.
- YongSeok Choi. dir. "BTS (방탄소년단) WINGS Short Film #2 LIE." *YouTube*, uploaded by HYBE LABELS, 5 Sept. 2016, <https://youtu.be/y8-HD5O69g>. Accessed 21 May 2024.
- YongSeok Choi. dir. "BTS (방탄소년단) WINGS Short Film #7 AWAKE." *YouTube*, uploaded by HYBE LABELS, 13 Sept. 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WYbrLlVelYk>. Accessed by 21 May 2024.
- Zimmerman, Shari A. "Milton's 'Paradise Lost': Eve's Struggle for Identity." *America Imago*, vol. 38, no. 3, 1981, pp. 247–67.

AUTHOR BIOS

Nayoung Bishoff is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in English at The George Washington University, where she is a Columbian Distinguished Fellow. Ms. Bishoff's research focuses on comparative literature between East and West, particularly Romanticism and Shakespearean adaptations. She has presented on gender, cultural globalization, childhood, and film and theater studies at the American Comparative Literature Association, Shakespeare Association of America, Asian Shakespeare Association, Renaissance Society of America, Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association, and other venues. Her most recent essay "Switching Gender Roles: Romeo and Juliet in K-drama" is in press from *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation*, issue 16.1, September 2024.

SUGGESTED REFERENCE CITATION

APA

Bishoff, N. (2024). Revisiting *Paradise Lost* through K-pop: A global approach of teaching writing. *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, 11(2). <http://journaldialogue.org/issues/v11-issue-2/revisiting-paradise-lost-through-k-pop-a-global-approach-to-teaching-writing/>

MLA

Bishoff, Nayoung. "Revisiting *Paradise Lost* Through K-Pop: A Global Approach of Teaching Writing." *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*. 2024, vol 11, no. 2. <http://journaldialogue.org/issues/v11-issue-2/revisiting-paradise-lost-through-k-pop-a-global-approach-to-teaching-writing/>



All papers in *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy* are published under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-Share-Alike License. For details please go to: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/us/>.

Examining Adolescence and Agency in the Midst of International Crisis: Pandemics, Pandemonium, and Zombie Young Adult Literature

T. Hunter Strickland

Georgia College & State University
Milledgeville, Georgia, USA
hunter.strickland@gcsu.edu

ABSTRACT:

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-22 brought an abundance of changes to secondary education as students transitioned across the country to virtual and hybrid learning contexts. Teachers flexed quickly and frequently to support the learning that students acquired in these new, digital spaces even as school, district, and state demands on teaching increased. The English/Language Arts classroom pivoted along with others as teachers sought out digital reading and writing resources for students to engage in. In the midst of a national crisis, a metaphorical monster that sought to destroy, much like Beowulf's dragon did, adolescent readers, despite the discourses of learning loss, turned to the monsters of zombie young adult literature (ZYAL) to cope with fear and tragedy around them. They did so because of a common genre feature where adolescent protagonists, much like their adult counterparts, deal with the horrors of their real world through literature when given a sense of power and agency both in the classroom and outside of it. Thus, popular culture becomes a tool for teachers and students to grapple with the great difficulties of life while examining it through high interest literature.

Keywords: zombie literature, young adult literature, english education, zombies, adolescent reading, adolescent literacy.

INTRODUCTION

While the zombie phenomenon has unashamedly transformed popular culture in the United States in the last twenty years through television and movies, zombie literature has also risen as an unmistakable fixture of the off-screen reading lives of adolescents and adults (Strickland 2019). Zombie young adult literature (ZYAL), while shuffling and staggering along behind the explosiveness of *The Walking Dead* comics and television show, has steadily grown in popularity as well with many blockbuster franchises coming onto the scene.

Meanwhile, secondary English teachers and teacher educators can and have brought ZYAL into public school English classrooms to help foster a love of reading and writing in adolescent students' learning (Strickland 2021). The great benefit of using ZYAL in the classroom, in particular, is not just high-interest-level-reading, although that is important, but how secondary students engage with the portrayal of teenage protagonists and their authentic struggles and personalities even while facing the reanimated corpses of those adults once in authoritative positions over them.

The COVID-19 pandemic, oddly enough, made these stories even more relevant as rampaging viruses changing the landscape of modern America have become much more personal and too realistic to engage with as a concept. This is not meant to trivialize the danger and horror that the pandemic has caused for many Americans by comparing it to horror fiction, but to show how adolescent protagonists facing unimaginable horrors can become mirrors for American students to deal with their own fears (Strickland 2019). For young readers, ZYAL creates an opportunity to unpack the concept(s) of adolescence(ts), and for readers to grapple with the socially constructed views of who adolescents really are as individuals and their ability to handle adult realities (Sarigianides 2012).

This article will argue that teachers can and should seek out and recommend such genre reading for their students because, not only are they interest driven, but they also feature adolescent protagonists that have the agency and power to deal with a very real adult horror even at a young age. It is important for teachers to remember that «Teaching about power is the fundamental aspect of teaching for critical literacy: who has power and who is denied it; how is power used and how is it abused» (Wolk, 2009, 668). Zombie YAL, in particular, provides a way for students to grapple with the real emotions they feel in the safe space and within the safe distance of fiction. This provides them with an ownership of power over their own lives and the agency to see themselves as being capable of dealing with difficulty.

ZYAL has shown teenage protagonists as capable, functioning individuals that have the power to affect change in their communities. These protagonists break the common social stereotypes of adolescents as fueled by hormones and lacking control, and show the power of teamwork and individual growth in a time that is representative of the growing up process. Students reading ZYAL have the opportunity of seeing themselves reflected in the mirror of these teenage characters struggling to survive an undead nightmare and can see through the windows of diversity to understand their classmates' identities and points of view (Sims Bishop 1990).

Understanding Adolescence(ts) in Teaching English

In order to grasp the potential of adolescent readers reading ZYAL to cope with a national pandemic, an understanding of the social stereotypes about adolescence should be examined. In English teacher education, the value in "Exploring adolescence as a cultural construct presents teacher candidates with a nondominant view of youth" (Sarigianides 226). This nondominant view allows veteran and new teachers alike to see more potential in their students than society would have them, and this allows for teaching to be based upon a foundation of positive rather than deficit views of youth within the English classroom.

When teaching in the English classroom begins with that positive foundation, a whole new opportunity for student growth becomes available. The hope for this positive view of students is due to the fact that "We

strive to encourage young people to share their stories from their lived experiences, and we acknowledge the value of their voices. We want them to realize the power of their stories and their perspectives; we want to challenge and create a new discourse about youth” (Flores, et al. 78). In many ways, English classrooms seek this potential in their students more than other subjects do. It is not just that English teachers wish for their students to read and write better after finishing a course, but they want them to have a chance to grow as individuals operating in a world that seeks to contain them.

Furthermore, teachers and teacher candidates have to take an active stance on dismantling harmful stereotypes of the youth they work with. In particular, “literacy teacher education might benefit by reconsidering how learning about the power of discourses to name and position adolescents in problematic ways affects preservice teachers’ reasoning about pedagogy” (Lewis & Petrone 407). This deconstruction of the power within discourses about adolescence(ts) sets the tone for student learning in English classrooms and affects the teaching and learning that goes on in the classroom as well. If the goal of English instruction is to have students engage in the world around them as active participants, then the focus of power needs to be more concentrated on students’ own agency for change and less on that of the teacher.

Conceptual Lens

The effect of stereotypes about youth on pedagogy has been widely explored. The foundation for the work found in this article comes from an understanding that once these stereotypes have been addressed by both teacher and student, real change can occur. In teacher education, when “Exploring changes in the ways that youths have historically been conceptualized in work, school, and social settings sometimes allow teacher candidates to begin to unfix their expectations of adolescents and to consider how this category of experience is more socially constructed than biologically inevitable” (Sarigianides 225). Understanding their views of students and their abilities as framed by social construction rather than by nature breaks apart the tension between students as innocents and students as a powerful force unto themselves.

This breaking of stereotypes can also allow teachers and teacher candidates to better serve diverse identities by viewing literature with the youth lens (YL). Exploring and analyzing literature used in classrooms with “a YL carries within it the potential to consider representations of youth in texts as they reflect assumptions tied to age as well as how those representations might intersect with conceptions of class, sexuality, race, gender, ability, and other social categories” (Petrone, et al., 508). Furthermore, a YL asks, “How does the text represent adolescence/ts?” and “What role does the text play in reinforcing and/or subverting dominant ideas about adolescence?” (511). When using a YL while considering texts to employ with students, teachers can begin to see a greater potential for more when teaching students English.

Zombie Young Adult Literature Provides the Space

Why study ZYAL or even consider using monster fiction with youth in English classrooms? First, there is a “surging popularity of YA dystopia alongside similar trends: post-apocalyptic narratives (be they in the form of print fiction, film, television, or video games) that share similar characteristics; zombie and vampire storylines with their fear-based ‘us versus them’ binaries; and horror films that encompass the above subcategories” (Ames 6-7). Second, these popular and interest-driven stories have the potential to both awaken students’ attention immediately and show them an understanding of their whole identity as capable adults.

The use of ZYAL during the COVID-19 pandemic could push students to see both intertextual and cross-subject potential to their studies and reading. However, “While intertextuality commonly refers to allusions or references in one text to that of another, interdiscursivity suggests important associations between a given text and its prevailing genre or discourse” (Wickens, 2011, 152). Thus, as students make the intertextual connections between the ZYAL they are reading and the real-life text of the pandemic taking place before their eyes, they can also begin to understand the connections between the texts and the discourses surrounding

youth in school and society simultaneously. It is through this association that students can begin to dismantle negative stereotypes about themselves in mainstream media, in schools, and from their parents, which gives them the agency and power to confront it.

When considering ZYAL as an avenue of study for adolescent students, teachers must consider why they should use monster and horror fiction as reading material in their classrooms. They wouldn't have to look far for such material, though, as zombie literature has been pervasive in American popular culture for decades. In reality, "The fact that the grim apocalyptic imagery present in mainstream texts has filtered down into young adult literature is quite telling" (Ames 7). It shows that "Connecting popular YAL to a tradition of dystopian narratives can help students to better understand the characteristics and history of the genre and how it is often used as social commentary" (Rybakova & Roccanti 38). This connection has immediate impact in English classrooms as students see, read, and write social commentaries attached to their reading, which enables them to enact change in their communities.

Finding ZYAL That Feature Adolescents with Power

One Example

There are many fantastic zombie young adult novels that feature teenage protagonists with agency in the face of overwhelming and horrific odds. One great example of this genre is the *Rot & Ruin* series by Jonathan Maberry. *Rot & Ruin* is the story of Benny Imura, a Japanese American 15-year-old boy and his friends as they survive in their small community in Northern California called Mountainside. Benny's world came crashing down as the zombie apocalypse raged across the world when he was only an infant. Rescued and now raised by his older brother, Tom, Benny resents his older brother for abandoning his parents on First Night, the zombie outbreak, and for his being left to attend school and live a sheltered life within the safe confines of Mountainside. Maberry narrates, "Tom and Benny never talked about zombies. They had every reason to, but they never did. Benny couldn't understand it. He hated zoms. Everyone hated them, though with Benny it was a white-hot consuming hatred that went back to his very first memory. Because it was his first memory—a nightmare image that was there every night when he closed his eyes" (Maberry 5).

When Benny's love interest, Nix's mother is murdered at the hands of a pair of evil bounty hunters, Benny and his friends look past their distaste for Tom and allow him to begin training them to become samurai with the requisite combat and survival skills to leave the safety of their community, search through the zombie infested rot and ruin to bring the evil bounty hunters to justice. These protagonists break their own social stereotypes against Tom and the other adults in Mountainside, and step into their future as capable and powerful warriors seeking justice in an unjust world.

Using the Youth Lens to Understand Adolescence in Rot & Ruin

In the first few chapters of this book, it is easy for readers to claim that Benny and his friends Chong and Morgie are every bit the stereotypical adolescent boys. They hate authority, they cut up and make jokes constantly, and they talk about girls. However, interwoven into an introduction of characters and contexts, teenagers that have to deal with the harsh realities of adult life are revealed, and they feel powerless to control their own lives.

Through their samurai training, Benny and his friends learn much about how to deal with massive issues as well as their own emotions of fear and helplessness. During one training session, Tom explains that in the face of fear, "People need something to blame... If they can't find something rational to blame, then they'll very happily blame something irrational. Back when people didn't know about viruses and bacteria, they blamed plagues on witches and vampires" (Maberry 17). The potential in using such deductions with modern students engaging in a study of current events and fear mongering is palpable.

There are many examples of the juxtaposition of adult discourses about youth, and the youth countering such discourses. Tom says at one point, “People are scared, Benny. They’re in denial. You’re only fifteen, so you and your friends don’t really understand what it was like during First Night” (Maberry 42). Such conversation happens frequently in the early part of the story, before Tom begins to see Benny and his friends as capable adults dealing with the same hardships that he does. He later says, “It’s okay to be scared... Scared means you’re smart. Just don’t panic. That’ll get you killed” (Maberry 97). Tom realizes that adolescents and adults face the same hardships and deal with the same emotions, and that it is this which should allow a greater understanding to grow between them. It is in this understanding whereby students can begin to see their own agency in traditionally adult spaces.

Adolescent Agency Leads to Hope

Breaking down the stereotypes of youth is a great benefit of studying YAL at large, but one of the most important reasons for studying ZYAL during the time of the national pandemic is the overwhelming message of hope amidst struggle that so many adolescent (and adult) readers long for. Once teachers, teacher candidates, and students understand the social construction of adolescence(ts) in the greater American discourse, they can begin to unpack the great potential, accomplishment, and vision of young people in English and English education classrooms. Benny and his friends are no strangers to this hope.

Throughout the story of *Rot & Ruin*, facing death, hunger, and deep emotions related to depression, loss, and grief, the camaraderie of this group of teenagers allows for an exploration of adolescent spirit. Even in the darkest of moments in the story, they support each other. In conversation about the loss of the world as they once knew it, Benny’s friend explains “And yet’ said Chong, ‘we’ll find a way to pick up the pieces of our shattered lives and struggle on” (Maberry 116). The message here relates to so many readers who have faced being within the midst of over two years of pandemic. Loss, while devastating in many ways, does not mean that there is no hope. Adolescents, like adults, must merely continue on.

While at Mountainside, still early in the story, Benny apprentices to an artist, Sacchetto, who sees the dark times they are living in as the end of times. He explains, “It happened. The dead rose, we fell. We lost the war and we lost the world. End of story. How it happened doesn’t matter much to anyone anymore. We’re living next door to the apocalypse, kid” (Maberry 137). However, we see much in how Benny responds to this discourse of doom and gloom that adolescent readers now would be so used to. He explains, “It’s just that I’m fifteen, and I have this crazy idea I might actually have a life in front of me. I don’t see how it’s going to do me much good to believe that the world is over and this is just an epilogue” (Maberry 137-38). It shows, even before the major character growth that Benny experiences over the rest of the story, that Benny sees the world for what it is, and does not let that ruin his spirit of hope.

The book also speaks directly to the concept of fear, which is so often why modern readers turn to horror and monster fiction. It provides a cathartic experience by dealing with fear with the distance provided through fiction (Strickland 2019). In a long speech, Tom shares with his younger brother:

We let fear rule us and guide us, and that’s never the way to win. A long time ago a great man once said that we have nothing to fear but fear itself. That was never truer than during First Night. It was fear that caused people to panic and abandon defenses. It was fear that made them squabble instead of working together. It was fear that inspired them to take actions they would have never taken if they’d given it a minute’s more cool thought (Maberry 188-89)

However, hitting the road into the rot and ruin with Benny and his friends shows Tom that there is so much more to this group of young people than his stereotyping of them earlier allowed. He later updates his thoughts by sharing:

There are some people who don't let fear rule their actions, and I suspect it'll be your generation that turns things around. Most of the people my age or older are lost in fear, and they'll never find their way back. But you and your friends, especially those young enough to not remember First Night... You're the ones who will choose whether to live in fear or not. (Maberry 189-190)

There is a realization here that young people like Benny and his friends do have a future separate from the adults in their lives, and they will have the agency to change and pursue that future as they see fit.

Finally, there is a sense of hope among Benny and his friends as they think about the impact of their apocalyptic world on why they should even try to survive. He says, later in the story, "That's just it, Nix. I can't let myself believe that nothing matters. You matter. We matter. We both need to believe that we'll get past this. That we'll be able to laugh again. That we'll want to" (Maberry 391). This realization gives these young protagonists the zeal for life they need to continue to struggle on and seek good things for themselves. The story concludes with this same hope when "Each of them stared into the storm with huge eyes that were filled with tears and hope" (Maberry 409).

Other Great ZYAL that Represents the Same Hope to Adolescents

This article used one novel, *Rot & Ruin* as an example of the power of ZYAL to be so much more than just interesting stories for a small group of readers to pursue. There are many other great examples of ZYAL that could have this same function and represent various diversities within adolescence as well.

Dread Nation by Justina Ireland (2018)

Dread Nation tells an alternate history of the American Civil War as the dead of the Battle of Gettysburg rise again and destroy America and any hope of a normal future. The story follows Jane McKeene, a Black teenager attending Mrs. Duncan's combat school where she will be trained to fight the dead and protect the homes of America's white elite as an attendant. This novel addresses the historical realities of residential schools, slavery and racism, as well as the discrimination and abuse of African and Native Americans.

Z by Michael Thomas Ford (2010)

Z is a middle grades or young-adolescent YAL text that provides an interesting fusion of ZYAL and video game culture. Josh and his friends are masters of their open-world zombie video game based on the historical zombie apocalypse that occurred before they were born. After receiving an invitation to play the game in an underground league by Charlie, a secretly female video game master, Josh realizes that the game is becoming too real as blood begins to flow. This story provides an interesting take on video game culture and the reality of gaming as a sport that so many adolescents subscribe to today.

Other Great Books to Check Out

1. *The Forest of Hands and Teeth* by Carrie Ryan (2009)
2. *Feed* by Mira Grant (2010)
3. *Quarantine: The Loners* by Lex Thomas (2012)

CONCLUSION

The potential of using ZYAL in classrooms for both independent and whole class reads has yet to be explored at length. Often, zombie and other monster fiction are brought up with their connection to often taught canonical works like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. The reality is that monster fiction has fascinated audiences for centuries, and world-wide catastrophe needs to be addressed in the classroom through distantly safe stories. The potential to deal with real-world issues, an obvious use of

monsters for the purpose of satire, and an examination of adolescent stereotypes all provide rigorous use in the English classroom.

Additionally, the reading of ZYAL and the study of monsters in general provide a great potential for both creative and academic writing in the classroom. First, students can use monster literature like ZYAL as mentor texts to create their own stories where they practice craft such as character creation, plot outlining, revision, and peer review. All these skills explored through the writing of interest-based stories (Strickland 2022) can be transferred to academic writing and the meeting of standards.

Lastly, students can grapple with local and school level issues related to the stereotyping of adolescence, have a platform and agency to create change in their community, and use reading and writing as avenues for an exploration of their own voices. By examining the hope and strength of adolescent protagonists in ZYAL, students can relate and further the discourses of such strength in their English classroom and with authentic audiences as well.

WORKS CITED

- Ames, Melissa. "Engaging "Apolitical" Adolescents: Analyzing the Popularity and Educational Potential of Dystopian Literature Post-9/11." *The High School Journal*, vol. 97, no. 1, 2013, pp. 3-20.
- Flores, Tracy, et al. "Embracing the Difficult Truths of Adolescence Through Young Adult Literature." *The ALAN Review*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2016, pp. 77-82.
- Ford, Thomas. Z. Harper Teen, 2010.
- Grant, Mira. *Feed*. Orbit Books, 2010.
- Ireland, Justina. *Dread Nation*. Balzer + Bray, 2018.
- Lewis, Mark, and Robert Petrone. "'Although Adolescence Need Not Be Violent...': Preservice Teachers' Connections Between 'Adolescence' and Literacy Curriculum." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, vol. 53, no. 5, pp. 398-407.
- Maberry, Jonathan. *Rot & Ruin*. Simon & Schuster, 2010.
- Petrone, Robert, et al. "The Youth Lens: Analyzing Adolescence/ts in Literary Texts." *Journal of Literacy Research*, vol. 46, no. 4, 2015, pp. 506-533.
- Ryan, Carrie. *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*. Ember Publishing, 2009.
- Rybakova, Katie, and Rikki Roccati. "Connecting the Canon to Current Young Adult Literature." *American Secondary Education*, vol. 44, no 2, 2016, pp. 31-45.
- Sarigianides, Sophia. "Tensions in Teaching Adolescence/ts: Analyzing Resistances in a Young Adult Literature Course." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, vol. 56, no. 3, 2012, pp. 222-230.
- Sims Bishop, Rudine. "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors." *Perspectives*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1990, pp. ix-xi.
- Strickland, Thomas. "Zombie Literature: Analyzing the Fear of the Unknown Through Popular Culture." *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2019, pp. 48-56.
- Strickland, Thomas. "The Young Adult Literature Methods Course in Secondary English Teacher Education." *The ALAN Review*, vol. 48, no. 2, 2021, pp. 39-50.
- Strickland, Thomas. "Understanding the Value of Choice in the Young Adult Literature Methods Course." *How Young Adult Literature Gets Taught: Perspectives, Ideologies, and Pedagogical Approaches for Instruction and Assessment*, edited by Steven Bickmore, Thomas Strickland, & Stacy Graber., 2022, pp. 40-50.
- Thomas, Lex. *Quarantine: The Loners*. Carolrhoda Lab, 2012.
- Wickens, Corrine. "Codes, Silences, and Homophobia: Challenging Normative Assumptions About Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary LGBTQ Young Adult Literature." *Children's Literature in Education*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2011, pp. 148-164.

Wolk, Steven. "Reading Democracy: Exploring Ideas That Matter with Middle Grade and Young Adult Literature." *English Journal*, vol. 103, no. 2, 2013, pp. 45-51.

AUTHOR BIOS

T. Hunter Strickland, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor of Reading, Literacy and Language at Georgia College & State University. He received his Ph.D. in Language and Literacy Education with a focus on English Education at the University of Georgia where he studied the young adult literature methods course in secondary English teacher education programs across the United States.

His teaching at GCSU focuses on adolescent literacy including secondary content area literacy, and English education. Through his understanding of young adult literature pedagogy, he believes that the best literacy teachers of any grade level are teachers who foster their own identities as readers and writers. His research interests are in young adult literature methods and pedagogy within secondary English teacher preparation programs and adolescent literacy.

SUGGESTED REFERENCE CITATION

APA

Strickland, T. H. (2024). Examining adolescence and agency in the midst of international crisis: Pandemics, pandemonium, and zombie young adult literature. *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, 11(2). <http://journaldialogue.org/issues/v11-issue-2/examining-adolescence-and-agency-in-the-midst-of-international-crisis-pandemics-pandemonium-and-zombie-young-adult-literature/>

MLA

Strickland, Thomas. "Examining Adolescence and Agency in the Midst of International Crisis: Pandemics, Pandemonium, and Zombie Young Adult Literature." *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*. 2024, vol 11, no. 2. <http://journaldialogue.org/issues/v11-issue-2/examining-adolescence-and-agency-in-the-midst-of-international-crisis-pandemics-pandemonium-and-zombie-young-adult-literature/>

Ways of Decoloniality by The Painted Lady: *Avatar: The Last Airbender's* Katara Demonstrates How to Revive a Community in Ecological distress Brought by the Colonial Expansion of the Fire Nation

Jose Santos P. Ardivilla
Texas Tech University
Lubbock, Texas, USA
jose.ardivilla@ttu.edu

ABSTRACT:

In the third episode of *Avatar: The Last Airbender's Book 3: The Book Of Fire*, The “Gaang” consisting of Avatar Aang, Toph, Sokka, and Katara chanced upon a fishing village on stilts, ravaged by the pollution of its waterways. The pollution comes from the industrial activity of the Colonial Masters’ Fire Nation which greatly affected the village. This animation is from Nickelodeon, a channel geared for children’s entertainment, thus implicates humorous asides in what purports to be a serious epicurean reclaiming of a lost balance through indigenous visual culture, solidarity, media studies, and ecocriticism. Katara disguises herself as “the Painted Lady,” a folkloric figure of the village to help in healing the sick and providing food, which proved not to be as effective until a direct confrontation with the polluters had taken place. Katara dons the appearance of the Painted Lady as a benevolent force (to rival the Fire Nation’s industrial foment) and eventually worked with the villagers to seize their village’s wellbeing by the ousting of the Fire nation. This paper explores connective nodes relating this episode with other local environmental concerns that are at the forefront of increased geopolitical tensions in the region.

Keywords Avatar: The Last Airbender, Katara, waterbending, Fire Nation, coloniality, decoloniality, animation studies, ecocriticism, popular culture, praxis

The Painted Lady (Hamilton and Spaulding 2007) episode of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* offers sharp ecocriticism in an extractive dominant culture that is very much a real-world issue with fraught calls of climate emergency. Though the cartoon highlighted in this paper is situated in a fictional world based on many Asian cultures, this episode offers a poignant look at coloniality and its attendant violence of ecological degradation and community oppression. In this episode, the character of Katara powers through the guise of a folkloric spirit to accommodate the belief system of a fishing village's indigenes. In the process, Katara and the Gaang fight the mechanical might and modernity of the dominant group. In this regard, the paper interweaves its critical lens of indigenous visual culture with indigenous beliefs and solidarity from the margins, and looks at how coloniality can be combated as evidenced by media studies delving into real life experiences uttered from the margins through the arts and popular culture. To uphold ecological justice is to trouble the hold of the dominant culture over those with much lesser power but with higher stakes through the empowerment of those who are subject to domination via decoloniality, which also involves an insurgent praxis to anticipate and allow for enunciation. This enunciation not only empowers the colonized with a means to an utterance, but also adheres to an emergence of visibility. This is also evidenced by real-life acts of defiance from many cultures across the world that seek to undermine the wanton extraction and exploitation of resources. Solidarity works with arms akimbo and linking with people that may be different from you but have shared concerns in terms of encountering and countering oppression and devaluation. Decoloniality means seeing through the lens of the smaller dominated culture, which extends the legibility of the cultures via solidarity. Furthermore, this episode shows the capacity of popular culture icons such as Nickelodeon cartoons to be informative about such issues, and potentially inspire a course of direct action.

Nickelodeon cartoons have the connective thread of using humor and goofiness in their stories which perhaps, at face value, are to tickle the primary audience which are children. But humor/goofiness can be reflective of a transgressive manner to emerge a different point of view to look upon a situation. This is informed by Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) carnivalesque wherein he critically dives into 17th century author Francois Rabelais's works to provide a lens of humor through carnival energy, which proves to be transgressive and has the capacity for inversion and provides an exposure of the tenuous nature of power. In Nickelodeon's cartoons, humor may be seen as aspects of silliness and a source of narrative disruption, but in *The Painted Lady* episode, humor and goofiness are crucial coping mechanisms as are disruptions in the figure of the boat man who shifts through different personas invoking his brothers. This shifting of bodies can be seen through Katara's donning the Painted Lady persona but it goes beyond goofiness as a transient way of becoming that can help her operationalize and shift through solidarity.

In this episode, Katara, a water bender, or somebody who can manipulate water, is on a quest with her friends called "Aang Gang" by the fans of the show to confront the Fire Lord, who is the leader of the Fire Nation that has colonized the other Nations (Water, Earth, Air). Katara and the Aang Gang come from tribes and are of bodies that are oppressed, underestimated, and besmirched. During their journey, they chance upon a fishing village that has been sickened by a polluted river (*The Painted Lady*, 00:02:32). The pollution comes from the Fire Nation's military facility and weapons factory. Katara, who has the capacity to heal (Katara is one among a more talented and skilled water benders who are adept with manipulation of helping energy flow like water to afflicted areas), sneaks into the village to cure some of the villagers and provide them with food. The villagers think she is the Painted Lady, their revered river spirit. Katara proceeds to dress up as the Painted Lady (copying from the statue she saw in the fishing village which is that of a woman with a wide-brimmed hat with diaphanous silken veils at the rim and wearing white flowing robes and streaks of red paint on the face) in order to go about saving the villagers (*The Painted Lady*, 00:08:36). Yet, as the root of the ills is the factory, she sneaks into the factory with Avatar Aang and destroys it (*The Painted Lady*, 00:13:36). The Fire Nation soldiers go to the village in retaliation, but Katara, still dressed as the Painted Lady, thwarts

them. The villagers are initially jubilant, until they find out that their Painted Lady is Katara in disguise. They become angry and castigate her for “tricking” them. One of them asks, “How dare you act like our Painted Lady? (*The Painted Lady*, 00:21:01)” Katara apologizes but argues that the question about the Painted Lady’s authenticity is beside the point, as the villagers have real practical and material problems that they need to address. She tells them that the solution to their problems starts with reviving the river. Katara and her friends help the villagers clean the river. The closing shot of this episode (*The Painted Lady*, 00:23:09) shows Katara at nighttime, standing alone by the shore of the newly rehabilitated river. Then the Painted Lady appears before her, thanks her, and disappears into the mist.

In animation, the “in-between is drawing the movement connecting one action frame to another to make it look like there is smooth action and transition. This segment of the “in-between” consists of a carefully thought out flow of frames that lead to action itself. I situate the in-between as a locus of anticipation in which one act will inform the next; or such an act will bring us from one frame to another, a synecdochic approach of taking us from an instance of abuse and exploitation to possible avenues of countering and liberation. Anticipation moves through a network of engagement, and encounters, bracketed by the political values of emotion. As Sara Ahmed (2015) writes, emotions are that which impression leaves behind or “has impressed upon the body” (Ahmed, 2015, loc 685 of 6419). This paper aims to point out how bodies that are oppressed are animated against their oppressors via the linkages of anticipation, which I argue are cognizant to praxis or thinking-doing. This paper weaves through operations of components, what David Harvey (2006) writes as blighted violence strewn across uneven geographic development which is operationalized by coloniality and its attendant crass capital accumulation via resource extraction which leads to displaced people. A proposed countering is accomplished via decoloniality and insurgency praxis (which is to work *with* the people according to their terms and not what you think is best for them, to speak *with* the people and not speak *for* the people), as discussed by various scholars, which is evident in this particular episode. This paper explores such issues via textual analysis of the episode, and by connecting it with analyses from articles on Indigenous visual culture, solidarity, media studies, and ecocriticism. The paper argues for listening to the Indigenous communities when it comes to their concerns on identity and cultural articulation. Though this paper is primarily focused on an episode of a cartoon show, it is argued that popular culture can be employed in registering dissent. Such creative aspects on identity and positionality are vital to community cohesion which is explored via examples of solidarity and creative practice. This paper demonstrates how popular culture is instrumental for protest and possible direct action to negotiate, trouble, and jockey for a counter-utterance, and how it has been used by marginalized people and communities in distress.

WHAT IS COLONIALITY?

In Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano’s *Coloniality of Power, Ethnocentrism, and Latin America* (2000), modernity for dominant colonizer European nations is achieved through coloniality. Coloniality is the field in which colonialism happens and is still present despite “independence (this is the enduring presence of colonial powers enacted on the former colonies that make up the Global south through protracted institutions of globalized capitalist extraction and through oppressive debts incurred by the poor nations in finance institutions controlled by the wealthy nations that are former colonial masters. This troubles the notion of independence when one is still leashed by the wealthy nations of the Global North).” It is an operation to propagate and sustain their modernity (for the colonizers or dominant culture) in which resource extraction is justified by ethnocentrism, which is to mark the colonized as incapable of self-rule, and incapable vanguards of their own resources.

Throughout the *Avatar: The Last Airbender* series, the Fire Nation's leaders and its military elite overestimate their own superiority. Coloniality justified by ethnocentrism enables the Fire Nation to relegate the fishing village as an entity that is merely in the way of their military industrial complex. As such, the fishing village's cultural identity is practically discarded. The Fire Nation weapons factory near the village fits into this domineering view. The fishing village is in the way of the Fire Nation's military ascent. Furthermore, since the fishing village is not inhabited by Fire Nation people, harmful factory chemicals were dumped near the village. This is what Robert Bullard (2019) writes as "environmental racism" wherein the dominant body (colonizer) sees its duty via might as the right to extract the resources from the colonized, who are incapable of doing so, and are not as technologically adept (read: backwards) to "deserve" these resources. "The association of colonial Ethnocentrism and universal racial classification helps to explain why Europeans [or, in this case, the Fire Nation,] came to feel not only superior to all the other peoples of the world, but, in particular, *naturally* [emphasis added] superior" (Quijano, 2000, p. 541). In this regard, coloniality is a means to manifest modernity, which is a lived experience operating in the perspective brought by historical experience. This perspective in turn generates an understanding of the world. The way the Fire Nation sees the world is that it is there for their taking. Modernity brings physical, material technological innovation by way of an industrial revolution that has people and goods moving faster. Colonialism is a mobile project in which it takes time and the space acquired by the dominant culture to manifest and maintain its modernity. The depiction of a fishing village built of flimsy, combustible materials and supported by stilts stands in contrast to the Fire Nation's massive imperial architecture and intricate urban design. "Thus, all non-Europeans [in this case, the Fire Nation,] could be considered as pre-European [pre-Fire Nationeans] and at the same time displaced on a certain historical chain from primitive to civilized, from the rational to the irrational, from the traditional to the modern, from magic-mythic to the scientific (Quijano, 2000, p. 556)." Coloniality is thus what happens to the fishing village when it is exploited in the name of the military might of the Fire Nation that is convinced of its superiority. Thus, it extracts resources from the village and maintains its dominance. Coloniality involves controlling people's domain and their enunciation. The fact that the fishing village is otherwise ignored is evidence of its being silenced in the name of Fire Nation modernity. Katara, in the guise of the Painted Lady, offers a way to seize this silencing and to enable others to speak up.

WHAT IS DECOLONIALITY? WHAT IS PRAXIS INSURGENCY?

Walter D. Mingolo and Catherine Walsh in *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* discuss that only through the realization that coloniality exists can decoloniality be delinked from it. The word "link" situates coloniality as a mesh of systems which can be thought of as the colonial matrix of power. The dominant colonial power dictates the content, manner, and location of such utterances. The colonial matrix of power which enables the modernity of one culture can be weaponized and used to control the domains of others and manage their mobility and existence. Thus, to disturb this coloniality is to expose this exploitative and abusive system through decoloniality. The ways of decoloniality are not just to realize that one is in the colonial matrix of power, it is then to delink from it and to relink somewhere else. Relinking, as dramatized in *The Painted Lady* episode, involved empowering the fishing village through their connection to the river.

Katara's act of summoning the Painted Lady has reminded the villagers that there is still "worth" or "power" in the river. Katara has thus aligned her power to the belief system and resources of the fishing village. As Mingolo and Walsh state, "Decoloniality, without a doubt, is also contextual, relational, practice based, and lived" (2018, p. 19). The emergence of the Painted Lady was, arguably, the crack that caused the Fire Nation to lose its grip over the fishing village. The praxis is being undone; "It is praxis that makes the path" (Mingolo and Walsh, 2018, p. 19). Katara undoes the dominance of the Fire Nation: "Undoing is doing something;

delinking presupposes relinking to something else. Consequently, decoloniality is undoing and redoing; it is praxis” (Mingolo 2018:120). Katara’s experience with the Fire Nation’s atrocities towards the Southern Water Tribe provides her an arsenal for decolonizing and disruption as a means of weakening the grip of the Fire Nation. In her donning the Painted Lady, she is transmuting her informed ways of defiance to suit the needs of the fishing village.

For Walsh and Mingolo, praxis does not come after theory/critical thinking, nor is it praxis that informs theory/critical thinking; but it is an act of *thinking-with* and *thinking-from*. This situates praxis *side-by-side* with theory/critical thinking. This is *thinking-doing* of insurgent praxis. This is to demand to go beyond the simple task of merely thinking *about* issues and to directly address these issues via confrontation, engagement, and the recalibration for a solution. Insurgent praxis is to expose coloniality, oppose the colonial matrix of power, and to *think-with* or *think-struggle-with* people alongside their knowledge production and culture. This is to delink and to disturb the Fire Nation’s insistence of its own modern narrative. However, Katara did not think this through before donning the revered spirit of the village. She may have enacted immediately for faster results but this became a sticking point for the villagers.

It is also necessary to note that Katara donned the Painted Lady not just as a costume but as a system of belief that is connected to the fishing village and to the health of the river system. By doing so, Katara has reminded the sick and weakened villagers that the Fire Nation is not the only power present—there is power in their traditional belief systems and in their ways of life and worldview that opposes the mechanistic and modern dominant worldview of the Fire Nation - Katara pretending to be the Painted Lady is an act of insurgent praxis. She understands the ways of a culture that is not hers and integrates this with her power capacities to help the afflicted. Katara as the Painted Lady is a means of drawing away power and might from the Fire Nation. In defeating the Fire Nation, Katara and her companions have disrupted the “universality” in which it depicts their own culture as the powerful one. In this episode, Katara as the Painted Lady destroys the factory and the villagers subsequently see the Fire Nation soldiers scrambling away from them.

Yet, the initial negative reception of Katara’s pretending to be the Painted Lady may create some tension among those who are in the margins as well. This is to prove that solidarity will not produce a monolith of struggle but a careful and thorough approach to link with others that are not similar in their ways of being and becoming. Katara is not just an outsider in the eyes of the villagers, but also an interloper with a different ethnoclass and positionality. Katara is not from their tropical littoral near the near river’s edge and the shore of the sea. She is from the Southern Water Tribe, with darker skin color than both the villagers and her own friends. It is a very telling detail that at the end of the episode where Katara meets the real Painted Lady, the Lady has iridescent pale skin. In this scene, the Painted Lady exists. Why did she not save the village herself? Indeed, the pollution of the river has driven this spirit away. The brownness of its water is equated with sludge and degradation. Why did she give her thanks to Katara when there was nobody to witness this exchange? The paintedness of the Painted Lady becomes even more apparent when the painted patterns show up even brighter on her pallid skin. This is the perceived dominance of whiteness which the Fire Nation use (and perhaps even the villagers) to denigrate those who are not *like* them, yet the “whitest” of them all, the Painted Lady shows her gratitude to Katara, whose browner body is a mark of her ethnoclassed reality as perceived as inadequate and barbaric. These shifts of identity are in comparison to the boatman Doc who switches head gears and claims to be his brothers (which Doc claims to be Xu or Bushi) offer a glimpse on the problematic aspects of Katara’s actions. The boatman shifts laterally, that is, still within the fishing village’s culture that is known and familiar, and thus comforting, despite the unsettling aspect of him donning different personas. His transformations are befuddling but goofy. Katara’s shift is crosswise, coming in from a different, if not opposite direction. This proves to be transgressive because the villagers’ littoral tropical environment is a contrast to her Antarctic one. This shows the intricacies and overlapping notions of identity and politics that

make solidarity not simplistic and easily transferrable. The villagers show their displeasure until the Avatar Aang has intervened and mentioned Katara's insurgent praxis as the chief reason for the ouster of the Fire Nation. The villagers find it problematic that a "colonial girl" tricks them and almost incites a riot until Sokka speaks for Katara. This intervention paves a way for Katara to take off the Painted Lady costume and speak directly to the villagers. The villagers have no bending power and yet find it distressing that a water bender has "tricked" them.

TROUBLING MODERNITY

Katara's move to help the fishing village and infiltrate the military factory of the Fire Nation is situated in an ecocritical insurgency. Such an attack targets the Fire Nation's claim to a universal modernity. With this centrality, the Fire Nation corrals "newness" and to be its arbiter. This positions the Fire Nation ethno-class to formulate global order according to their image. Modernity is a linear narrative which marks people and cultures that are non-Fire Nation to be lagging, ergo primitive. The claim to modernity enables the Fire Nation to exploit the present to ensure their future. Decoloniality is to delink from this and to relink to the identity of the fishing village and assert it.

Katara reaches back into the fishing village's "past," which is represented by the lived lives and belief system of the fishing village, to defeat the Fire Nation's insistence on their version and vision of modernity. This is very much a demonstration of praxis: intentionality and mindfulness. It is a form of self-fashioning that allows others to realize their own capacity for self-fashioning. This is delinking away from the colonial matrix of power. To delink is to allow the re-existence of other voices, other lives. Praxis allows us to realize that modernity is how dominant cultures control enunciation and to foster, generate, and enlarge our own enunciation, our own voices. In a way, Katara demonstrates how to trouble coloniality by taking a dive into the comparative epistemic situations of the fishing village compared to those of the Fire Nation. Katara has induced and used "...insurgent praxis — that is, in multiple contexts, manifestations, and hows of political-epistemic-existence-based resistance, rebellion, struggle, action and prospect ..." (Mingolo and Walsh, 2018, p. 35). This means there are other ways to fight back.

Ecocritical Insurgency

The ecological distress of the fishing village from the chemical debris of the Fire Nation's Industrial Military Complex is a component of "imperial underpinnings" (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010, p. 3), which has enabled the dominant culture's ascent and maintenance of its self-ascribed superiority and modernity. To delink from this is to embark on an "epistemic decolonisation — what the Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o calls the 'decolonisation of the mind' — as with more directly physical forms of social struggle, and with theorizing the ideas of a political practice ..." (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010, p. 14), which is what Katara's insurgency demonstrates. Katara's use of the belief system of the fishing village in assuming the identity of the Painted Lady is a form of epistemic decolonization that led to the destruction of the Fire Nation's factory. In her insurgent praxis, Katara uplifts other lives, other voices, and other beliefs, thus facilitating the seizing and enabling of this cultural enunciation. This episode is a depiction of eco-criticism which is "...bringing to light these alternative knowledges and knowledge-systems, [this] emphasizes postcolonial communities' sense of their own cultural identities and entitlements, which often represent the ontological basis for their territorial claims to belong" (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010, p. 20). This episode speaks of territorial claims not just as a means of geography and cartography, but also as a claiming of the spirit of the place. The very last scene of the episode is the actual Painted Lady appearing before Katara thanking the water bender for her help. Then, the Painted Lady dissolves back into the mist of the river that cradles the fishing village. The mist may be a nebulous mystery which can be symbolic of insurgent praxis which is to go through great lengths to unveil and reveal

the weak spots. Perhaps this victory for the tiny fishing village heralds the substantial victory to come for other tiny villages around the world who are threatened by dispossession or already displaced and fractured by such violence.

Such dispossession is what Harvey (2019) describes as a result of accumulative capitalism that is supported by the politically dominant that are backed by their military and economic might. The sickened and polluted fishing village in the episode is but an aspect of such imperialist ways of extracting resources whilst dividing the world into subservient modes to cater to the hegemony. Harvey's work offers a blueprint on how the world is bracketed into spaces of uneven development by infiltration and invasion, which leads to displacement and dispossession. Harvey's ultimate point is to put theory to task: to combat the constantly shifting social processes of embedding and its consequent dispossession. He notes, "Theory should be understood instead as an evolving structure of argument sensitive to encounters with the complex ways in which social processes are materially embedded in the way of life" (Harvey, 2019, p. 79). Such an "evolving structure" is an anticipatory mode essential in combating accumulative capitalism, which Harvey positions as being adaptable to new conditions. Harvey makes an interesting point in his discussion on common sense as an implement of conformity in that it leads to a way of not seeking direct action. Citing Gramsci (1971), Harvey elaborates that common sense enables a sense of political passivity and a weakened morality. To counter this, "good sense" is insurgent praxis in which to think with relationality; that we are a part of an "ensemble of relations," as per Gramsci. To alter the environment, one changes oneself to affect such an ensemble of relations. Harvey then connects Gramsci's thoughts on Lefebvre's (1991) notions of space which provide a possibility of transformation. Lefebvre's work situates the way we navigate through everyday life through a critical lens of relations and power structures. Thus, for Harvey, such materials from everyday life—be it belief systems, media products, consumption—have "meaning that derive from commodification and its associated fetishism's" (Harvey, 2019, p. 114). For political action to be effective, it is imperative that the daily life issues in the web of life are addressed.

David Harvey invokes Marx and Engels (1975): "in transforming our environment we necessarily transform ourselves" (Harvey, 2019, p. 88). Environment may mean ecological surroundings, but it can be situated in spaces, perhaps to expand or to reclaim what was dispossessed. Transformation here may be an operation of changing. It may be as drastic as warfare and invasion, or it could be transformation via generative and creative arts.

Theatrically, Katara as the Painted Lady confronting the Fire Nation soldiers involved creativity, art production, and being responsive to materials present in the immediate surroundings. She was acting as the Painted Lady and employed her friends the Aang Gang, who are from oppressed ethnoclassed bodies (Aang is from the Airbending tribe wiped out by the Fire Nation, and Katara and her brother Sokka are from the Southern Water Tribe) and marked with disability (Toph), to use their power and skill to impart a menacing warning to the Fire Nation soldiers. Toph the Earthbender moves a boulder to generate a foreboding stomping sound. Aang the Avatar uses his air-bending ability to create a veil of fog snaking across the lake enveloping the fishing village. The sky Bison Appa provides guttural growls behind the scene. And to add to the eeriness, Sokka plays a mournful tune with his flute. The thick fog parts to show Katara standing at the surface of the lake, who then proceeds to attack and defeat the Fire Nation soldiers. This is a demonstration of how creative practice, collective action, youth culture, solidarity with indigenous issues can be a ballast for political engagement. This dispute results in the bracketing of the network of operations to confront the inequality and abuse brought about by the deeply embedded capital accumulation enacted by the imperial Fire Nation which has resulted in the dispossession of the fishing village. A confrontation with dispossession in this episode may have involved brute force between Katara and the Fire nation, but it is necessary for her to initially inculcate the faith system which is part of the "web of life" as David Harvey (2017) writes of the power of the quotidian and the creative.

Creative work can not only expose and discuss such inequalities, but they can ameliorate the unevenness and inequalities in a manner that is shared and involves non-traditional political engagement. *The Painted Lady* episode demonstrates how to practice insurgency when engaging in the quotidian. Belief systems clash with industrialist-militaristic science that extracts resources, displaces Indigenous people and endangers their community. Childs (2019) writes of the communities in Papua New Guinea that are aware of the commercial deep-sea mining (DSM) occurring on their territory and its ramifications to the environment and to their culture. To counter the might of industry and the state bureaucracy which backs it, the communities engaged in the arts as “other forms of political contestation” (Childs, 2019, p. 118).

Enunciation

The fact that the fishing village in this episode has been ignored and just allowed to be laid to waste by the Fire Nation is a problem of many marginalized peoples regarding their enunciation or lack thereof to stave off the dominant coloniality. Katara carves an insistence of visibility wherein she anticipates a rallying to a cause situating the indigenous people’s possible emergence and maintenance of their identity. This enunciation is discussed in Laura R. Graham’s *Image and Instrumentality in a Xavante Politics of Existential Recognition: the Public Outreach Work of Etenhiritipa Pimental Barbosa*. This asserts the “real world” connection of the Painted Lady episode in its capacity to reflect Indigenous people’s concerns and lives amidst the global march of coloniality-inflected modernity. Graham writes of the attendant issues of one of Brazil’s Indigenous tribes the Xavante, describing how they are perceived and recognized by the non-Xavante. The “instrumentality” operationalized here is the cultural show staged by the Xavante to be consumed by outsiders (outside the community and the nation of Brazil). Though Graham opines that these cultural shows may be kitschy and not really emblematic of the Xavante’s concerns (such as Brazil’s hydro-engineering project directly impacting the community), this does not mean that there is nothing to politically assert by the Xavante’s cultural show. It is the position of the “image” which the Xavante deploys and demonstrates their agency. The young male leaders see this as a means of managing perception. For the elder leaders, the image is hinged upon recognition that the Xavante exist. In this case, the use of the image takes a vertical path (the lateral movement within the community) as well as a horizontal path (beyond the Xavante community). Katara’s operation of delving into the cultural show which demands to be seen is similar to that of the Xavante.

This “image instrumentality” is seen in *The Painted Lady* episode. After the first night, when many of the villagers were healed and fed, the fishing folk were all fired up and excitedly talking about the Painted Lady. A storekeeper tells Katara and her companions about their cherished river spirit, displaying a small statue of the Painted Lady that is lovingly and reverentially wiped clean. Later, after the appearance of the Painted Lady (Katara in disguise), the villagers want to install a massive statue at the center of their complex. Hence, if the Xavante have their cultural performance, this shift from a tiny statue hidden from view to a monument in the middle of the village is what Graham refers to as a means of “...placing themselves in a public sphere of their own terms ...” (Graham, 2005, p.637). At the start of the episode, the villagers are seen wandering through the dilapidated village. Once Katara has enacted her insurgent praxis by embodying the Painted Lady, this eventually enables a relinking or a return of the revered river spirit as the crux of village life itself.

As mentioned above, after having defeated the Fire Nation soldiers and seeing them flee from the fishing village, it is revealed that Katara was pretending to be the Painted Lady. This initially angers the villagers until it is pointed out that it was Katara as the Painted Lady who caused the fall of the Fire Nation in the area. The ruse had given the villagers a chance to “reclaim” the sacred river and restore its health. Katara apologizes for pretending to be the Painted Lady, but then states that the villagers do not actually need the Painted Lady. Katara said “It does not matter if the Painted Lady is real or not, because your problems are real; and this river is real. You can’t wait around to help you. You have to help yourself (*The Painted Lady*, 00:21:34).” She says that it is up to them to fix their situation by cleaning up the river. Katara is not belittling the Painted Lady but is

speaking from her own experience as a victim of the Fire Nation's violence. Though they are cartographically and culturally different, Katarā's own village and the fishing village have a shared experience involving the Fire Nation.

Historically Informed Violence

Katarā's many painful memories and violent encounters with the Fire Nation sustains her cache of emotions which informs her particular anticipations. Violence and extraction are encounters that have been implicated in the daily existence of Indigenous communities. This historical and systemic type of violence is how the communities in Papua New Guinea anticipate the severe manner of depletion and diminution brought about by the multinational corporations in collaboration with state forces. In Childs' (2019) research on how Indigenous communities of Papua New Guinea dealt with a multinational company engaged in DSM, their participation and the malleability associated with working with a direct environment to source materials are crucial in registering their wariness. It is the history of many of these Indigenous communities that have been displaced and dispossessed that inform their distrust over the government's partnership with commercial mining. The proponents of DSM argue with science and reason that such an activity occurring at the Bismarck Sea of Papua New Guinea, for example, is too far from the community's immediate environment and too deep to have any impact on the communities. The communities counter this with their belief system that all are interconnected. Perhaps this is where Bullard's (2019) "environmental racism" offers a crucial operation on how resources are viewed by those with dominant powers. Bullard offers a reason for the emergence of environmental racism via the development of the United States of America:

Western culture perceives nature as something to be exploited and dominated... Communities are viewed in the same context. When certain lands are seen as exploitable, the people that happen to be living there are viewed as expendable. Hence the (White supremacist American) genocide of Native people and the exploitation of slaves. At the same time, pollution is seen as just a byproduct of moving to the highest level of the economy. Smoke, air pollution, water pollution... that is the smell of progress (Bullard, 2019, p. 239).

The DSM proponents argue that the depth of the source is distant from the location, ergo physically distant relative to the position of the natives, and thus should be grounds for extraction. This complicates what Bullard mentions as "that happen to be living there" as beyond cartographic pinpointing but in the native cosmogony. *Where* is the native? Is it where they live physically or should their manner of organizing the world be taken into consideration? Childs asks a vital question "whose knowledge counts in contesting it as a site of resource extraction?" (2019, p. 118). Such a confrontation of epistemic violence is demonstrated in how Childs compares two images, the first being a scientific illustration rendered by the DSM company which highlights the levels of depths of the sea. Each layer rendered in a different color seems to suggest a demarcation of space. Whereas the second image, the drawing rendered by participants from the communities shows the deep sea as seamless space for sea creatures as well as their mythological beings, some of whom they believe directly affect them. The scientific illustration renders the depths as empty whereas the indigenous people insist it is occupied by spirits that are connected to them. Childs posits that their "relational cosmology (Childs, 2020, p.122)" impacts their political worldview. In the Painted Lady, the sculpture and theatrical works are the villagers' means of intervention, both of which are participatory. Childs notes that these communities "don't creatively articulate their cosmopolitics without intimate understanding of their historic dispossession in the name of growth and institutions that they 'perform against' (Childs, 2020, p. 127). Such a worldview is not naive for the communities that have had experience with extractive capitalism. Some of their members work for these companies, and this has further informed their political worldview. Such exposure and engagement

have placed these communities into a heightened anticipation of ecological destruction which will put their people under duress, with a risk of displacement, and even of death.

In an uneven geography of development, indigenous communities are seen as distant from modernity. This marked difference sadly provides a justification for their violent dispersal or a leeway for their dispossession. However, if one were to work with the web of life or the Indigenous quotidian, there are possibilities of pushback via articulations of movements informed by indignation and the anticipation of solidarity.

Solidarity via Pop Culture

This paper also argues for the pedagogic possibilities of popular culture in terms of informing and forming resistance. The expansive reach of popular culture elucidates a crucial possibility of shared interests which can be transposed to local concerns. This positions that the anticipation of transnational solidarity among people from different sectors can be implemented. Popular cultural artifacts such as cartoons, films, Warholian portraiture, or anticipatory projections for solidarity which

does not assume that our struggles are the same struggles, or that our pain is the same pain, or that hope is for the same future. Solidarity involves commitment, and work, as well as the recognition that even if we do not have the same feelings, or the theme lives, or the same bodies, we do live on common ground (Ahmed, 2015, loc. 4358 of 6419).

The arts are a vital channel to enact such engagements and are also a fount of inspiration for protest action. Popular culture has a wide grip given Hollywood's massive machinery. Hollywood as an industry is within dominant capitalist imperialist ideology" (Loshitzky, 2012, p. 13). Yet, there are still individual opportunities for inspiring resistance. James Cameron's *Avatar* (not related to the abovementioned Nickelodeon cartoon) has inspired "bottom-up resistance for the Palestinians to protest against Israeli land-grabbing (Loshitzky, 2012, p. 153)." Popular culture allows youth culture to utilize media products that seem to be outside of their culture, yet still vital and accessible enough to integrate it to their reinvigorated protest actions. For the youth, popular culture becomes a means for the collaborative and the creative. It links youth culture's possibility of "textual poaching", and performance vis a vis collective art that can refashion direct action for those who have met with authoritarian silencing (Diaz Pino, 2019 as cited in Jenkins (2012). The connective point of all these protest actions, be it real or fiction, is the political salience of emotion; "we need to consider how emotions operate to make and shape bodies as forms of action, which also involve orientations towards others" (Ahmed, 2015, loc 134 of 6419). To navigate the limited space accorded by the dominant power to those who have less, or who are diminished, or left behind have to amass and direct their emotion as productive, creative, and generative as counter-utterance.

In Tara Daly's *Claudia Coca's Chola Power: Pop Art as Decolonial Critique*, the Peruvian contemporary artist Claudia Coca is discussed as a means of bridging seemingly disparate (i.e. cartographically and culturally distant) elements to demonstrate and criticize the foment brought about by globalization's colonial matrix of power to trivialize people in a fraught categorization. Coca embeds the figure of the "Chola" in her portraits (some of which are self-portraits) that are informed by Western Pop Art and by the European Renaissance. Chola is the label ascribed to Indigenous people, in Peru's case, the Andean identity, which does not fit into the idealized notion of beauty and modernity insisted on by ethnocentrism. In an interview, the artist posited, "The cholo is the other, that's a way of putting ourselves down. That chip is so ingrained that we're afraid to recognize ourselves as Andean" (Coca, 2010; Daly, 2019, p. 422).

Coca utilizes "oppositional aesthetics" to confront the violent hierarchy of ethnoclass definition of beauty wherein mainstream culture brands the Chola as inadequate, indecent, and inelegant. Identifying herself as Chola, her work is a means of "reclaiming the term for oneself and in solidarity with other 'cholos' [which] tells an altogether different story: one about self-empowerment, self-actualization, and social critique"

(Daly, 2019, p. 429). Coca's solidarity with other cholos is enacted by Katara deciding to help the fishing village via the lens of their shared marginality. Katara shares a border (distinct from Fire Nation modernity) and parallel positionality with the villagers in a similar way to how Coca fights for other cholos in her oppositional aesthetic to critique the racism and exploitation in Peru's prevailing conditions. This also demonstrates that *The Painted Lady*, though an animated fictional cartoon, still holds a solution that can be applied and related to the real-world violence against marginalized communities. Decoloniality means having the ability to course through such shared borders.

Katara is "...border dwelling, thinking, doing is [which informs her] ...decolonial direction ..."(Mingolo 2018:108). Besides, the entire point of the *Avatar: The Last Airbender* is decoloniality itself, to take out the Fire Nation's supremacy over others, over them. This is solidarity that brings the group together in their quest. This is the solidarity which Katara felt with the fishing village. Instead of portraying herself as the savior of the fishing village, Katara uses the belief system of the fishing village to help the village. Ultimately, the ones who have actually saved the fishing village are the villagers themselves working in tandem with the group who are familiar with their oppression. This is solidarity.

It must be noted that Katara and her friends are young people who have effectively routed the Fire Nation soldiers. The inflections of youth cultures are occasionally informed by pop culture. Ergo, she and her friends engage in recognizable tropes as part of their rules against the fire nation. This route is very much informed by anticipation in the same manner as was done by Chilean students to make their protest less confrontational and agitated by invoking a cartoon. Working with other groups, the students utilized a popular cartoon to embark on a creative protest action that will spark recognition and solidarity for their cause. Youth-led action is central to Diaz Pino's (2019) article on Chilean students protesting against neoliberal policies that have cut state support from education leading to increased student debts in 2011. Utilizing the anime (Japanese animation) *Dragon Ball Z* situated collective action based on the "long held quotidian impact of anime in many regional mediascapes—Latin America included (Diaz Pino, 2019, p. 205)." Not only is this protest media-informed, it is a multimedia performance. A video clip of the lead character, named Goku, seeking help from others to lend him their *qi* or energy so he can harness it to defeat the enemy has been repurposed by the Chilean protesters. The protest took place in the major plaza in the capital where, in the clip, the crowd is addressed directly and requested to focus their energy to deflect the enemy. In the anime, this focus energy becomes a glowing ball of light, which was then refashioned by the Chilean protesters into their own version of collective energy which appears as a gigantic ball made of plastic secured over an internal frame. This giant ball crowd surfs from one end to the other then to the middle. As the ball moves, the protesters perform a transfer of their energy to make the ball "grow" as a political communication of their collaborative act to show their resistance and determination to defeat evil, in this case the neoliberal clutch on education. Diaz Pino also aligned this aversion for neoliberalism with the seeming ease of adopting the anime, particularly *Dragon Ball Z*, into Chilean media consumption. Anime is not seen as a neo-colonial implement from U.S. media. Diaz Pino writes of this textual poaching to resituate *Dragon Ball Z* "to become overt text, connecting it to specific aims of the protest itself" (Diaz Pino, 2019, p. 211).

This textual poaching is seen by Loshitzky (2012) as how some protesters have appropriated James Cameron's 2009 film *Avatar* to protest against land grabbing and its attendant ecological and cultural destruction. The film depicts neo-colonial capitalist research on possible resource extraction in outer space. This science fiction film shows an edenic planet named Pandora with lush foliage marking it as a possible site for resource extraction for humans, specifically U.S. capitalist accumulation. A scientific team is led by military personnel which depicts the problematic connection between scientific rationality, research, violence, and colonial expansion. The planet is noxious to humans, so to explore it and to infiltrate the indigenous Na'vi population, the scientific team needs a mechanism to transport human consciousness temporarily to an

engineered Na'vi vessel — an Avatar. A human in a Na'vi body infiltrates the tribe, which causes trouble for the human interlocutors. The said human falls in love with a Na'vi woman and with Na'vi culture and thereby becomes their protector. As a consequence, the humans stage an attack at the Na'vi “soul tree” which is the center of Na'vi belief. The humans are eventually defeated by the Na'vi, despite their relatively “primitive” weapons. The incursion of a heavily armored militarized people invading paradise and destroying cultural artifacts important to the indigenous people resonate with many peoples, particularly the Palestinian people. The planet Pandora, as an Eden is aligned with how many Palestinians viewed their land before the Zionist land grab. This has been reflected in Palestinian art and literature. Loshitzky (2012) writes that *Avatar* has captured the Palestinian imagination since the movie resonates with their resistance literature as well as actual images of their own conflict being reflected on screen. Loshitzky (2012) shows some protesters dressed in costume looking like the Na'vi to show up in contested sites to confront the settlers. The most provocative part of the article is the comparison of the armored vehicle in the film demolishing the spirit tree with that of an Israeli settler's bulldozer in a landscape of felled olive trees, trees which are vital to Palestinian cultural identity and economy. Such images of destruction and foment connect “to local resistances of the dispossessed” (Loshitzky, 2012, p. 162). Despite it being a Hollywood blockbuster, and one which has been critiqued for perpetuating a white savior complex in some readings, protesters resituate it to their daily web of life. The images of the Na'vi, who are at risk of being displaced and having their resources dispossessed is read as a parallel to the dispossession of Palestinians. Loshitzky shows how popular culture emanating from the Hollywood behemoth, which is often criticized for being an implementation of U.S. American imperialism can be appropriated to enable marginalized people to see themselves and show how “cultures can resist their erasure” (Loshitzky, 2012, p. 162).

These erasures are testament to Harvey's (2019) uneven geographical development being brought about by capitalist accumulation. The above-mentioned examples are what Sara Ahmed (2015) writes about with regards to the ways emotions can confront one body due to complications via encounters and generate an impression to generate a series of affects in which it enables courses of actions. Emotions, for Ahmed (2015), are not an operation of externalization (inside-out), nor internalization (outside-in). Rather, emotions entail movement, contact, and the accumulation of an effective value. Emotion as accumulation thus situates it and operates across time which can be historicized. Emotion is also spatial in that it is engaged through contact zones (i.e. Military takeover, suspension of Democratic institutions, land-grabbing, crass resource exploitation, weakened representation in the name of profit and marketability) which have the capacity to reshape the surface (i.e. landscape) and the bodies (i.e. displacement of Indigenous groups). “Feminist and queer scholars have shown us that emotions ‘matter’ for politics; emotions show us how power shapes the very surface of bodies as well as worlds. So in a way we do ‘feel our way’” (Ahmed, 2015, loc 321 of 6419). Ahmed (2015) aligns emotions as being no less than rationality which demands distance, but as part of our relational network that needs to be investigated for its possibilities to take a look at power structures and work towards social justice. To invoke emotions as part of a network means it cannot be and should not be segmentized and diminished as the currency of emotions encompasses circulation and contact that are not just from impressions left by others but are crucial in informing, forming, and reforming societal norms. This demonstrates the performance of emotions which are situated in daily lived experiences and are embedded in what Harvey calls the “web of life.” Precisely because of this embeddedness and circulation, emotions are political or can be marshaled for political acts, as they are informed by the histories of such contact zones. Emotions are not merely reacting to the past, but are modes of anticipation: “emotions also open up futures, in the ways they involve different orientations to others” (Ahmed, 2015, loc 4660 of 6419).

In *The Painted Lady* episode, Katara acts upon the suggestion that helping out the fishing village by providing food and medicine is not enough; that she must get to the source of the problem. To recognize

the Fire Nation's capitalist accumulation via its military industrial complex as the reason for a protracted environmental degradation endangering the Indigenous communities is an act of anticipation. The protest actions presented here are indicated in anticipation: that the issues must be exposed and then opposed for, if not confronted, it will lead to worse conditions to those who are marginalized and to those who are endangered by such issues. Be it Chilean students fighting against scaled back support for education, or the loss of land, life, and destruction of culture for Palestinians, anticipation is an irruption to the violence of uneven geographical development. With Indigenous communities' historical engagement with multinational resource extraction and with Hollywood's record of whitewashing and the diminishing of minorities, protests are an anticipatory act to stave off a worsening condition. Anticipation is how marginalized identities resort to a pop cultural gesture to counter their diminution. In sum, anticipation animates direct action in a blighted landscape made uneven by forces that seek supremacy of space and bodies and unjustly direct the web of life according to their preferred image.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, S. (2015). *The cultural politics of emotion*. (2 edition). Routledge.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1984). *Rabelais and his world*. Indiana University Press.
- Bullard, R. (2019). Addressing environmental racism. *Journal of International Affairs*, 73(1), 237-242.
- Childs, J. (2020). Performing 'blue degrowth': Critiquing seabed mining in Papua New Guinea through creative practice. *Sustainability Science*, 15, 117-129.
- Diaz Pino, C. (2019). Weaponizing collective energy: Dragon Ball Z in the anti-neoliberal Chilean protest movement. *Popular Communication*, 17(3), 202-218.
- Hamilton, J. (Writer), & Spaulding, E. (Director). (2007, September 21). The painted lady. (Season 3, Episode 3) [TV series episode] In DiMartino, M. D. & Konietzco, Avatar: The last Airbender, book three: Fire.
- Daly, T. (2019). Claudia Coca's chola powerpop art as decolonial critique. *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism*, 18(2), 414-444. <https://doi.org/10.1215/15366936-7775773>
- Huggan, G., & Tiffin, H. (2015). *Postcolonial ecocriticism: Literature, animals, environment*. Routledge.
- Graham, L. R. (2005). Image and instrumentality in a Xavante politics of existential recognition: The public outreach work of Eténhiritipa Pimentel Barbosa. *American ethnologist*, 32(4), 622-641. <https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.2005.32.4.622>
- Harvey, D. (2006). Notes towards a theory of uneven geographical development. In D. Harvey. (Eds.), *Spaces of global capitalism: Towards a theory of uneven geographical development*, (pp.69-116). Verso.
- Loshitzky, Y. (2012). Popular cinema as popular resistance: Avatar in the Palestinian (imagi) nation. *Third Text*, 26(2), 151-163. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2012.663971>
- Mignolo, W. D., & Walsh, C. E. (2018). *On decoloniality: Concepts, analytics, praxis*. Duke University Press.
- Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of power and Eurocentrism in Latin America. *International sociology*, 15(2), 215-232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580900015002005>

AUTHOR BIO

Jose Santos P. Ardivilla is a political cartoonist, printmaker, and writer from the Philippines. He is pursuing a PhD in Fine Arts at Texas Tech as a Fulbright-Philippine Commission on Higher Education scholar. You may reach him at ardivilla.com

SUGGESTED REFERENCE CITATION

APA

Ardivilla, J. S. P. (2024) "Ways of decoloniality by *The Painted Lady: Avatar: The Last Airbender's* Katara demonstrates how to revive a community in ecological distress brought by the colonial expansion of the Fire Nation." *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*. 11(2) <http://journaldialogue.org/v11-issue-2/ways-of-decoloniality-by-the-painted-lady/>

MLA

Ardivilla, Jose Santos P. "Ways of Decoloniality by the Painted Lady: Avatar: The Last Airbender's Katara Demonstrates How to Revive a Community in Ecological Distress Brought by the Colonial Expansion of the Fire Nation." *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*. 2024, vol. 11, no. 2. <http://journaldialogue.org/v11-issue-2/ways-of-decoloniality-by-the-painted-lady/>



All papers in *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy* are published under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-Share-Alike License. For details please go to: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/us/>.

Three Characters and Me(me): Positioning Popular Culture to Unpack Emerging Teacher Identity

Gillian E. Mertens

SUNY Cortland

Cortland, NY, USA

gillian.mertens@cortland.edu

Henry “Cody” Miller

SUNY Brockport

Brockport, NY, USA

hmilller@brockport.edu

ABSTRACT

In this article we narrate an instructional practice we implemented in two different teacher education courses that facilitated conversations about teacher identity through the use of fictional characters who were educators. This practice served two purposes in our course work: firstly, this activity presents students with an opportunity to demonstrate their media interests and career goals; secondly, this activity provides a quick, baseline assessment of how aspiring teachers view their profession and future practice. We detail student responses to this activity and consider how their choices of fictional educators fit into broader patterns we see in popular culture, specifically depictions of teachers within film and television. While our paper specifically centers teachers, there is significant possibility for this activity to be used in any professional-identity training program (e.g., nursing and medicine, social work and counseling, and law). We close the paper with additional questions for future lines of scholarly inquiry into teacher identity and media representation.

Keywords: teacher identity, memes, television shows, practice-based identity, identity models

A slew of television shows in recent years have turned their attention to the lives of educators: Mr. Ajayi in Netflix's *Heartstoppers*, Mr. Wilson in Disney+'s *Ms. Marvel* series, and Ms. MacElroy in CBS' *Young Sheldon*, among others. Yet, Quinta Brunson's *Abbott Elementary* stands out by being the one show whose entire main cast comprises public school educators. Indeed, *Abbott Elementary* has been lauded and has garnered an expansive viewership; one critic argued that the show represents a "new model for network-sitcom success" (Adalian, 2022), while one political activist praised the fictional school for fulfilling the "promise of schools without cops" (Ettah, 2022). As former English teachers and current teacher educators, we're thrilled to see an emerging pop culture behemoth illustrate the challenges and beauties of public education in a nuanced, thoughtful manner. Equally exciting is the show's cast, which balances new teachers learning the sweet spot between idealism and pragmatism alongside veteran teachers who are equally poised and self-reflective. Each week millions of viewers in the United States see these teachers on screen enact pedagogies of care, provide compassionate collegiality, and offer critical critiques of policies that create the inequalities plaguing too many public schools. The popularity of the show combined with our roles preparing future teachers made us wonder: What other fictional educators in popular culture are aspiring teachers looking to as models? And what might those fictional educators reveal about how future teachers plan to teach their own students?

In this paper we detail how we created an assignment that prompted students to reflect on those very questions, and on their own emergent identities as future educators. In doing so, we offer other professional educators a classroom activity that services two purposes: first, this activity presents students with an opportunity to demonstrate their media interests and career goals; second, the activity also provides a quick baseline assessment of how aspiring teachers view their profession and future practice. This work is informed by the conceptualization of identities-in-practice (e.g., Wenger-Traynor, 2015), or how identities are enacted within the context of a professional activity. It is an activity that illuminates the preconceived perspectives of a professional identity that students bring to their pre-professional training. While this activity specifically centers on teachers, there is significant possibility for it to be used in any professional-identity training program (e.g., nursing and medicine, social work and counseling, and law).

The curricular decisions we outline in this article have been influenced by scholars of teacher representation on screens, both big and small. Indeed, significant research has attended to teacher representations on television and film, including pedagogical implications of such representations in the past three decades (Alsup, 2019; Beyersbach, 2005; Burbach & Figgins, 1993; Dahlgren, 2017; Dalton, 2013, 2017; Dalton & Linder, 2008; Dalton & Linder, 2017; Marcus & Stoddard, 2007; McLaren & Leonardo, 1998; Raimo et al., 2002; Trier, 2001; Weber & Mitchell, 1995). For instance, Shoffner (2016) found three archetypes for teachers spanning several eras in popular media: The savior who acts like a messiah for students and their families; the scapegoat who is underpaid and blamed for society's ills by external forces; and the schoolmarm who shows no interest in students' lives, opinions, and interests. We wondered how this triumvirate of fictional pedagogues would be reflected in our students' analysis of self-selected fictional teachers. Additionally, we wondered how we could prompt semester-long discussions about teaching and teacher identities with our students using an analysis of fictional teachers as our starting point. We detail that journey in the following sections after establishing who we are and how popular culture has informed our own teaching practices.

WHO WE ARE

We are both white, cisgender queer educators from the south who are currently located in the northeast. Prior to our roles in academia, we both taught public secondary English language arts in the American south. Our time teaching English, like our current work in teacher education, was heavily influenced by scholars who sought to bridge a critical analysis of popular culture with a secondary English language arts curriculum

(Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005; Morrell, 2002, 2014). As scholars and teachers, we are interested in how teacher identity is developed, revised, and nurtured throughout educators' trajectories.

TEACHER IDENTITY

Teacher identity is a complex and nebulous construct. As teachers are specifically situated within the socially-constructed practice of teaching, their identities are highly contextualized within the act of teaching and are subject to evolution, narrativization, and change. Multiple definitions of teacher identity contain the same core components: recognition of identity's dynamic nature, the impact of socio-cultural and political context on teacher identity, and a focus on identity development through narrative (Alsup, 2006; Alsup, 2019; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Understanding teacher identity involves considering identity as situated within a practice— in this case, teaching— with the understanding that culture, the profession, and the individual all evolve, with teacher identity often evolving in turn.

However, for those not contextualized within the current world of teaching, popular narratives about teachers shape the public's perception of teacher identity. For students training to be teachers— preservice teachers— the depiction of teacher identity in popular media bears significant implications for how these students conceptualize their future profession. Preservice teachers come to the teaching profession having experienced school from the perspective of a student, complete with identity models, narratives, and ideologies around school. During her exploration of the identity discourses of millennial teachers, Alsup (2019) identified several cultural narratives around teaching replicated in media:

Media images of teachers have likewise vacillated between the binary poles symbolized either by the male schoolmaster and the female mother or the previously mentioned slacker versus the sacrificial martyr. Movies like *Stand and Deliver* and *American History X* depict the teacher as disciplinarian and purveyor of tough love against incredible odds; films like *Dead Poets Society* and *Freedom Writers* envision the teacher as heroic nurturer, often at odds with the more discipline-minded administration. When teachers are characters... they are often played as dimwitted, old-fashioned, unreasonable, ridiculous, and, at the very least, irrelevant... Images of teachers are ubiquitous in our society, and for the most part these images exist at binary poles, and often appear as distinct choices for the preservice teacher. (p. 38)

We, the authors, are acutely aware of the narratives about teaching that our preservice teachers— like us before them— bring to the classroom. These narratives are often racialized, gendered, and classed; Alsup (2019) describes the common classroom model of a school teacher as “overwhelmingly white, young, female, middle-class, poorly-paid, mother figures” (p. 37). As teacher educators, we are committed to challenging these hegemonic narratives about the teaching profession. However, challenging these perspectives necessitates understanding what emergent conceptions these students have about teacher identity.

TEACHER IDENTITY AND MEDIA ASSIGNMENT

The Assignment

We began brainstorming this assignment the summer before the fall semester. As avid lovers of pop culture, we wanted to bridge the gap between the screen and the classroom. We were also seeking an engaging way to invite students to reflect on their own understanding of how they viewed teachers in popular media. Our hope was that fictional teachers could serve as a guide to the types of pedagogies we hope our students will enact as classroom teachers. In fact, Boche (2016) contends that fictional teachers can support preservice teachers in developing quality teaching practices such as “relationships, care engagement, democracy and

teaching the whole child” (p. 87). Inspired by the popular “Describe yourself in three fictional characters” meme (Brad, 2019) that populated social media feeds almost a decade ago, we began to tweak the structure of the meme to align with our course goals. We introduced and assigned the assignment in the first week of the fall semester. Image 1 features the example we provided for our students as well as its origin story.

Image 1:

Teacher Identity and Media Assignment Handout

“My Teacher Identity” in 3 Characters from Film/TV Media

Some time ago, a meme challenge circulated that asked participants to describe themselves using three characters from media. A couple of examples are provided below!



As a way for us to get to know each other, let’s remix this assignment into something related to teaching.

I’d love for you to describe the teacher you are or hope to become using 2-3 fictional characters from media. These characters might be classroom teachers themselves, or they might be educators in a non-traditional fashion!

We modeled the assignment and its purpose to our students in class. Modeling the assignment using examples from our own lives served dual purposes. First, it provided students with a guide on how they could write and analyze their own choices. This point was especially important since some students were unfamiliar with writing about popular culture in the academic setting of a college classroom. Additionally, we used our model to share our own beliefs in pedagogy, our own journeys as educators, and our relationship to power and identity and how these shape the contours of K-12 schooling. For instance, Cody in the example provided below used the character of Marco from the popular and long-running Canadian television show *Degrassi: The Next Generation* to share his experiences as an out queer high school teacher. We provide pictures of our examples we shared with students in Images 2 and 3 below.

Image 2:

Gillian's Teacher Identity and Media Example



Author 1



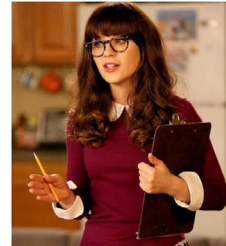
Ms. Frizzle (now Dr. Frizzle!)
The Magic School Bus

*"Take chances! Make mistakes!
Get messy!"*



Mary Poppins
Mary Poppins

*"In every job that must be
done, there is an element of
fun. You find the fun, and snap,
the job's a game!"*



Jessica Day
New Girl

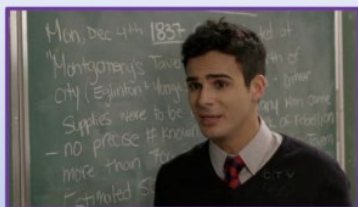
*"I have touched glitter in the
last 24 hours! And that doesn't
mean I'm not smart and tough
and strong."*

Gillian contextualized her exemplar assignment with the following text:

As a teacher, I believe in authenticity, hands-on learning, and a version of organized chaos. All three of my teachers have a version of organized chaos in the way they teach, from outlandish field trips to magical encounters to interpersonal shenanigans. But all three teachers are unabashedly passionate—and flexible!—about their teaching. There are aspects of learning that are important but mundane, and one of my passions is helping students see their own lives in a new way. Maybe that's a deep dive into an idea, like Ms. Frizzle would do, or maybe it's gamifying learning and developing systems for organization like Mary Poppins. But both Ms. Frizzle and Mary Poppins are almost mythological figures! They're not exactly human to the kids they work with. Jessica Day, on the other hand, is dedicated to her students *and* deeply human at the same time. Her passion and foibles remind me that, like me, teachers are just people trying to figure it all out.

Image 3:

Cody's Teacher Identity and Media Example



Marco from *Degrassi: The Next Generation*



Janine and Jacob from *Abbott Elementary*



Peter Parker from the *Spider-Man* series

Cody explained his decisions to students with the following writeup:

As a teacher, I believe in building relationships, working to meet students where they are while expanding their abilities, and trying to make positive change in the world through my classroom. All three teacher examples embody these beliefs in one way or another. We only see Marco's time as a student teacher in *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, and it's an experience I related to as a young teacher. Marco wants to be liked by his students and is diligent in forming relationships as a core part of his classroom management. While admirable and good practice, he does not yet pair relationship-building with clear boundaries and guidelines. Watching him learn to implement his beliefs into practice reflected my own experiences (and still does). Lately, I've come to believe that every teacher is a combination of two *Abbott Elementary* characters and mine are Janine and Jacob. The former for her dedication and optimism in the face of mass inequities and the latter for his well-meaning, always growing but sometimes clueless white guy approach to social justice in schools. The pragmatism Janine develops throughout her early teaching career is never soiled by cynicism as she remains steadfast in her belief for a better world for her students. I aspire to balance the realism and hope about K-12 education that Janine embodies in the show. Finally, Peter Park is a caring and kind teacher, who often finds a hard time balancing work and life. Like the other teachers mentioned, he works hard to know his students as people beyond their test scores and abilities in his class. Across all three examples, I see teachers who are working to balance what they believe is right with the structures of the world they live in.

Students were then tasked with completing their own three fictional teachers the following week. We provided an elastic definition of teacher to include professors and other educators who teach outside of traditional educational institutions. This wide definition was important as it allowed students to mine their popular culture habits for inspiration and insight into their own views of teachers and teaching. We also stressed the importance of expanding genres to move beyond realistic fiction. While examples from a popular show like *Boy Meets World* could provide insight, so too could more fantastical series like *X-Men* and *The Magic School Bus*. Students were encouraged to think about teachers based on their pedagogies, relationships with students, and identity markers that they found relevant to their own lives. Students shared their teachers with peers the following week in class, which we detail in more depth in the succeeding section.

NOTES FROM OUR CLASSROOMS

In this section we share insights from our implementation of the assignment as well as patterns we noticed from across both classes. Importantly, we are not positioning this section as an empirical study. Rather, we are providing insights and vignettes into the implementation of this assignment. Our goal is to illustrate how this assignment worked in our classrooms and what types of conversations were prompted due to the work. Ultimately, we believe the excerpts from our classrooms demonstrate the value of using pop culture to unpack aspiring teachers' attitudes and beliefs about pedagogy and their future classrooms.

We are both teacher education faculty within the State University of New York system at two different institutions, and we both are tasked primarily with working with aspiring teachers. All the students in our classes are preservice teachers, which means they are completing a program that will lead to teacher certification in our state. Gillian's students (23) are completing certification to teach elementary students while Cody's students (18) are completing certification to teach secondary English language arts. This split in teacher trajectory means that the focus of our two classes differ. That said, our courses are among the first teacher education courses that students enroll in during their programs, thus explicitly naming and unpacking

ideas of teacher identity is valuable as these students still have malleable and transitional depictions of what their future teacher identity may or may not look like. Our teacher education student body mirrors that of the United States teaching force: overwhelmingly white and cisgender women (Will, 2020). Both classes we implemented this assignment in did have Black and Asian American cisgender students and non-cisgender white students. However, the majority of the class composition echoed what we see in national trends.

Gillian's Classroom Vignette

I (Gillian) introduced this assignment during the first session of “Teaching Elementary School Reading and Language Arts”: a literacy course preparing elementary education majors to teach literacy in the elementary classroom. All students are in their senior year of college, and are preparing to move into their student teaching experience. After opening the class with a discussion about experiences with reading both inside and outside of school, I presented students with my model and the directions. Verbally, I explained my slide to students, and contextualized the activity by expressing the personal belief that “you can learn a lot about your own views on teaching and education by thinking about depictions of teachers in the media.” I encouraged students to think flexibly about teaching by indicating that they could also consider non-traditional instructors, such as coaches or mentors. I shared my example with particular attention to how Miss Frizzle and Mary Poppins worked in tandem— an approach I jokingly characterized as “structured, purposeful chaos.” I used the Jessica Day example to highlight teachers’ identity both in and out of school— as well as to introduce larger social narratives around gender performance, race performance, and perceptions of strength in the classroom. The larger conversation was framed around the notion of practice-based identities: what teachers know, what they do, and who they are (Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

Before the second day of class, students submitted their slides, and during this second class meeting, they shared their teacher identity models in small groups. Upon sharing, they were challenged to identify patterns they noticed within their small groups. During the first round of sharing, I circulated the room and listened to how students conceptualized their choices and how their group mates responded to each selection. Then, as a whole group, we discussed the patterns we noted across student responses. Our discussion focused on teachers as role models for young children, often during their first schooling experiences. The intention of this discussion was that students would begin to recognize stereotypes and assumptions about the teaching profession that impact their positionality as early-career teachers. Many students referenced a culture of care and warmth in their selections; for example, Miss Honey from *Matilda* was referenced repeatedly. Students often mentioned that they selected models based on the emotional impact these teachers had on their students: for example, Will Schuster from *Glee* was referenced as a dedicated leader, and teachers like Mr. Feeny from *Boy Meets World* and Ms. Howard from *Abbott Elementary* were referenced as wise, patient role models. During the discussion, I jotted down some notes on large patterns to share with Cody.

Cody's Classroom Vignette

I (Cody) presented this assignment during the first week of my English language arts methods course entitled, “Teaching Middle School English Inclusively.” All students were enrolled in a program that prepared them to teach English language arts Grades 6-12. The course was a mix of undergraduate (13) and graduate (5) students seeking initial certification in New York state. Some of the 18 students knew each other from prior classes, but many did not. I introduced the assignment by discussing the importance of seeing popular culture and multimedia as important textures in a well-rounded, engaging and relevant English curriculum for secondary students. I also briefly shared how I incorporated popular culture into my high school classroom before explaining that a major theme throughout the semester would be broadening our definition of “text” to include material beyond print texts, which echoes a cultural studies approach to secondary English language arts (Webb, 2014). In that sense, I modeled what I was advocating for: teaching popular culture in the contexts

of English language arts. Then, I shared my examples, specifically focusing on the character Marco from the popular Canadian television show *Degrassi: The Next Generation*. Marco was the focus of my piece because I wanted to stress the importance of having openly queer educators for LGBTQ students. Again, the goal was to plant another seed that would be watered throughout the semester: creating affirming spaces for students who have historically been maligned and marginalized within schools and in their classrooms.

The students submitted their own versions of the assignment before the following class, in which we shared our writings in small groups within the class. I posed the following guiding questions for discussions after the students had shared their characters: What trends do you notice across your educators? What identities seem most prominent? What characteristics are shared across different students' selections? These questions prompted a whole class discussion in which students noted the frequent appearance of zeitgeist-dominating popular cultural artifacts like the Harry Potter series and *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. The mention of the Harry Potter series subsequently prompted a brief conversation about the author's recorded transphobia, and this allowed us to consider how we engage with texts whose authors we find abhorrent. Many students also pointed out how their peers expanded the definition of "educator" across institutions and beyond traditional K-12 schools. For instance, students noted a few instances of Mrs. Puff from *SpongeBob SquarePants* as an example of a patient, caring educator who never gave up on the titular character. I took notes of students' points in order to share them the following week with Gillian.

Common Identity Models Across Both Classes

Finding commonalities across our two classes is generative for considering what topics and questions we should engage our students in to further their thinking around teaching and becoming teachers. Importantly, as previously noted, this paper is not an empirical study. Yet, our observations do inform our practice. Several common characters that appeared on our students' submissions are fictional teachers who have been the subject of scholarship, including that of critical interrogation. We fold in critical readings of these popular teachers in our commentary in this section to suggest preconceptions we can unpack with our students throughout the semester. For instance, critical interrogations of whiteness, femininity, and niceness must guide our conversations with future teachers about teaching, considering the demographics of our students (Bissonnette, 2016; Daniels, 2021; Pascoe, 2023). In a sense, this assignment acted as a type of pre-assessment to provide valuable information into the construction of future conversations and our courses' curricula.

Some common responses were expected. For instance, John Keating from *Dead Poets Society* was a popular response in our classes, which isn't too surprising given that scholars have identified Robin Williams' character as the first time a fictional teacher on screen has "engendered such strong feelings of professional pride and admiration" (Burbach & Figgins, 1993, p. 65). There is a level of romanticizing English teaching that is embodied in Williams' character: from standing on desks and destroying textbooks to challenging ideas of tradition. Yet, more critical scholars have drawn into contrast the limits of Mr. Keating's allegedly radical pedagogy, noting that the poetry-loving pedagogue "falls short of politicizing a collective project toward cultural emancipation" (McLaren & Leonardo, 1998, p. 132). Mr. Keating offers an interesting line of questioning for our students regarding the image of the sagacious teacher whose unplanned lessons inspire but never fully embody a clear political critique of power and institutions of immense privilege. Mr. Keating's bursts of inspirational monologues seem spontaneous, but quality teaching requires planning, reflection, and thoughtfulness (Darling-Hammond, 2012). Mr. Keating is a sage and the classroom is his stage, but the "sage on the stage" model of teaching has fallen out of favor in many schools. Furthermore, Mr. Keating doesn't link the students' predicaments to a broader critique of wealth and whiteness that unequivocally shape the experiences at Welton Academy.

Another frequently-mentioned figure was Miss Honey, particularly as depicted in the 1996 film *Matilda*. Ryan and Grieshaber (2005) describe this depiction as "Caucasian, slim, single, and attractive female

with blonde hair and a sweet voice” (p. 40)-- an interesting corollary to a description of “the average teacher” in Pauline Annin Galvarro’s (1945) doctoral dissertation as “single and serious” (p. 1). Miss Honey is sweet yet unassertive, dedicated to learning yet policed by the tyrannical Miss Trunchbull. Miss Honey was the most commonly referenced teacher model among Gillian’s preservice elementary teachers, and aligns with archetypes Alsop (2019) characterizes as the “sacrificial martyr” and the “female mother” (p. 38); indeed, Miss Honey is shown as gratefully living in poverty, and adopts one of her students by the end of the film. Students reported being inspired by Miss Honey’s care for her students, and the warmth and welcome she brought to her classroom. Miss Honey’s position in popular culture has recently undergone a more radical reading with some queer viewers dubbing her the “original lesbian cottagecore queen” (Jewett, 2021) and a “woman who sparked a [queer] generation’s sexual awakening” (Rennex, 2020). The sapphic reading of Miss Honey marks an interesting departure from compulsory heterosexuality that entraps many young female teacher characters in other media. Miss Honey as lesbian icon suggests a new queer (at least by some fans) educator that can serve as a model for LGBTQ preservice teachers.

Additionally, several students referenced “hero teachers,” often highlighting teachers from narratives of “white saviors”. The white savior media narrative centers the “hero teacher”: a dedicated passionate white teacher who intends to “save” their (often-Black and Latino) students. Films centering teachers in this role include *Freedom Writers*, *Precious*, *Dangerous Minds*, and *The Blind Side*, and often star inspirational teachers who, by nature of their dedication and sacrifice, motivate and rescue suffering students from their oppressive lives (Hughey, 2010). Most damaging about these narratives is their emphasis that *white* savior teachers are best positioned to “rescue” marginalized or oppressed students, thus continuously centering whiteness. While these narratives may appear uplifting on the surface, Hughey (2010) describes white saviorism in film as...

validat[ing] a structurally violent and racist educational and legal system, demoniz[ing] youth and lower socioeconomic cultural patterns associated with people of color, and ultimately sanctify[ing] a sole white teacher as a messianic character of biblical proportions. (p. 479)

This depiction of education as comprised of “saviors” severely neglects the structural impacts of schooling as an institution to enact social harm. These sorts of identity models can stimulate critical conversation about educational inequities and structural solutions.

Several students reported an affinity for experienced, calm, expert teachers. It was surprising how many different depictions of teacher expertise arose in this category, ranging from *Harry Potter’s* Minerva McGonagall to *Boy Meets World’s* Mr. Feeney. A more recent addition to this category includes *Abbott Elementary’s* Barbara Howard, who has been teaching for at least 30 years. These teacher veterans are seasoned, but never cynical or bitter; rather, their wisdom is always generously imparted to the students and early-career teachers they encounter. Mrs. Howard does mark a new phase of representation for veteran teachers as she (unlike Professor McGonagall or Mr. Feeney) is shown facing challenges as a more seasoned educator. For instance, in one episode she has trouble accessing a digital repository of teacher training videos. In another episode, Mrs. Howard must interrogate her own beliefs regarding respectability politics to best support a student. Mrs. Howard thus demonstrates to our students (and ourselves) the importance of constant learning and reflection.

Mrs. Howard is also a Black woman educator. She and two newer teachers — Janine and Gregory—have been praised as illustrating the important work Black teachers do for Black students (Moss, 2022). It’s notable that most, though certainly not all, of our white students did not discuss race in their selection rationale, even when they selected a fictional educator of color. Addressing race and racism in our courses was already a major component of our work, and the writings on these assignments reinforced our goal to challenge color-evasive approaches to education with our students (Goldin & Khasnabis, 2021). This point offers an opportunity to have students discuss how the characters they selected reflect (or not) their own racialized

experiences in schools as students. Explicitly discussing how race and racism shape educational and teacher experiences could be one way to disrupt the white savior thinking that we noted earlier in this section. What students did not write can be as valuable information about their thinking as what they chose to vocalize on this assignment.

OPENING CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT TEACHER IDENTITY

Both authors used this activity, firstly, as an icebreaker: a way to get to know students at the beginning of a new semester and an opportunity to spark conversations. While this activity gave students the chance to think through their responses, it also afforded them the opportunity to consider their developing professional identities through influential media depictions of teaching. Foregrounding identity can provide insight into students' emergent perspectives of the field they're working towards entering, and instructors can build upon these preconceived perspectives during future discussions.

Furthermore, we believe this activity can support students' criticality as they explore depictions of teacher identity through media. For example, the activity can spark conversations regarding stereotypes and cultural discourses present across teacher identity models (Dahlgren, 2017; Weber & Mitchell, 1995). For example, any of the following tropes demonstrated as a pattern - white savior, caring and parental pedagogue, rebel with a heart, selfless martyr - may provide fertile soil for future conversation. These stereotypes are highly present within American media, and as Dahlgren (2017) notes, repeated cultural images influence Americans' meaning-making out of their educational experiences. Bringing these held stereotypes to the forefront of professional education is one step towards creating an intentional curricular space for preservice professionals to explore their own identity construction, and indeed to problematize hegemonic expectations of teacher identity.

Additionally, discussions of media representations of teacher identity can prompt a conversation of existing inequities within the profession: for example, the overrepresentation of white, middle-class women within American education (Alsup, 2019). Stereotypes about teacher identities are pernicious and pervasive, and oftentimes are linked to existing assumptions of teaching as a white, female, and middle-class profession. However, many of our students do not fit the single mold of what teachers' look like, and indeed, they shouldn't— it's critical for young learners to have teachers that reflect the same identity diversity that is present across schools.

Finally, this activity can spark inquiry regarding the pedagogical models and philosophical approaches that students identify in their identity models. For example, are students drawn to pedagogical practices highlighted by media models, such as hands-on learning or whole-group lecturing? Can students notice how these teachers cultivate a sense of community in their classrooms, and contextualize those practices within authentic K-12 classrooms? Comparing models with oppositional pedagogical practices may support students' meaning-making about classroom practices. For example, comparing how Ms. Howard (*Abbott Elementary*) questions her own beliefs to Mr. Feeney's (*Boy Meets World*) less-reflective dispensation of wisdom may help students conceptualize the impact of reflective practices in education.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This activity was planned and implemented in two teacher education courses. However, we believe the outline of the work can be implemented in other professional education programs. For instance, nurse educators could ask incoming nursing students to select fictional nurses and conduct a similar analysis. Other fields like social work, law, and medicine could adapt the activity as an opening assignment to the field. Like teaching, popular media abounds with characters who are nurses, social workers, lawyers, and

doctors. Scholars in the aforementioned fields are also grappling with how popular media depictions of these professions impact the broader public (Flores, 2004; Friedman, 2017; Hallam, 2012; Ravulo, 2018). We believe it is worth considering how students new to their professional field see their own aspirational practices reflected in contemporary media.

As previously stated, we do not position this paper as an empirical study but rather a pedagogical reflection. With that said, further research in teacher education could take up the way in which future teachers envision their teaching through fictional teachers. Future empirical studies may attend to such inquiries as: What ideologies and belief systems do teacher candidates inherit from popular cultural depictions of educators? How do new career teachers enact or evolve the pedagogies they learn from educators on screens? What pedagogies are most commonly praised or critiqued in popular culture? Such questions can provide further insight into the relationship between aspiring teachers and the characters they see teach on the screen, both big and small.

We did notice shifts in how our students talked about their emerging teacher identities throughout the semester. A gap between how our students imagined their future selves through pop culture and their actual future selves began to widen after spending time in actual K-12 classrooms. Some of that gap stemmed from the realities of classrooms compared to their representations on screen. For instance, students noted that enacting student-centered, community-oriented practices is more difficult in a room of 26 students with widely diverging academic and socio-emotional needs. A show like *Abbott Elementary* is beginning to reflect these realities, but many beloved shows and movies depict an artificially cohesive public school classroom.

As teacher educators, we've noticed that our students come to teacher preparation with unrealistic expectations of teacher identities, largely delivered through media: teachers as saviors, teachers as parent figures, teachers as hyper-competent heroes. As these early-career teachers develop an awareness of tropes around teacher identity, they simultaneously go into schools and see teacher identities enacted in ways that expand far beyond what's depicted in media. We hope activities like the one we've outlined in this paper offer a starting point to dialogue about construction of teacher identity in media and practice.

REFERENCES

- Adalian, J. (2022, April 13). How *Abbott Elementary* reinvigorated the network sitcom. *Vulture*. <https://www.vulture.com/article/how-abbott-elementary-reinvigorated-the-network-sitcom.html>.
- Alsop, J. (2006). *Teacher identity discourses: Negotiating personal and professional spaces*. Routledge.
- Alsop, J. (2019). *Millennial teacher identity discourses: Balancing self and other*. Routledge.
- Beauchamp, C., & Thomas, L. (2009). Understanding teacher identity: an overview of issues in the literature and implications for teacher education. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 39(2), 175-189. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057640902902252>
- Beyerbach, B. (2005). Themes in sixty years of teachers in film: Fast times, dangerous minds, stand on me. *Educational Studies*, 37(3), 267-285. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326993es3703_5
- Bissonnette, J. D. (2016). The trouble with niceness: How a preference for pleasantries sabotages culturally responsive teacher preparation. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*, 12(2), 9-32. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1120318>.
- Boche, B. (2016). Teacher Images in Young Adult Literature: Pedagogical Implications for English Preservice Teachers. In M. Shoffner (Ed.), *Exploring Teachers in Fiction and Film: Saviors, Scapegoats and Schoolmarms* (pp.79-89). Routledge.
- Burbach, H., & Figgins, M. (1993). A thematic profile of the images of teachers in film. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 20(2), 65-75. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23475195>

- Brad. (2019). Describe yourself in three fictional characters. *Know Your Meme*. <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/describe-yourself-in-3-fictional-characters>
- Dahlgren, R. L. (2017). *From martyrs to murderers: Images of teachers and teaching in hollywood films*. Sense Publishers.
- Dalton, M. M. (2013). Bad Teacher is bad for teachers. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 41(2), 78-87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01956051.2013.787352>
- Dalton, M. (2017). *The Hollywood curriculum: Teachers in the movies* (3rd Ed.). Peter Lang.
- Dalton, M., & Linder, L. (2008) (Eds.) *Teacher TV: Sixty Years of Teachers on Television*. Peter Lang.
- Dalton, M., & Linder, L. (2017) (Eds.) *Screen lessons: What we have learned from teachers on television and in the movies*. Peter Lang.
- Daniels, J. (2021). *Nice white ladies: The truth about white supremacy, our role in it, and how we can help dismantle it*. Seal Press.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2012). The right start: Creating a strong foundation for the teaching career. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 94(3), 8-13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003172171209400303>
- Duncan-Andrade, J. M., & Morrell, E. (2005). Turn up that radio, teacher: Popular cultural pedagogy in new century urban schools. *Journal of School Leadership*, 15(3), 284-304. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105268460501500304>
- Ettah, E. (2022, September 12). Quinta Brunson's *Abbott Elementary* is an abolitionist model for schools. *Scalawag*. <https://scalawagmagazine.org/2022/09/abbott-elementary-police/>.
- Flores, G. (2004). Doctors in the movies. *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 89(12), 1084-1088.
- Friedman, L. M. (2017). Law, lawyers, and popular culture. In D.S. Clark (Ed.), *Popular Culture and Law* (pp. 3-30). Routledge.
- Galvarro, P.A. (1945). *A study of certain emotional problems of women teachers*. [Doctoral dissertation, Northwestern University].
- Goldin, S., & Khasnabis, D. (2021). In the pursuit of justice: Moving past color-evasive efforts. *The Educational Forum*, 86(1), 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2022.1997307>
- Hallam, J. (2012). *Nursing the image: media, culture and professional identity*. Routledge.
- Hughey, M. W. (2010). The White Savior Film and reviewers' reception. *Symbolic Interaction*, 33(3), 475—496. <https://doi.org/10.1525/si.2010.33.3.475>
- Jewett, E. (2021, Jan 13). Miss Honey from *Matilda* is the original lesbian cottagecore queen. *Study Breaks Magazine*. <https://studybreaks.com/tvfilm/matilda-miss-honey-lesbian/>.
- Marcus, A. S., & Stoddard, J. D. (2007). Tinsel town as teacher: Hollywood film in the high school classroom. *The History Teacher*, 40(3), 303-330.
- McLaren, P., & Leonardo, Z. (1998). Deconstructing surveillance pedagogy: dead poets society. *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 31(1), 127-147.
- Morrell, E. (2002). Toward a critical pedagogy of popular culture: Literacy development among urban youth. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 46(1), 72-77.
- Morrell, E. (2014). Popular culture 2.0: Teaching critical media literacy in the language arts classroom. *New England Reading Association Journal*, 50(1), 5.
- Moss, P. (2022, Feb 22). What *Abbott Elementary* gets right about Black teachers. *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/opinion-what-abbott-elementary-gets-right-about-black-teachers/2022/02>.
- Pascoe, C. J. (2023). *Nice is not enough: Inequality and the limits of kindness at American High*. University of California Press.

- Raimo, A., Devlin-Scherer, R., & Zinicola, D. (2002). Learning about teachers through film. *The Educational Forum*, 66, 314-323. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131720208984850>
- Ravulo, J. (2018). Social policy and social change: Popular culture, new media, and social work. In S. Tascón (ed.), *Visual Communication for Social Work Practice* (pp. 117-129). Routledge.
- Rennex, M. (2020). Miss Honey from *Matilda* sparked a generation's sexual awakening. *Junkee*. <https://junkee.com/miss-honey-matilda/272222>.
- Shoffner, M. (Ed.) (2016). *Exploring teachers in fiction and film: Saviors, scapegoats, and schoolmarms*. Routledge.
- Trier, J. D. (2001). The cinematic representation of the personal and professional lives of teachers. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 28(3), 127-142. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23478308>
- Webb, A. (2014). A cultural studies approach to literature methods. In *Reclaiming English language arts methods courses: Critical issues and challenges for teacher educators in top-down times* (pp. 190-203). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315858159>
- Weber, S., & Mitchell, C. (1995). *That's funny, you don't look like a teacher!: Interrogating images and identity in popular culture*. Falmer Press.
- Wenger-Trayner, É. (Ed.). (2015). *Learning in landscapes of practice: Boundaries, identity, and knowledgeability in practice-based learning*. Routledge.
- Will, M. (2020, Apr 14). Still mostly white and female: New federal data on the teaching profession. *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/still-mostly-white-and-female-new-federal-data-on-the-teaching-profession/2020/04>.

AUTHOR BIOS

Gillian Mertens is an assistant professor of literacy education at SUNY Cortland. Her research interests include digital and information literacies, teacher preparation, and the interplay between technology and identity. Gillian previously worked as a middle school English teacher in Florida.

Henry "Cody" Miller is an associate professor of English education at SUNY Brockport. His research interests include young adult literature, graphic novels, LGBTQ education, and educational politics. Cody previously worked as a high school English teacher in Florida.

SUGGESTED REFERENCE CITATION

APA

Mertens, G., & Miller, H. (2024). Three characters and me(me): Positioning popular culture to unpack emerging teacher identity. *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, volume 11(2). <http://journaldialogue.org/v11-issue-2/three-characters-and-meme/>

MLA

Mertens, Gillian, and Henry "Cody" Miller. "Three Characters and Me(me): Positioning Popular Culture to Unpack Emerging Teacher Identity." *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*. 2024, vol 11, no. 2 <http://journaldialogue.org/v11-issue-2/three-characters-and-meme/>



All papers in *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy* are published under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-Share-Alike License. For details please go to: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/us/>.

Call for Papers

Rolling Deadline
www.journaldialogue.org

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.
Free to read. Free to submit.

Topics are particularly welcomed that address a critical scholarly examination of popular culture and pedagogy, such as:

- Relationships between literature, culture, music, technology, gender, ethnicity, and media;
- Theoretical, practical, pedagogical, and historical examinations of popular culture, including interdisciplinary discussions and those which examine the intersections between American and international cultures; and
- Interviews, reviews of books, films, conferences, games, music, technology, children's media.

TYPES OF SUBMISSIONS:

1. Articles/essays — theoretical or practical discussion of popular culture and pedagogy. Articles and essays are reviewed through a double-blind peer review process. Submissions should follow these general guidelines:

- MLA or APA format (please note which format you are using)
- 5,000-7,000 (inclusive of abstract, endnotes, and citations).
- Submit two manuscripts, one blinded for review. All manuscripts should be in Microsoft Word format, 12pt Times New Roman with:
 - 10 keywords;
 - abstract (250-300);
 - author bio(s) (up to 100 words);
 - author contact information (email, phone, and social media as applicable).

To submit an article, visit <http://journaldialogue.org/submissions/>

2. Proposal for Special Issues — brief description (up to 500 words) of the topic to be considered, the breadth of appeal of the topic to *Dialogue's* audiences, and the need for such an issue. If a set of articles have already been identified for consideration, include a list of titles of 6-8 articles, suggested referees, and short bios (up to 250 words) of all authors and editors

3. Reviews — essays reviewing books, films, games, conferences, children's media, and other sources as they relate to popular culture and pedagogy. Reviews are assessed through an editorial process guided by the lead editor. Submissions should follow these general guidelines:

- MLA or APA format.
- Length: 1,200-1,800 (inclusive of endnotes and citations).

- All manuscripts should be in Microsoft Word format, 12pt Times New Roman with:
 - 10 keywords;
 - abstract (250-300);
 - author bio (up to 100 words);
 - author contact information (email, phone, and social media).
- **Book Reviews** — See Call for Book reviews for specific formatting and a list of suggested books (<http://journaldialogue.org/books-for-review/>). Book Review questions and submissions can be emailed to the Book Review Editor, Miriam Sciala (miriamsciala@gmail.com).
- **Children's Critical Media Reviews** — See Call for Critical Media Reviews for specific formatting and a list of suggested media <http://journaldialogue.org/call-for-childrens-book-reviews/>. Questions and submissions can be emailed to the Children's Critical Media Review Editor, Roxanne Henkin (rhenkin@journaldialogue.org).
- All other review questions and submissions can be emailed to editors@journaldialogue.org .).

4. Musings on Pedagogy & Practice — Highlight applications in the classroom, best practices in teaching and learning both inside and outside the classroom, new multimodal approaches, and additional items/ideas not fitting neatly into a scholarly article. See <http://journaldialogue.org/musings-submissions/> for Musings specific style guidelines. Questions and submissions can be emailed to the Musings Editor, Karina Vado, kvado1224@gmail.com.

To submit an article, visit <http://journaldialogue.org/submissions/>

For questions and more information, contact the editors: editors@journaldialogue.org





DIALOGUE

*The Interdisciplinary Journal of
Popular Culture and Pedagogy*

Call for Book Reviews

Editor: Miriam Sciala

www.journaldialogue.org

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.

Free to read. Free to submit.

THE BENEFITS OF BOOK REVIEWS AND A NOTE FROM THE BOOK REVIEW EDITOR

In *Dialogue, The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, book reviews play a crucial part in the introduction to the public of newly-written books that provide analyses of popular culture and the way it reflects current social conditions. These publications can serve to educate not only the general reader, but also researchers and educators. Indeed, by providing insight into a particular book that goes beyond what the title – be it catchy or not – provides, the reviewer lays out the main components of a book to the potential reader and can be instrumental in convincing that reader to choose that particular book for a future read.

Hence, by describing the main gist and viewpoint on a book of popular culture for our journal, which caters to social scientists/researchers and educators, the reviewer is placed in a position whereby they can reach out to our readers and pique their interest in a book that is pertinent to their interests. For instance, an educator reading one of these books may be induced to translate the knowledge gained from the book into practical methodologies that can be applied to their pedagogy. Ultimately, this will help them guide students towards more salubrious perceptions of social issues and a deeper understanding of the various existences among various social groups, thus engendering a kinder and more tolerant society.

Academics involved in the social sciences also appreciate reading our book reviews as they search for sources to support and enhance their own research. A book review could help them save time as they can then more rapidly decide whether the book in question is suitable for their endeavours in explaining the way popular culture reflects our society.

Writing a review of one of the books on our list would be beneficial to our readers. By helping them to ascertain the genre of popular culture under discussion and the angle in which the information is presented, the reviewer places the readers in a position whereby they can better judge whether reading the entire book would be beneficial to them and whether it could lead to potential applications within their respective fields.

The books on this list have a focus on a specific genre of popular culture, be it fiction, film, television, music, video games or technology. They have been written with the aim of helping the reader understand popular culture and its assistance and limitations towards the generation of a deeper comprehension of society. If you are interested in reviewing one of these books, we invite you to contact us letting us know which book you would like to review. We look forward to collaborating with you.

A note from the Book Review Editor - Miriam Sciala

For me as a reader, or more specifically, as a bookworm from a very early age, book reviews open up possibilities as they guide me to the next set of books on my lengthy “to be read” list. Realistically, though, despite the best of intentions, I never will



Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy is the official journal of the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association (SWPACA). Learn more at www.southwestpca.org.

read all the books on that ever-expanding list as life is much too fleeting. Therefore, for all those that will remain unread, book reviews serve a different purpose – that of providing a synopsis - a brief description that offers me a view of the author’s stance, the context within which the book was written and a few choice details that enable me to gain a sense of the subject matter; in truth, it is a condensed account that nonetheless provides some information, opening a window into the narrative. In fact, a perspicacious review on its own can provide me with a few precious moments of reading pleasure. And after turning that page, I will have gained knowledge and the possibility of applying it in my work.

The act of writing a book review, in my experience, is extremely rewarding, too. This type of writing has done more than afford me the opportunity to read a particular book; it has engendered a perusal with intent – a deeper reading than that done merely for pleasure. Book reviews are my mini-research projects where I approach the book from the angle of the chronicler who endeavours to comprehend and explain the content and point of view of that book, connecting these to the context in which it was written. It is an exercise in objectivity to outline the strengths and limitations that form the features of the book. Penning a book review for the reader activates my creative side as I communicate the salient information appearing in the book to an imaginary fellow reader, albeit without giving too much away, in an attempt to prompt that reader to pick that book up and experience it through their own eyes.

CALL FOR BOOK REVIEWS

Dialogue would like to invite experienced academics to review new books for our readers. We are currently seeking reviews of the following books:

1. Allen, Craig. *Univision, Telemundo, and the Rise of Spanish-Language Television in the United States*. University of Florida Press. 2020.
2. Bordwell, David. *Perplexing Plots: Popular Storytelling and the Poetics of Murder*. Columbia University Press. 2023.
3. Craig, Byron B, Patricia, Davis G. and Rahko, Stephen E. *Rupturing Rhetoric: The Politics of Race and Popular Culture since Ferguson* (University Press of Mississippi)
4. Dorney, John; Regan, Jessica; and Salinsky, Tom. *Best Pick a Journey through Film History*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. 2022.
5. Giannini, Erin. *Supernatural: A History of Television’s Unearthly Road Trip*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. 2021.
6. Lent, John. A. *Asian Political Cartoons*. University Press of Mississippi. 2023
7. Mahdi, Waleed F. *Arab Americans in Film: From Hollywood and Egyptian Stereotypes to Self-Representation*. Syracuse University Press. 2020.
8. Manno, Andrew. *Toxic Masculinity, Casino Capitalism, and America’s Favorite Card Game: The Poker Mindset*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2020.
9. Mitchell, James G. *Watching in Tongues: Multilingualism on American Television in the 21st Century*. Vernon Press. 2020.
10. Sinykin, Dan. *Big Fiction: How Conglomeration Changed the Publishing Industry and American Literature*. Columbia University Press. 2023.

Guidelines: short articles reviewing books, films, games, conferences, etc. as they relate to popular culture and pedagogy

- Format: MLA or APA
- Length: 1,200 – 1,800 (inclusive of endnotes and citations)
- Editorial review
- To be considered for online publication on a rolling basis

Contact editors@journaldialogue.org or miriamsciala@gmail.com to coordinate writing a review for the journal.





DIALOGUE

*The Interdisciplinary Journal of
Popular Culture and Pedagogy*

Call for Musings

Editor: Elizabeth Gonzalez, MFA

www.journaldialogue.org

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.

Free to read. Free to submit.

The “Musings” section of *Dialogue* highlights innovative popular culture integration in the classroom, best practices in teaching and learning inside and outside of K-12 and college/university classrooms, emergent multimodal teaching approaches, critical insights into popular culture, and/or additional items/ideas not fitting neatly into a scholarly article. Of particular interest are “Musings” that explore one or more of these topics/areas:

- The politics of popular culture
- The role of popular culture in politics
- Intersections between critical pedagogy and popular culture
- Intersections of social justice and popular culture
- (Mis)Representations of class, (dis)ability, ethnicity, gender, race/racialization, and sexuality in popular culture
- Global popular culture
- Multimodal popular culture
- Student perceptions of popular culture
- Representations of academia/education in popular culture
- Popular culture as pedagogy
- Popular culture and media literacies
- Popular culture and multimodal literacies

See <http://journaldialogue.org/musings-submissions/> for Musings specific style guidelines. Musings can be emailed to editors@journaldialogue.org or to the Musings Editor, Elizabeth Gonzalez, musings@journaldialogue.org.



Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy is the official journal of the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association (SWPACA). Learn more at www.southwestpca.org.



DIALOGUE

*The Interdisciplinary Journal of
Popular Culture and Pedagogy*

Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy is the official journal of the **Southwest Popular/American Culture Association (SWPACA)**.

Read Dialogue online at: www.journaldialogue.org

The mission of the **SWPACA** is to promote an innovative and nontraditional academic movement in Humanities and Social Sciences celebrating America's cultural heritages. To provide an outlet for scholars, writers, and others interested in popular/American culture, to share ideas in a professional atmosphere, and to increase awareness and improve public perceptions of America's cultural traditions and diverse populations.

Visit us online at: www.southwestpca.org



Facebook: facebook.com/southwestpca
Twitter: twitter.com/southwestpca
Web: www.southwestpca.org