ReVisions: Best Student Essays is a publication designed to celebrate the finest nonfiction work composed by undergraduate students at The University of North Carolina at Pembroke. This issue was copyedited, designed, and produced by the students in PRE 3450: Computer-Assisted Editing and Publication Design.

Essays may cover any topic within any field of study at UNCP. We encourage submissions from all fields and majors, but we do not publish fiction or poetry. All submissions must be nominated by a UNCP faculty member. Students who believe that they have a strong essay for submission are encouraged to ask a faculty member to sponsor that essay. Nomination forms are available at http://www.uncp.edu/academics/colleges-schools-departments/departments/english-theatre-and-foreign-languages/revisions.

Manuscript requirements: no more than 3,000 words in length and double-spaced. Do not include any names or identifying information on the essay itself; use the nomination form as a cover sheet, making sure to fill out all parts of the form. Please submit electronically the nomination form and the nominated essay in one Word or RTF file to teagan.decker@uncp.edu.

All essays will be read and judged in a blind selection process. If a submission is chosen for publication, the author will be notified and asked to submit a brief biography, and a photograph of the author will be taken to be included in the publication.

Nominations to be considered for publication in the Spring 2016 issue will be accepted until December 2015. For further information, contact Dr. Teagan Decker, Lowry Bldg. 131, (910) 521-6437, teagan.decker@uncp.edu.

The cover photo was taken on campus during the Spring 2015 semester by Jiselle Maldonado for JRN 3200: Photojournalism. Maldonado is a senior Mass Communication major with a concentration in Broadcasting.
# ReVisions: Best Student Essays

Vol. 15

## The Dangers of Being Female: Exposing Swedish Patriarchy through *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* Novel and Film

Savanna Fowler  
ENGS 4010: Film Adaptations of Literature

## Treating the Body and the Spirit: Commentary on the Humorous and Religious Values in the Film *Patch Adams*

Victoria Huggins  
REL 2050: Religion, Art, and Culture

## A Holy Cause: Catholicism and Civil War Memory

Charles Jackson  
HSTS 4330: The US Civil War at 150: Memory, Commemoration, and Mythology

## Fairy Tales and Contentment: The Bildungsromans of Jane and Pip

Kelli Jacobs  
ENG 3420: The British Novel

## Mali’s Literacy and the Islamic Influence

Zachary R. Lunn  
HON 2000: The Humanistic Tradition

## The New Ceremony: Silko’s Novel as Healing Story

Donnie McDowell  
AIS 3440: The Native American Novel

## Identity in *Faces in the Moon*

Kenley Patanella  
ENG 2200: Native American Literature

## Fried Green Tomatoes: A Religious and Cultural Examination

Lacey Sapp  
REL 2050: Religion, Art, and Culture

Click on any title above to be taken to the start of that essay. Click on the 🛡️ at the end of any essay to return to this Table of Contents.
The Social Democracy policies of Sweden have been met with universal acclaim for the nation’s dedication to the assurance of opportunity for all its citizens and the personal responsibility of all Swedish people to provide all citizens, both capable and not, with a high standard of living. Its reputation as one of the most efficiently run and equal societies on earth makes the possibility of a growing underbelly of political and economic corruption at the hands of women-hating men undeniably small. Yet such corruption took shape with Stieg Larsson’s publication of the Millennium Trilogy, a series of crime novels that also featured an element of political commentary, primarily aimed at the phenomenon of male superiority in the democracy of Sweden. With the publication of Stieg Larsson’s first 2004 novel Man som hatar Kvinnor (Men Who Hate Women), known in America by its westernized title The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo, Larsson reveals the horrendously biased and patriarchal conditions of the Swedish welfare state, exposing the country’s contradiction-filled social framework that retains its popularity through promises of justice and equality. Exploring the legalized hatred and marginalization resulting from Sweden’s social system through his two protagonists Mikael Blomkvist and Lisbeth Salander, Larsson exposes the world of the welfare state and its role in “concealing pervasive misogyny at every level of society” (McDougal), Larsson details a year in the lives of Mikael and Lisbeth; exposing their complicated and lengthy entanglements with the often praised social welfare system slowly reveals the dangerous lives of females as they are constantly sought out for sex, violence, and intimidation by the very men involved in maintaining Sweden’s high standard of living. Just as the social-welfare programs are everywhere in the lives of recipients, so are the men who exercise their violent hatred toward women via a system founded on the ideas of support and equality. Within Larsson’s novel is the exposure of the welfare state’s massive contradiction, that is, its legitimation of men and their “dominant interests” (12) while subjugating “lower social classes” (12) which in Larsson’s world are predominantly women. For Larsson’s view of Sweden, this translates simply into the implementation of the constructed patriarchal system preying on and intimidating the females of Sweden into fear and silence. In conjunction with Larsson’s social criticism is David Fincher’s American film adaptation of the novel, which both upholds and strengthens the author’s social criticism. Both Larsson and Fincher address the hidden corruption that has taken root in Swedish society, through government, business, and social institutions, which continues to permeate the lives of disadvantaged women and others, creating a massive contradiction to the standards of equality proclaimed by the Kingdom of Sweden.

Identifying the Enemy in The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo

For Mikael, it is his actions against a corrupt billionaire through printed media that sees him pushed into a state of silence, weakness, and eventual captivity and torture. Although shocking for men, the reality of forced silence and powerlessness has become part of the everyday life of women who both literally and symbolically experience Mikael’s defenselessness. His inevitable meeting with the novel’s serial killer Martin Vanger and his twisted modus operandi also connects Mikael with the women who cannot avoid the legal government entitlements mandated for them. Prevented from utilizing the power the male has in society, he as an individual target is defeated by the social system that has effectively silenced him. Conversely, Lisbeth’s working with Mikael not only allows Mikael to reclaim his professional career and respect, it shows her ability to overcome her oppressive world by transcending the position of female welfare recipient, developing into an adopted amalgamation of masculine authority and power. In the aftermath of Martin Vanger’s defeat and the discovery

Savanna Fowler fancies herself a rhetorician and maybe even a writer. She thinks that the truth is hilarious, is absolutely fine with not having a plan at the moment, and wants to run and write until she can’t. She is pursuing a master’s in rhetoric and writing at Illinois State University, where she has become an expert in the primitive art of staying warm and has learned that giving up cartoons is definitely not a sign of maturation.
of his rapist past along with the guaranteed silence of sodomite Nils Bjurman, it is still the welfare state as the origin of the novel’s male monsters that is the ultimate enemy of its victims.

Despite the novel’s extensive chronicling of heinous individual acts of grotesque brutality, serial rapists, kidnapping, molestation, child abuse, sexual assault, Nazis, Fascism, biblical violence, murder, and torture, the novel’s primary target remains the state itself. The novel’s description of abuse and corruption toward females as being widespread is seen in the corrupt doctors, social workers, parliament members, CEOs, and every other level of society that women are unable to avoid or escape. It is easy to lose sight of this intention with the novel’s depiction of both Martin and Bjurman as sexually insatiable and violent monsters who are allowed to run amok without punishment or discovery. There is also the novel’s murder mystery element that puts the audience in the mind frame of whodunit, forcing the audience to think of the single perpetrator that is standard for a crime thriller rather than consider the Swedish system as the inhuman yet true villain. The most obvious distraction is the loss of the novel’s original title for a title that draws attention to Lisbeth rather than the text’s message. Consequently, the attention is once again drawn to a single character rather than mass institutions and populates represented throughout the novel. Despite the thematic confusion that has developed around the novel the advantage of Lisbeth’s notoriety is that viewers are drawn to the tragedies of her life along with the numerous female fatalities. They are also able to view the corruption that has accompanied the prosperity of the men behind these murders in one of the most socially equal and liberal countries in the world. For Larsson and his constructed view of Sweden, the state will always be the creator of the men who embody the overwhelmingly patriarchal mentality that has become a part of Sweden’s legal, monetary, and economic framework.

According to Gunnel Gustafsson’s “Sustainable Pressure for ‘Women-Friendliness’ in Sweden,” decades of pro-women movements have yet to overcome the system, which has not changed at a fundamental level to continue to combat patriarchy amongst male politicians (48). This male domination has now transferred into the Swedish economy and culture, effectively curtailing the economic potential of women and endangering their public safety. The efforts of men lie in keeping women in the traditional roles of the archetypal housewife and mother, which is evidenced by the Swedish economy predisposing women to “remain as housewives” (Bradley 5). The contention that arises from women violating this social role puts women who work in business or outside of the home, women without children, women who dress more provocatively, and women with ambitions of economic/social mobility at risk of experiencing male contention and backlash. The viciously graphic rape of Lisbeth Salander, who violates every housewife norm and speaks out against society, is evidence of what male contention can become for any outliers. The regularity of female assault by men is also mentioned by Lisbeth as she accepts her rape as a reality, as she does not know a single female who “at some point had not been forced to perform some sort of sexual act against her will” (200). For Salander and the women of Sweden, it has become accepted as part of the social structure that the female entity is subjected to attack and control. A person need only be female, or assume the position of a female as Mikael does, to fall under the state’s quest for the regulation of women.

As Metro as Possible: Feminizing Mikael Blomkvist and the Masculinity of Lisbeth Salander

The punishment of Mikael Blomkvist by the economic and legal powers of Sweden follows the exact pattern of control and punishment as that which applies to those who speak out against the state and its elite. Mikael, as man, is first feminized by the state by leaving him without legal, financial, and political power, leaving Mikael dependent on the money and free services of a corporation to maintain, i.e., control, his life. Mikael is introduced to readers minutes after being convicted of libel toward famed billionaire financier Hans-Erik Wernerstrom.

The reader has discovered his character’s feminizing in medias res. Mikael is quickly robbed of his freedom with a three-month prison sentence, payment for damages which will empty his monetary resources, and his loss of position as publisher at Millennium magazine, which he quickly resigns in the face of the scandal, effectively forfeiting his political voice and platform. Publicly convicted, penniless and jobless, Mikael is maneuvered into the perfect position for the social-welfare program to assume control of his life. This control is delivered in the form of Henrik Vanger, a famous businessman who offers Mikael a job solving the cold case of the death of his grandniece Harriet Vanger. Mikael, having few other options, accepts, and Vanger Industries becomes a prominent and invasive presence in his life. Unfortunately, with Mikael’s acceptance comes his increased
silence and his strengthened status as a feminine figure as he is forced to move “from the private dependency . . . to the public dependency of the state” (Stimm10).

Mikael’s newly acquired social dependence, and by extension loss of individual power, is evident in the terms presented by Henrik Vanger in his job offer: Mikael is to move into a guest cottage on the Vanger property in Hedestad, a frigid island several hours out by train, for an entire year. His salary, described by Vanger as “better than any offer you’ll get in your life” (107), is beyond luxurious. He is to work from his cottage home, and incriminating evidence against Wernerstrom is to be given to him upon completion of the assignment. It is no exaggeration when Henrik tells Mikael that he wishes to “buy a year” (107) of his life. This situation is incredibly similar to the conditions of those who are dependent upon social welfare for survival. Mikael’s housing is provided and paid for, his salary is gratuitous compared to his assigned work, his cottage serving as his main office is an extension and somewhat male version of the housework that is constantly pushed on the Swedish female population, and his cooperation comes with the promise of stability and returned normalcy in the form of a guilty Wernerstrom. This dependence on Vanger for his standard of living not only shows Mikael’s assumption of circumstances that the novel has clearly designated as a feminine pattern, but also shows how the masses are often under the control of companies such as Wernerstrom or are desperate recipients of the welfare-esque charities of corporations like Henrik Vangers Industries.

As Mikael continues to work throughout the year on Harriet’s murder, his loss of agency increases with the nature of his assignment and the emergence of the details of his trial. Working from the Vanger property in Hedestad, Mikael is literally surrounded by his corporate patrons in a striking reflection of the invasive presence that the welfare system has in the lives of its recipients. This is extremely true of females who are not only more involved with the system for childcare, contraceptives, and worker equality placement to compete with a male-dominated work force, but also because of the extreme amounts of sexual assault and exploitation toward Swedish females. Mikael is also forced to devote his time to the voices of the past in regards to Harriet’s murder, adding another layer of silence around Mikael as he substitutes his own voice for the voice of the dead. Finally, it is revealed that despite going to court Mikael never told his side of the story (268) about Wernerstrom, taking the sentence without any intention to comment or appeal. The submissive silence of Mikael, who, as the publisher of a political magazine, is no stranger to speaking out, showcases the power behind state-sanctioned corporations and their incredible dominion over the lives of dissenters. Mikael’s submissiveness to state sanctioned media and Wernerstrom parallels the silence that the novel’s female characters assume after they have been in conflict with state-sanctioned or government-run institutions. One in a series of statistics included by Larsson states: “Eighteen percent of the women in Sweden have at one time been threatened by a man” (15). Larsson’s frequent use of these types of statistics work to contrast the image of the Scandinavian economic utopia with the patriarchal reality of Swedish women, while juxtaposing Mikael to females who are threatened into silence and submission. As Lisbeth remains verbally silent about her rape, and Harriet Vanger keeps the secret of her abusive father well into her adult years, so does Wernerstrom’s power force Mikael into the same type of victimized silence.

The greatest contrast to Mikael and possibly the entirety of the novel’s characters is the female protagonist Lisbeth Salander. As the novel’s most dynamic and talented character, Lisbeth excels at overcoming the weaknesses of her small stature, social inadequacies, harassment by men, and the total domination of social welfare over her life to morph into the sole character capable of battling the corruption of men and their social system. As virtually a possession of the state, her defeat of the unfair system that frequently trumps women is a testament to her skills at recognizing not only the ways she is being controlled, but also the necessity of assuming a masculine skill set and identity to escape the pitfalls of being a Swedish female. Many of these masculine qualities are immediately obvious in her interests, personality, and looks, quickly distinguishing her from the majority of the people around her. Lisbeth frequently dresses in pants and vulgar t-shirts along with her trademark leather accents. Her hair is short and ostentatiously styled, dyed black from its original red color. Lisbeth physically defies the accepted look of females with her boyish frame and she is often described as “born thin with slender bones . . . and childlike” (41). She actively engages in the male dominated sport of boxing, stating “I spar a little now and then against the guys in a club in Söder” (329). However, in such a patriarchal society, a woman cannot assert such independence without consequences as “women who dare to cross traditional gender lines . . . are often punished
with violence” (9). Her habitual crossing of gender lines leads to her rape by Nils Bjurman, her social welfare guardian, in a direct parallel between her rape and the helplessness of women against the system.

With the succession of rape and murder victims that are exposed during the hunt for Harriet’s killer, Lisbeth makes a powerful diversion from the “passive, dependent, and easily manipulated” (Mirchandani 3) view of females. She is a prodigy in the traditionally male-dominated world of technology, where she is known as the hacker Wasp. She later admits to Mikael that she is “probably the best in Sweden” (332). Lisbeth expertly proves this assertion by stealing 32 billion Kronor from Wernerstrom by hacking his offshore bank account in the closing pages of the novel. The online persona makes gender impossible to determine because all interactions between herself and the hacking community are virtual. Lisbeth’s illegal lifestyle allows her to operate in a world outside of the legal Swedish system—to which she is basically indentured—in order to defeat its limits on her money and adulthood. Despite the illegality, critics such as Ian MacDougall have identified Lisbeth’s lifestyle as the only line of defense plausible for the general public, stating that “criminal acts committed by do-gooders in the name of justice—from petty larceny to massive bank fraud—are the only means by which to overcome the comprehensive failure of the world’s most comprehensive welfare system” (MacDougall). Illegal activity becomes organized resistance against corruption. Her expertise with technology permits her to exact revenge on her rapist guardian, ensuring his cooperation through video recordings and blackmail. It also leads to her discovery of Martin, to luring Mikael into his home, and to her rescue of Mikael seconds from his death while hanging on a gleaming hook. By the time of the novel’s conclusion, she emerges as the only female, better, the only character, fully capable of self-defense from patriarchal violence.

Adapting Tattoo: David Fincher’s Vision

An analysis of David Fincher’s 2011 adaptation of The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo will leave little doubt that the film utilizes every opportunity to further the welfare-state-scarey commentary originated by the novel. The film makes its endorsement of the novel’s critique of the nature of the state apparent in several ways. Visually, the film makes abundant use of wide-angle shots to show the massive offices of the welfare system, such as the colossal building that is home to the office of Nils Bjurman and the apartment complexes that house Lisbeth’s welfare-dependent hacker acquaintance Plague. The display of money and space that goes into establishing the influential and continuing presence of the welfare bureaucratic system also highlights the system’s power and often invasive presence in the lives of the welfare-receiving populace. Fincher’s technique of placing the characters in secluded and often private company locations also evoke the novel’s criticisms of the numerous underhanded deals and secrets of the corporate and business worlds which are protected not only by company resources but by the state socialist programs which benefit from corporate wealth through means of taxation. Directly prior to Mikael’s confrontation with Martin, the film shows Salander sifting through the private documents of Vanger Industries in a multi-level building full of maps, photos, newspapers clippings, articles, and a variety of company numbers and logistics. Fincher’s inclusion of this scene points out that patriarchal atrocities are hidden amongst artifacts of success and accomplishments of a large company that Swedes pride themselves upon.

There is also the inclusion of specific dialogue, which brazenly re-directs the viewer’s attention to the suspicion that should accompany the welfare system and the men who run it. Erika Berger is the first to tell Mikael that the Wernerstrom’s legal victory is not a personal attack on him; rather, it functions as a message to the people and the government: “don’t ask questions” (00:10:03). Erika’s pessimistic view of businessmen is echoed by the former Nazi party associate and family recluse, Harald Vanger, who no longer actively participates in the family business: “Hide the past like they do? Under a thin shiny veneer? Like an IKEA table?” (01:45:10-16). It is obvious that he has become disenchanted with the corporate world and is not blind to the nature of businessmen and their use of products and services to render their indiscretions invisible and unknown to the public. His statement of being the most “honest out of all of them” (01:45:22) with reference not to his own family’s business but of “Sweden” (01:45:28) weakens the trust the audience may have gained toward the seemingly innocent Vanger family. If Sweden is dishonest, then the Vangers and their position as Swedish business royalty are a part of that dishonesty, while the only Vanger who is capable of earning any trust does so only by excluding himself from Vanger Industries and the world of companies and corporations.

This combination of scenes and dialogue work for the entirety of the film to ensure that while characters like Bjurman and Martin are beyond sickening, it is the state itself that is responsible for the death
and injustice in the story. With the power of the state looming in a majority of scenes, audio, and dialogue, the images of Mikael as feminized victim and Lisbeth as gender-bending victor are also reinforced for the audience.

**Fidelity and Omissions in Fincher’s Characters**

A change in Fincher’s adaptation of the character of Mikael is his decreased sexuality, mainly in the exclusion of Mikael’s sexual relationship with Celia Vanger and his attraction to Anita Vanger, whom he interviews in London. This more personal, less carnal, relationship Mikael has with the female members of the Vanger family further connects him to the family, lending greater impact to Martin’s eventual revealing of his sadistic nature and his betrayal of Mikael. While Mikael does continue his open-marriage relationship with his friend and co-owner of the magazine Erika Berger and initiates a sexual relationship with Lisbeth in Hedestad, Berger is rarely on screen and their relationship is mentioned but never explicitly shown, unlike the sex between Lisbeth and Mikael. This change in “novelistic events for . . . ideological reasons” (Stam 85) further distances Mikael from the men such as Bjurman, who obviously take sex from their female state wards on a regular basis, and creates a contrasting male character that appears to attach importance and value to his sexual partners. Further examples of Mikael’s feminine status are the film’s clips of him shopping for groceries, cooking for and preparing rooms for several guests, and caring for and sometimes talking to a cat that finds its way into his cottage. All of these actions are the quintessential stereotype for the typical housewife in many cultures and societies, and are also in direct contrast to Lisbeth, who does not cook, has no regard for providing any hospitality for guests she does not want, and often shows her genius through traditionally masculine pursuits.

Mikael’s greatest defeat and the pinnacle of feminine weakness against the state is featured in one of the film’s and novel’s most disturbing scenes: Martin’s attempted murder of Mikael. Captured by the revealed serial rapist and kidnapper Martin, Mikael is taken to the basement of his home where Martin carries out his brutal murders of women. It is a first for Martin who tells Mikael he has “never touched another man” (379), but touch him he does, as he incapacitates him in the same manner as his female victims, performing his pre-murder rituals of conversation and filming as if Mikael was another “immigrant . . . whore” (373). Mikael’s capture and torture is the pinnacle of his forced feminine actions, as he assumes the exact positions of the murdered women before him and becomes a victim of men who hide their insanity behind money and societal patriarchal privilege. Ergo, Mikael becomes any and every woman that has been and could be a victim of Martin, or rather, the woman-hating system that has allowed him and other maliciously corrupt men of the system to simultaneously hide and profit from their murderous patriarchy. Mikael is incapable of freeing himself until Lisbeth arrives to save him, and he is unable to exact revenge as Martin dies in his attempted escape from the enraged Lisbeth, again leaving him dependent on the interference of outside sources to literally survive the power that men such as Martin possess. When his dealings with the Vangers conclude, Mikael is paid handsomely, but is disappointed in the useless information on Wernerstrom given to him by Vanger, and is then explicitly asked to keep the life of Martin out of his writings and the public eye. Such disappointment serves to bring the so-called great promises and favors of the system into question, and to reinforce the business of secrets and lies that follow those who control the system.

From the moment Lisbeth steps off of her motorcycle and into her employer’s office after the film’s first set of credits, it is safe to assume that she has no patience with the male sex. Lisbeth is leather clad and petite, with a hard glare and a refusal to make eye contact with the two men in the room. She is short in her answers, borderline rude in her demeanor, and shows very scant concern for her employer and the millionaire client beside him. Lisbeth’s trademark defiance of men and their expectations presents itself throughout the entire film, until her male friends and colleagues are forced to except her acerbic nature. Fincher uses a series of scenes to stress Lisbeth’s adherence to both an anti-feminine look and lifestyle, establishing her as a single, modern, non-maternal female. The audience quickly deduces that Lisbeth lives alone in a single bedroom apartment where she never cooks and doesn’t care for the interior of her surroundings. She liberally takes drugs while in punk-rock clubs and is very open to her sexuality, engaging in multiple sexual liaisons with both men and women. Her intense sex drive further connects her to the male characters of the novel, such as Mikael and his four conquests, as only the men are seen enjoying such frequent and open sexual relationships. The film draws greater attention to her personal look with several commentaries made by male characters in an extended series of scenes. During Lisbeth’s first meeting with Bjurman,
he rudely inquires about a facial piercing asking “Do you think that thing through your eyebrow makes you attractive?” (00:36:21). Clearly, Bjurman, and by extension Swedish society, believe that women should only dress or present themselves in ways that will attract the attention of men. His derogatory tone also indicates that for men and their society, Lisbeth is not following the rules laid out for the future housewives of Sweden.

Ironically, Lisbeth’s crowning demonstration of masculinity comes when she is visually at her most feminine. The novel’s last subplot—Lisbeth’s virtual thievery of the Wernerstrom fortune—claims the films final minutes, as Lisbeth sets out to prove once and for all that men are incapable of competing with her. Donning a pretty blonde wig, a sophisticated coat, pearls, and eyeliner, Lisbeth demurely works her way into the heart of Wernerstrom’s financial power, and legally transfers all of his money through her illegal hacking skills. It is understood that these Swiss and London Banks would never believe that a girl who dresses like Lisbeth would have access codes to a fortune of 32 billion kronor. This prompts the adoption of her disguise: an attractive and well dressed female who appears to know nothing about the system than her own personal information. Not only is Lisbeth’s pseudo-elegance presented to the audience in a rather comical manner (viewers are treated to a few seconds of Lisbeth tottering around in a her new heels), it also shows Lisbeth’s brilliance by turning the regulations and expectations of men into an advantage for females. Her ruse only provides more support from the audience for her illegal activities and the power over her lifelong oppressors that such deviance grants her. In a larger context, the film’s somewhat lengthy depiction of Lisbeth’s transcontinental triumph, juxtaposed with Mikael sitting in Stockholm while watching news coverage of the Wernerstrom financial collapse, boldly proclaims that men and their patriarchal ideology are not as invincible nor intellectually advanced as they believe themselves to be. It is only through Lisbeth’s mastery of intellect and force, characteristics that are thought to only belong to men, that Wernerstrom is exposed as the corrupt arms dealer that Millennium labeled him as, that Martin’s killing streak was finally eliminated, and that Mikael is able to return to a life of financial and social normalcy.

The novel expertly establishes the image of Lisbeth as efficient and lethal, but it is on film that audiences can see just how bantam her character truly is. Fincher’s Lisbeth is chronically silent, dependent upon her glare and no-nonsense commands as her primary method of communication. Unlike the novel’s sporadic inclusion of her thoughts and internal musings and the exclusion of several personal conversations between Mikael and Lisbeth, she becomes more unpredictable and mysterious than ever, strengthening her angry and aggressive presence. With a cocktail of her punk-Goth appearance and all of her atypical female qualities, Fincher shows Lisbeth confronting men twice her size, as seen with the film’s obese characterization of Nils Bjurman. After viewers are shown Nils raping Lisbeth, she returns to her guardian’s home where she subdues, threatens, and tortures him, securing her freedom from his repeated sexual advances: “You will tell them that I and I alone have access to my money. Each month you will prepare a report, about a meeting we will never have” (01:06:15). She then takes his keys with the promise of random visits and the threat of releasing the video footage she has captured of his sexual abuses to a ward of the state, effectively reversing their positions of power and granting Lisbeth control over Bjurman’s daily life. Her defiant independence is in direct contrast to women such as Berger, who spends most of her screen time begging Mikael to come to bed or to stay at the collapsing company during the time she needs him the most. This addition of a more solemn persona to a loner like Lisbeth helps Fincher draw focus toward her capabilities and her ability to succeed regardless of the presence or absence of men.

Conclusion

While the novel continues to be surrounded by criticism for its controversial material and surrounded by tragedy due to Larsson’s unexpected death, and the film wrestles with box office concerns, the series offers more than leather-wearing girls and possibly offensive promiscuity. The novel has become a massive exposé on the discriminatory practices implemented by the governing and business ruling bodies of an entire nation, using a combination of social justice, Swedish history, and current patriarchal policies. It is a call to arms for the controlled masses, an encouragement for non-traditional ideas and behaviors that will constantly stress the system into changing and adapting to increasingly fair policies, and rejection of mass delusion and approval of systems about which the public is incredibly naïve. This ideological focus on lingering and emerging social corruptions is preserved in Fincher’s adaptation along with the strong female lead and the exposure of Sweden’s aggressive male underbelly. Both novel and film present a solid critique
of social democracy and proclaim equality by encouraging an extended look at the history of countries and policies, human rights, and lingering prejudices that have continued to have influence in modern society. Larsson’s and Fincher’s commentaries about the gap between rhetoric and actual practice in the Swedish economy, the corruption and suppression of public media and discourse, and economic and corporate rules in a supposed neoliberal society proves that the novel’s core content is often overlooked by viewers and reviewers alike in favor of outrage over prudish concerns such as nudity and frequent use of profanity. Should future adaptations continue to focus on the immorality of the system, which will have to include the on-screen atrocities against Lisbeth, the novel can transcend its reputation, and the movie its R rating at theaters, to establish itself as serious political and social exposé rather than a simple ode to senseless and unnecessary violence.

Works Cited


The 1998 comedic drama feature film *Patch Adams* is arguably one of the most beloved films of the nineties. It will forever have a special place in the hearts of many due to the outstanding performances of the accomplished actors and the plot itself. However, this film—inspired by a true story—has many references to religious meanings and ideologies. This paper will serve as an exploration of these references and delve deeper into the underlying motivations and methods used to present one of the most renowned and beloved doctors to ever hit the movie screen. This paper will address whether humor can have the same transcendence as religion and whether this cultural phenomenon of comedic interaction is directly correlated to a spiritual experience within the healthcare industry.

The title of this paper was inspired by the scene in the feature film where Adams is presenting his case to the state medical board to overrule his expulsion from medical school due to his practicing without a license. In one of the most memorable moments, Adams addresses his belief in treating patients on a personal level of interaction. He argues, “It is my responsibility [as a doctor] to treat the body and the spirit...you treat a disease, you win you lose; you treat a person, and I guarantee you win no matter what the outcome” (*Patch Adams*). Upon reviewing this statement, I have found it to be one of the most profound lines in the entire piece of work. As seen in the film *Patch Adams*, the professors were trying to build a wall between the doctors-to-be and their patients, arguing that they were of a higher caliber than those they served. Adams smashed the wall both in real life and in the movie, through making personal relationships with his patients and through understanding their unique receptions of humor to overcome their sickness. Author Norman Cousins explored this issue in his partly autobiographical book, *Head First: The Biology of Hope*. He researched patient and physician relationships across America, and he encouraged patients with his own experience of severe illness with how positive thinking and laughter helped him to overcome. When discussing the opinions of the patients in regards to their physician, his research found a common complaint. Most felt that the communication between themselves and their doctor was lacking both crucial information and sensitivity (47-55). Cousins does not diminish the fact that most physicians have a heavy work load, therefore they are unable to have lengthy conversations with their patients regarding their health. However, he does argue that there should be a certain level of compassion and strategy upheld by those involved in the medical industry towards their patients. He says, “The wise physician doesn’t minimize the seriousness of the illness; he presents a challenge that calls for the best both doctor and patient have to offer. Instead of dwelling on melancholy possibilities, he offers a plan of battle in which the patient has an active role. The physician stays in close touch with the patient, regarding morale as an integral part of the treatment” (66). Therefore, establishing a good relationship with open communication between the patient and doctor is the one of the key factors in successful healthcare treatment, according to Cousins.

In a 2014 article by doctors May McCreadie and Sheila Payne, they too conclude that personal humorous interactions within the healthcare industry improve patients’ overall morale and confidence during treatment. They agree with the film’s main issue, that “Being cared for is the pinnacle of the patients’ endeavors and might provide some reassurance that their treatment will be individual and enduring as well as safe and potentially therefore more successful” (McCreadie and Payne 338). Their research in this study brought together four different focus groups of ailing adults to test their hypothesis on the role of humor by healthcare workers (particularly by nurses). As McCreadie and Payne share in the introduction, “most humour research to date has focused on the humour–health hypothesis—the concept that hu-
Theologian Paul Tillich, the main theoretician we read on the relationships among religion, art, and culture, maintains that an ultimate or religious concern underlies cultural creations that are not explicitly religious. Analyzing the film Patch Adams, Victoria explores how humor and laughter can manifest caring, promote healing, and contact people with a with a divine depth dimension allowing for self-transcendence. In this on-line course, Victoria demonstrated the ability to discern the deeper religious, artistic, and cultural values expressed in historical Western art and contemporary film.

—Dr. David Nikkel

mourn has a positive direct or indirect impact upon health (333). Similarly, Joanna Collicut and Amanda Gray concur in their essay entitled, "A Merry Heart Doeth Good Like A Medicine," that the effects of humor do elicit both direct and indirect benefits in patients, boosting positivity and bringing renewed joy (765). One could argue that the boost in morale would create a self-transcendence within the patient to overcome the physical situation of illness involving a connection to the divine. It harkens treatment of the soul in addition to the mind and body in the healthcare industry. Doctor Mark Gilbert emphasizes this point in his article, “Weaving Medicine Back Together: Mind-Body Medicine in the Twenty-First Century.” He writes, “Clinical studies have shown how emotional, cognitive and spiritual beliefs can directly affect physical well-being” (567).

Humor is included within these methods of clinical research along with music and nutrition and many other—what Gilbert calls—“complementary and alternative medicines (568). He further argues that physicians must pay attention to treating the whole being, not just fixing the external problem. Gilbert says, “But mind-body medicine emphasizes healing. Healing is an internal process, by which an individual becomes vulnerable to his or her own emotions, thoughts, sensations, and spirituality in a non-judgmental way every moment for the rest of his or her life” (568). Physicians can benefit their patients by providing these alternative forms of treatment in addition to medical treatment to help the individual heal from within, creating an internal change that has the power to transcend the circumstance to an external benefit. Similarly, this transcendent reality found in humor can be compared to that transcendence found within religion. Collicut and Gray explore this possibility further when they say, “If the view that humor is a positive psychological state with the capacity to enhance physical and psychological wellbeing can be justified on empirical grounds, then one might expect to find some conceptual or empirical connections with religion” (760). Therefore, in their research, the women delve into forming this connection through aspects of both subjects in relation to health. To set up their hypothesis, the authors discuss the definition of both humor and religion separately before comparing and contrasting them. One of the first conflicts they address is that between profane, cynical, or absurd humor and the sacred. They mention several instances within the religions of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism where interactions with these types of humor are to not be associated with the believers (767). However, Collicut and Gray agree that, ultimately, humor and religion/spirituality converge. The authors quote Reinhold Niebuhr to further their belief. According to Collicut and Gray, Reinhold Niebuhr shared the following quotation in 1969: “humour is a proof of the capacity of the self to gain a vantage point from which it is able to look at itself. The sense of humour is thus a by-product of self-transcendence” (140). So, humor does have a direct correlation not only with physical wellbeing, but also in the realm of religion.

Also important in humor and medicine is the relationship between physicians and younger patients: children. One of the most memorable scenes in the movie Patch Adams is when he delights the children in the hospital as a clown-like figure. This role created a magic relation between him and the children, which is what Lotta Linge wanted to research. She says, “We can also observe the importance of and enthusiasm over a magical relation, really a reversed relation, in which the child is strong and smart and the clown is weak and silly—a situation in which the child has the advantage and can experience joy” (Linge 2). The Swedish Halmstad University researcher explores the interaction of children with hospital clowns in her empirical research paper, “Magical Attachment: Children in Magical Relations with Hospital Clowns.” In her study, she created a research design that interviewed nine children and their families who had interacted with hospital clowns during periods of illness at hospitals when the children were between the ages of two and eighteen. Her first goal was to see how age determined the reaction to the hospital clown. Secondly, she set a goal to determine the “children’s narratives . . . [and] the underlying message in their experiences of encounters with hospital clowns” (4). Upon concluding her research, Linge learned that the older participants appreciated the clowns on a more internal level, while the younger participants enjoyed a more physical, external appreciation (6). Also interesting was the so-called “magical attachment” that the parents and older participants recognized within this interaction. One patient expressed to Linge the following: “it feels so great that they’re spending time on me . . . just for me . . . it feels like I mean something to them . . . I think it’s important that they build this world together with us, the patients . . . a world that maybe isn’t the real world . . . but for us, at the time, it is . . . they don’t see the illness . . . they only see us” (Linge 7). This eighteen-year-old participant connected the visit with the hospital clown—an outlet for humor—to a transcendent realm. Linge
also observed that “What emerged clearly from the interview data was the fact that for children the clown encounter was a matter of being able to relax in the hospital situation and feel a sense of joy together with the clowns” (7).

Finally, why is laughter so important? Humor and laughter are mentioned numerous times in the Bible. For example, Proverbs 17:22 says, “A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones” (NIV Adventure Bible). Even Jesus says in the Beatitudes sermon, “Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh” (Luke 6:21). There is such a positive energy in laughter. While unrighteous humor is not encouraged in the Bible, it still speaks of the beneficial effects of humor in the believer's life. In Norman Cousins' research, he firmly believes that humor is necessary in overcoming sickness. He pondered, “Why should simple laughter have produced this effect? Brain researchers with whom I have spoken have speculated that the laughter activated the release of endorphins, the body's own pain-reducing substance... The body's own morphine was at work” (145). How amazing and intricate are our own bodies? This particular release of the internal pain-killers is achieved through the integration of laughter and humor within patients. Cousins himself overcame severe ankylosing spondylitis through the incorporation of laughter in his treatment. He also notes that it is important to incorporate other elements of medical care along with humor. He writes in his book, “In writing this experience, I was careful to point out that I didn’t regard the use of laughter as a substitute for traditional medical care. I also emphasized that I tried to bring the full range of positive emotions into play—love, hope, faith, will to live, festivity, purpose, determination” (126). In this list, there are several spiritual ideas at work, further deepening the connection between laughter and religious thought. The will to live is a mental and spiritual choice that produces an external effect in attitude and sometimes in curing the illness.

I chose this movie as the topic of my research paper because this character is one that I would want as my physician. Compassion is something that is severely lacking throughout the world, but particularly in our health care industry. The various points throughout the film that show the underlying motivations of connection, interaction, sympathy, and concern are all relevant to religious ideals and concepts. I further argue that this film is just as relevant today as it was when it was originally released almost fifteen years ago. The culture of the community Patch is surrounded by appeals for him to conform and distance himself from patients. But, he breaks all the rules to prove that “Humour might be a risk, but...it is a risk worth taking” (McCreddie and Payne 342). Humor has many positive benefits within the healthcare industry and is a healing method within itself.

Works Cited


The Confederate Memorial Hall in New Orleans, Louisiana’s oldest continuously-operating museum, is an impressive sandstone monument constructed in the Romanesque Revival style by architect Thomas Sully. Were it not for a prominent sign identifying the building as home of the second largest collection of Civil War artifacts in the world, visitors to the streets of New Orleans could hardly be faulted for confusing the museum with a church: its elegant arches, columns, and stained glass windows evoke early European cathedrals—its trusses are emblazoned with both crosses and the fleur-de-lis. The religious awe conveyed by the Confederate Memorial Hall serves a purpose; its archives hold memory artifacts and documents long held sacred in the South, relics of the Lost Cause of the Civil War, which posits a romanticized and doomed Old South, frozen in time and infinitely superior to the post-emancipation world. Lost Cause devotees intended the Memorial Hall to function as relic chapel rather than a mere educational facility. The architecture of the building was meant to convey an ideology, much like the arrangement of the artifacts within.

Among the more unusual items housed in the Confederate Museum are a set of memory artifacts purporting to link Confederate President Jefferson Davis with the Roman Catholic Church; these are a letter and photograph Pope Pius IX sent to Davis and a crown of thorns woven by Davis’s wife but intentionally misattributed to the papal fingers. Although Catholicism was never widely practiced in the nineteenth-century American South, Davis was educated at the Dominican operated St. Rose Priory near Springfield, Kentucky. Following the war, the Sisters of Charity in Savannah educated his children. Davis himself was a lifelong Episcopalian, and sympathetic to the more “high-church” liturgical tradition that dominated in Catholicism and became popular in the Episcopal Church following the early nineteenth-century Oxford Movement in the Church of England. Several important Confederate spies and diplomats were Catholic clergy, and the poet laureate of the Confederacy, Father Abram Ryan, was a Vincentian priest. Confederate Memory organizations and traditionalist Catholics emphasize Pius IX’s role in bestowing a supposed legitimacy on the Confederacy. Nevertheless, scholars have spent little time discussing Catholicism’s contributions to Southern civil religion and the Lost Cause.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, a broken South actively created a civil religion in an effort to grapple with their devastating defeat, seamlessly weaving their Lost Cause into the fabric of a holy cause, and promoting a regional folk Christianity that championed the Confederacy as a Christian nation. By the late nineteenth century, religious and ethnic minorities in the South came to identify with the Lost Cause in an effort to integrate into a frequently challenging and often hostile culture; more recently, traditionalist Catholics have used papal memory artifacts to ally themselves with both reactionary political factions and historically Protestant organizations (such as the UDC and SVC) for the promotion of shared social values and a common interpretation of history. Both of these stories add nuance to a narrative that usually assumes white southerners in general, and Lost Cause advocates in particular, not only adhered primarily to evangelical Protestantism but also expressed hostility toward the Roman Catholic faith.

Pius IX began his papacy as a progressive, but quickly became a staunch conservative following a series of anti-clerical revolutions in Italy. Both Pius IX and Davis were members of a dying generation that stubbornly resisted the rising tides of liberal democracy and industrialization, and found unlikely bedfellows in one another. While it is likely that Pius IX sympathized with Davis, especially given his own extensive loss of temporal power during the Italian Unification (describing himself as a “prisoner of the Vatican” after the fall of the Papal States), he never overtly supported the Confederacy and remained as-
siduously opposed to slavery.

Nevertheless, organizations and individuals loyal to the Southern interpretation of the Civil War have combined the artifacts associated with Pius IX in such a way as to both sacralize the Confederacy and transform Davis into a martyr. The correspondence exchanged between Pius IX and Jefferson Davis is authentic, although it never constituted the formal recognition of the Confederacy’s legitimacy that some Southerners claimed it had. While the Pope did respectfully address Davis with the title President in his 1864 letter, the Vatican never opened official diplomatic relations with the Confederate States. This did not, however, prevent a Confederate diplomat to the Vatican from boasting to Davis that Pius’s letter “will live too, forever, in Story, as the production of the first Potentate who formally recognized your official position.” Pius also sent Davis a papal photograph bearing a handwritten inscription in Latin, as is attested to in the collection of Davis’s personal letters. In March 1878, Varina Davis wrote to her husband in prison to inform him that the late pope’s photograph bore the inscription “Venite ad me, omnes qui laboratis et ego reficiam vos, dicit Dominus.” She added that “it will be long before a better man fills the Papal Chair.” What is clear from the collection of Davis’s letters is that there is no mention of a crown of thorns woven by the pope and sent alongside his photograph—despite claims to the contrary by numerous Confederate memory organizations, Catholic traditionalists, and even the Confederate Museum in New Orleans. On the popular scholarly blog Civil War Memory, Karen Cox and Kevin Levin’s research concluded that the crown of thorns was, in fact, woven by Varina Davis and later combined with the legitimate papal artifacts well after her death in order to construct a narrative that suggested the Catholic Church had recognized the Confederacy. Following the defeat of the Confederacy, Southerners and their memorial organizations rallied around a common memory of the war, which sought to exonerate the South of its crimes and simultaneously portray the South as a Christian nation desperately battling the inevitable tides of modernity. The use of the papal memory artifacts as relics is a product of deliberate efforts to mythologize the Lost Cause and promote a socially conservative, romanticized notion of the past. The contemporary organizations that continue to use these relics range from Catholic monarchists to neo-Confederates, all seeking to interpret American history according to a specific ideological vision. Invoking these relics in support of their political and social agendas, radically disparate fringe groups manipulate historical evidence in order to confirm their beliefs and rewrite history accordingly.

Contemporary historiography of religion and the Lost Cause tends to focus on how Evangelical Protestantism became the basis for a civil religion that identified the defeated Confederacy with a nation of martyrs. Charles Reagan Wilson’s book, Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, explores the development of civil religion in the South and its role in sustaining and promoting Lost Cause ideology. Wilson examines how monuments, holidays, and communal rituals were socially constructed in the wake of the Civil War to commemorate the Confederacy and champion the nobility of the South. According to Wilson, Southerners created a mythology that elevated their own morality and piety above that of the Union. In that process, individuals such as Leonidas Polk, Stonewall Jackson, Robert E. Lee, and Jefferson Davis were accorded a saint-like status; objects and places associated with them became holy, and they enjoyed a kind of cultural canonization. Davis was especially regarded for his sanctity, leading Wilson to write, “if Lee was the Christian knight, Jefferson Davis was the Christian martyr… Davis symbolically assumed the South’s burdens . . . Southerners cherished all the relics of his suffering as Christians hold the wood of the cross.” The observance of Confederate Memorial Day paralleled the Christian holiday of All Souls’, and Southern museums became the repositories of sacred relics. Baptized in Blood sheds light on the creation of Confederate relics, and how they were popularly imbued with spiritual power akin to the saints’ relics in the Middle Ages. Wilson writes, “Wartime artifacts also had a sacred aura about them, with Bibles that had been touched by the Cause being especially holy . . . [m]useums were sanctuaries containing such sacred relics.” Wilson argues that these artifacts became integral in forming a tangible link between generations with the Confederate dead, and directly served as instruments to promote the Lost Cause; efforts at Southern memorialization quickly came to parallel and overlap religious observations. Museums themselves became holy shrines, and New Orleans’ Confederate Memorial Hall embodies this ideology in its very architecture. The interdenominational patronage by the churches and clergy of monument building and memory organizations (like the UDC and SCV) added prestige to Lost Cause mythology and helped create a civil religion which boastfully conflated the Confederacy with authentic Christianity and maintained that God’s favor had rested on

One of the things that really impressed me about Charlie’s paper was his ability to apply course themes to material he had studied in other classes and his own interests. While the religious aspects of the Lost Cause showed up in many of the essays we read in class, they were not something we discussed explicitly in any of the research assignments we undertook to build to this paper, but Charlie is interested in American religious history and so took the initiative to find relevant primary sources. His work also explores a niche not widely covered in the scholarship on Civil War memory, which meant he had to bring together several threads of scholarly literature—Civil War memory, nineteenth century American religious history, and Roman Catholic history—to put his findings into the proper context.

—Dr. Jaime Amanda Martinez
the South. When the imminent defeat of the South became apparent, apocalyptic language flourished; Wilson notes, “Southerners came to have a sense of foreboding. The image most often evoked by religious people was that of entering into darkness.” Wilson argues that Southerners were keen to co-opt religious language and seize upon biblical parallels in an effort to defend the legitimacy of the South’s memory of the Civil War and portray themselves in a pious light.

Southern Catholic contributions to the memorialization of the Confederate dead and the creation of a Lost Cause civil religion were subtle but deeply internalized; Southerners imitated Catholic festivals for the dead, the use of sacred relics, and the beatification of saints in the formulation of their Civil War memory. Historian David Blight notes that on Memorial Day “participants and orators often drew a comparison to the old Catholic European custom of All Saints day, on which whole villages and towns marched to churchyards to decorate the graves of generations of dead loved ones.” The creation of holidays, memory organizations, shared rituals, and monuments helped to turn the Lost Cause into a nationalistic civil religion that persisted even after the defeat of the Confederacy. The Lost Cause was not only a romanticized memory of antebellum times, but also a religiously charged memory that invoked traditional iconography to effect an experience of the numinous. Wilson effectively makes this argument—but he mostly considers the impact of Protestantism in the South, to the disregard of minority religious traditions. While making passing references to Catholicism, Wilson fails to consider how it contributed to or contradicted the Southern civil religion.

A second point of contention in the historiography of religion and Civil War memory is the lack of conversation that has usually been accorded to the role ethnic religious minorities played in constructing the mythology of the Lost Cause. While Irish Catholics who fought in the Civil War were most commonly Union soldiers, a significant minority of Irish soldiers fought for the Confederacy and later used their experiences to integrate into a post-war South. Narrowly focusing on the role Irish Union soldiers played in the Civil War neglects very important ways Confederate Irish soldiers influenced the surrounding culture and created a less hostile environment for Catholicism. Scholar David Gleeson claims that Irish Catholics in the South rallied to fight for the Confederacy under the leadership of bishops who found it politically expedient to throw their support behind the Confederate government. Numerous Catholic priests served in the Confederate army and at least one bishop was made Confederate ambassador to the Vatican. While Gleeson claims the Confederate Irish accepted their defeat less reluctantly than their Anglo-American cousins, he also argues that “the Irish also used the growing cult of the “Lost Cause” to reestablish their Southern credentials.”

As an example, Gleeson cites the role of the “poet-priest” of the Confederacy, Father Abram Ryan, played in constructing a theology of the Lost Cause. Ryan “compared Southerners to the persecuted early Christians and eulogized the Confederacy as a legitimate government, which heroes like Jefferson Davis had founded to protect liberty.” Ryan’s most famous poem, The Conquered Banner, is still popularly read at Confederate Memorial Day events; similarly, a statue in Mobile, Alabama’s Ryan Park memorializes the South’s “poet-priest.” Robert Curran notes that following the publication of his poem, Ryan “became both a symbol and a promoter of the Lost Cause.” According to Curran, Ryan’s cult of popularity exploded following the war and Jefferson Davis himself had a bust of Father Ryan in his home. While Ryan played a peripheral role in the war itself, Curran argues that Ryan was instrumental in salvaging the idea of the Confederacy from the ravages of history -- and singular in his quest to promote a romanticized Arcadian memory of the antebellum South. Ryan spent his later years writing articles and giving speeches that eulogized the South as a Nation “baptized in blood.” Despite the obvious doctrinal contradictions between Southern Protestants and their Irish Catholic neighbors, the disparate groups united behind Lost Cause ideology and mutually contributed to the creation of an enduring civil religion.

Contemporary religious, political, and memorial movements continue to rally behind the “stainless banner” of Lost Cause mythology. While Southern Catholicism made important contributions towards the narrative of the Confederacy as a Christian nation, few scholars discuss the obvious links between the cult of the Lost Cause and the Catholic Church. As suggested above, not only do traditional Confederate Memorial Day celebrations openly borrow from the Catholic devotion to the saints, but groups such as the UDC and SVC also esteem Civil War artifacts like religious relics. Only recently has much attention been accorded to the role religious and ethnic minorities played in promoting and internalizing the Lost Cause movement. Irish Catholics in particular identified with the Lost Cause in order to assimilate into the Anglo-American South, assuage anti-immigrant
hostility, and negate anti-Catholic bias. Father Abram Ryan remains an iconic hero of Lost Cause mythology, and his poetry has been absorbed into many Lost Cause “liturgies.”

The papal relics in New Orleans’ Confederate Memorial Hall thus fit into a larger framework of Lost Cause ideology and historiography surrounding civil religion and ethnicity in the South. As Wilson noted, Southern Civil War museums became the repositories of sacred relics in popular practice and imagination. The artifacts enshrined in these museums were meant to inspire a sense of awe, pride, and sadness for a bygone South. Artifacts were arranged in such a way as to convey the memories the museum and general public deemed orthodox, and orthodoxy was normally defined by adherence to the Lost Cause rather than to historical accuracy. This is how a series of perfunctory letters and a papal photograph became associated with a crown of thorns completely unrelated to Pius IX. Associating the crown of thorns with the other papal artifacts became a means to connect the image of Jefferson Davis more deeply with Christ, sanctify the Lost Cause, and promote the understanding of Southern defeat as martyrdom. That religious, political, and memorial groups continue to rally around the promotion of these relics indicates the willingness of ideologically disparate groups to sacrifice historical accuracy for a shared political and social vision that memorializes the South and romanticizes the past.

Notes
2. Come into me, all you who labor, and I will give you rest, says the Lord.
3. Davis and Strode, Private Letters, 472.

Primary Sources

Secondary Sources
Fairy Tales and Contentment:
The Bildungsromans of Jane and Pip

By Kelli Jacobs

British Victorian novelists Charlotte Bronte and Charles Dickens use the bildungsroman genre to show how the protagonists of Jane Eyre and Great Expectations change and mature through the trials of life. A bildungsroman reveals how personal experiences mold characters and support their growth, despite the overall outcome of the plot or the shortcomings of the character. Jerome Buckley establishes a definition of the bildungsroman in his book Season of Youth. He states, “The Bildungsroman in its pure form has been defined as the ‘novel of all-around development or self-culture’ with ‘a more or less conscious attempt on the part of the hero to integrate his powers, to cultivate himself by personal experience’” (13). A bildungsroman plot is not simply an opportunity for lessons to be learned; it also allows a character to demonstrate personal growth and development by applying new experiences to the conduct of his or her life and to achieve a feeling of contentment.

Although the bildungsroman is broadly defined as a coming-of-age novel, certain British bildungsroman novels possess distinctive qualities that contribute to the development of characters. Both Bronte’s Jane Eyre and Dickens’s Pip are underdog heroes in plots that possess elements of a fairy tale. In The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture, Franco Moretti analyzes the common correlation in English novels between the bildungsroman and fairy-tale plots. Moretti explains, “The English Bildungsroman reflects a stable society and democratic values: it has a ‘common hero’ from the middle class; it has a fairy tale plot that sets up ethical dichotomies between right and wrong” (185-92). As Moretti’s insight suggests, both Jane and Pip evolve through fairy-tale experiences into unexpected heroes who defy the odds of their social class origins and make moral choices that allow them to achieve contentment.

Starting as orphans from less-than-humble beginnings, Pip of Dickens’s Great Expectations and Jane of Bronte’s Jane Eyre are each presented with unexpected opportunities for social mobility. Dickens and Bronte place their characters into rags-to-riches situations, giving each novel a fairy-tale quality. Jane’s fairy tale stems from her romance with a rich and charming man, shaping her into somewhat of a Cinderella character. Though Pip’s fairy-tale opportunity is not as romance-based as Jane’s, a mysterious “fairy godmother” figure enters his life and grants his wish to become a gentleman, increasing his hope to marry the girl of his dreams. However, though Pip and Jane are placed in similar fairy-tale situations, the way in which they approach their situations is different. Therefore, Pip’s and Jane’s bildungsroman experiences are not defined by the fairy tales they find themselves in; rather, each bildungsroman is a reflection of the protagonist’s response to the opportunities of magical social advancement.

Great Expectations and Jane Eyre both begin with significant episodes from the protagonist’s childhood. The descriptions of Jane’s and Pip’s lives as children establish their distinctiveness, as is often reflected in the central characters of fairy tales. Buckley brings attention to a common characteristic of bildungsroman characters: “The growing child, as he appears in these novels, more often than not will be orphaned or at least fatherless” (19). Jane and Pip fall into this category, as they are both orphaned. Both are also portrayed as unique children, with intelligence and bright imaginations that set them apart from others. Each character grows up in a non-nurturing environment. Pip is raised by his abusive sister and Jane is raised by an aunt who greatly resents her. By juxtaposing the characters’ poor surroundings and rich personality traits, the authors foreshadow greater purpose or destiny. Pip and Jane, like some fairy-tale heroes, are exceptional orphan children who are destined to beat the odds life has dealt them.

Pip’s unique nature is demonstrated through his imagination and his intelligent observations. For
example, when reflecting on his only impressions of his parents, Pip states, “The shape of the letters on my father’s [gravestone], gave me an odd idea that he was a square and stout, dark man with curly black hair. From the character and turn of the inscription . . . I drew the childish conclusion that my mother was freckled and sickly” (Dickens 9). Pip's logic and description of his perceptions of his parents are uncommonly detailed for a child, shedding an interesting light on Pip and his ability to imagine. Similarly, Jane has a vivid imagination and intelligence during childhood. When retaliating to the bullying antics of her cousin John, Jane compares him to a slave driver, murderer, and Roman emperor (Bronte 23). In this instance, Jane's exceptional intelligence shines through, as she applies her readings to a life situation. Fairy tales tend to include remarkable journeys for the main characters that rise from hopeless situations. Dickens and Bronte both prepare readers for the fairy-tale journey by establishing a “diamond in the rough” scenario for their characters. Though both protagonists are oppressed orphans in their home, they have striking character traits that destine them for a fairy-tale adventure of growth and maturation.

In addition to containing unique character traits as children, as is typical of fairy-tale heroes, both Pip and Jane must both overcome the “evil witches” who serve as opposing forces to the success of their fairy tales. Not only are the evil-witch antagonists reflections of a fairy tale, but they also establish the difficulties the central characters must experience in order to achieve the growth of the bildungsroman. The lavish “magical castle” in each novel houses the witch who works against the protagonist. Though each home is a reflection of the wealth of the higher social class, the large estates possess gothic elements that indicate threatening obstacles in the journeys of the beloved main characters. The witch in Pip's life is Miss Havisham, who lives in Satis House. Though Pip often uses words such as “grand” and “large” to describe the house, they are often followed by more eerie descriptions. For example, Pip states, “The cold wind seemed to blow colder there, than outside the gate; and it made a shrill noise in howling in and out” (Dickens 48). Likewise, Miss Havisham's appearance reflects the uncanny quality of her home. When describing his first experience in Satis House, Pip says, “everything within my view that ought to be white, had been white long ago . . . and was faded yellow . . . Now, wax-work and skeleton seemed to have dark eyes that moved and looked at me. I should have cried out, if I could” (Dickens 50). Pip's description of Miss Havisham and her surroundings resembles that of a witch in an evil lair who devotes her time to training Estella to break Pip's heart. Not only does her appearance reflect that of an evil witch, but her actions also create obstacles in Pip's life. These obstacles, however, eventually lead to the growth of Pip as a bildungsroman character. The fact that Miss Havisham's wicked appearance and evil actions correlate confirms her role in Pip's fairy tale as the opposing force to the hero.

The witch figure in Jane's fairy tale is more discreet and concealed than Miss Havisham. Jane is happy working in Thornfield, the estate that belongs to the man she is in love with. However, eerie occurrences give the home an unsettling feeling. Jane recounts a frightening instance by saying, “The night —its silence—its rest, was rent in twain by a savage, a sharp, a shrilly sound that ran from end to end of Thornfield Hall. My pulse stopped: my heart stood still; my stretched arm was paralyzed” (Bronte 207). Like Pip in his impression of Satis House, Jane too is unnerved by the terrifying occurrences that interrupt her fairy tale. Later, Jane learns that the cause of the terrorizing in Thornfield is the secret wife of Rochester, Bertha Mason. When describing Bertha, Jane states, “In the deep shade, at the further end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight tell . . . it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing” (Bronte 290). Though not as deliberate as Miss Havisham, Bertha serves as the evil witch who ruins Jane's fairy-tale love story. However, though Bertha is the evil force, she drives Jane towards self-discovery. Jane is able to leave Thornfield and work on her personal growth once her eyes are open to the fact that Rochester is married. Both Jane and Pip are exposed to the pleasures of a higher social class and all of its majesty. However, each story reflects that every fairy tale has an evil force working against the beloved protagonist, and the pleasures of higher social classes are not always as wonderful as they seem.

Although the characters are similar in several ways, Pip's and Jane's fairy tales shape them differently, molding the outcomes of their happy endings and the trajectories of their bildungsromans. Pip's dependency on his benefactor and Jane's independence and work ethic influence their reactions to their opportunities. It could be argued that Jane's hard-working nature is what leads her through her tale. For example, Jane consistently supports herself in some way, whether it is as a teacher or governess. If
Fairy Tales and Contentment

she had not been such an independent soul, searching for work, she would have not met Rochester. Once she begins working in Thornfield, Jane is presented with a romantic fairy-tale dream. When discussing the fairy-tale aspect of Jane Eyre, Gilbert states, “Jane's first meeting with Rochester is a fairy-tale meeting . . . Jane and Rochester begin their relationship as master and servant, prince and Cinderella, Mr. B. and Pamela” (485). However, though Jane is provided with the elements of a fairy-tale love with Rochester, she discerns the right time to walk away from him, demonstrating her independence. Jane realizes that the fairy tale cannot solve all of her problems. Jane’s maturity allows her to step away from the dream and work on the areas of her life that need development. Although she is intelligent and self-sufficient, Jane is still searching for deeper elements in life, such as love, family, and contentment with herself.

The bildungsroman exhibits Jane's maturity as she transforms from restless and unsettled to content and loved. For example, as a child at Lowood, Jane sometimes has negative thoughts about the way others treat her. After being unjustly humiliated for an act she didn’t commit at school, Jane thinks, “so overwhelming was the grief that seized me . . . now, here I lay again crushed and trodden on; could I ever rise more? ‘Never,’ I thought” (Bronte 77). Jane the child has a mentality that no matter how hard she tries, she can never rise from her circumstances. As she grows into a young woman, the desire for something more remains. Her restlessness is evident as she moves from Gateshead to Lowood, and then from Lowood to Thornfield. Though her fairy-tale love for Rochester is a step towards her growth and maturity, Jane still has a need to find contentment and happiness with herself. Jane's bildungsroman concludes when she finds family and friendship, inherits wealth (which is a sign of her independence), and finally marries the love of her life. She no longer roams, but rather she is content with herself. Jane's fairy-tale romance shows that she does not just settle for the prince and riches. Despite the opportunity to run away with her prince charming as his mistress and rid herself of labor, Jane chooses to be independent. With new magical support from rediscovered family members, she is transformed and rises above her circumstances. Though Jane ends up with the happily-ever-after ending, married to the man she loves, she has waited until she found contentment within herself. She only accepts the fairy-tale marriage when she has her own wealth, peace of mind, and resolved family issues.

In contrast to Jane, Pip is content only when he is rescued from his poor hand in life. Unlike Jane, Pip does not find satisfaction with working hard for a living, nor is he content with his social circumstance in life. For example, in his time at home, before he is sent to London, Pip states, “It is a most miserable thing to feel ashamed of home . . . I had believed in the forge as the glowing road to manhood and independence . . . Now, it was all coarse and common, and I would not have had Miss Havisham and Estella see it on any account” (Dickens 86). From this stage in his life, Pip does not seem to value the idea of hard work and earning independence. His shame of his social class plants seeds of desire for social mobility. Whereas Jane does not like the idea of relying on someone to take care of her financially, Pip welcomes the idea of a benefactor, someone who can help him achieve gentleman status. Therefore, the longing for a fairy-tale escape develops in Pip’s life. When reflecting on his relationship with Miss Havisham and Estella, Pip states, “She had adopted Estella, she had as good as adopted me, and it could not fail to be her intention to bring us together. She reserved it for me to restore the desolate house . . . in short, do all the shining deeds of the young Knight of romance, and marry the Princess” (Dickens 179). In this statement, Pip reveals his truest desires. He craves the idea of a fairy-tale ending and all of its instant gratification. He hopes that Miss Havisham will transform him into the Prince Charming who could marry the princess, Estella. Pip’s whimsical fantasy about Estella and Miss Havisham reveals his value of social status and winning the princess, and he strives to find happiness in money and love.

Pip’s shallow idea of contentment leads him down his own path of self-discovery; however, he must first endure the trials that come his way. For example, when Pip finally has become a gentleman, his lavish spending and blind pursuit of Estella lead him astray from true contentment. Because Pip has become caught up in the idea of a fairy tale, he does not gain the happily-ever-after marriage to Estella. After Pip learns that his resources came not from the fairy/witch Miss Havisham but from a condemned criminal, he abandons his money and status and learns to depend upon himself. He is then able to grow from what he has lost to realize the meaning of contentment. Pip states, “I sold all I had, and I put aside as much as I could for the composition of my creditors . . . I lived happily with Herbert and his wife, and lived frugally, and paid my debts, and maintained a constant correspondence with Biddy and Joe” (Dickens 355). Pip’s bildungsroman growth occurs once
he realizes that material gain and status cannot bring him contentment. Instead, he finds happiness living simply, surrounded by friends and family. Pip grows and matures from a young man who was ashamed of his background and financial circumstances into a hard working individual who is at peace within himself and with his loved ones.

Once he has examined his life and found contentment, Pip's and Estella's paths cross by fate. Pip describes this reunion by stating, “I took her hand in mine, and we went out of the ruined place; and, as the morning mists had risen long ago when I first left the forge, so the evening mists were rising now, and in all the broad expance of tranquil light they showed to me, I saw the shadow of no parting from her” (Dickens 358). Therefore, like all fairy tales, Pip's bildungsroman ends with a sense of hope. Though, he and Estella are not married or wealthy, they have hope of each other's company. In an even greater sense, the two have the satisfaction of growing and learning from the mistakes and trials of life. Pip's description of this final, magical scene allows the fairy tale and bildungsroman to go hand-in-hand. His description of the mist reflects the two different stages of his life and how he has learned and grown. The bildungsroman of Pip has allowed him to have peace within himself, accepting the past and leading to a hopeful future with Estella.

Pip and Jane's differences in response to their fairy tales cause them to develop dissimilar levels of contentment during their lives and as their fairy-tale bildungsroman narratives end. Jane has maintained contentment with her social class by taking pride in her work. She does not look for contentment in money and refuses to accept love from a married man. Instead, she strives to keep her integrity and find a deeper sense of peace within herself. Before she is able to accept the fairy-tale marriage to her prince, Jane's bildungsroman causes her to develop deeper contentment within herself as an independent woman. On the other hand, Pip is not pleased with his financial situation and the status of his job in the forge. He restlessly seeks to be a gentleman in order to win the heart of the woman he placed on a pedestal. Pip continues to seek contentment in money, status, reputation, and the idea of love until he learns the truth about his expectations. By the end of the novel, Dickens develops Pip's bildungsroman to reveal Pip's newfound contentment with hard work and the company of loved ones. Though Jane and Pip have similar character traits, and they face similar trials through life, they respond to their fairy tales in different ways. Pip finally achieves Jane's initial level of contentment, and Jane finds a deeper level of peace from her past. Overall, Pip and Jane both obtain a level of personal satisfaction appropriate for an English bildungsroman after being involved with higher social classes and fairy-tale experiences. 

Works Cited

Mali’s Literacy and the Islamic Influence

By Zachary R. Lunn

Zachary R. Lunn enjoys the satisfaction that comes from solving puzzles through research. After graduating with a biology degree, Zachary plans to pursue an MFA in creative writing.

Mali is a nation located in sub-Saharan West Africa. Today it is among the poorest countries in the world, but this was not always the case. The city of Timbuktu developed into a commercial trade center in the twelfth century. Salt from the north met gold from the south, and the city flourished. The Mali Empire controlled Timbuktu from the early thirteenth century until its collapse in 1493. Rulers of this empire were integral in maintaining not only the economic prosperity of Mali, but also its growth into a center of academic and spiritual learning. In turn, the influence of Islam had a profound effect on the scholarship and literacy of the region during this time.

An oral history of the ancient Mali Empire, passed down by griots, details the exploits of its first emperor, Sundiata. These histories are often told in song, and Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali contains the trappings of classic epic poetry: childhood hardships, betrayal, exile, and triumphant victory. In 1240, Sundiata liberated Mali from King Sumanquru of Sosa at the Battle of Kirina on the Niger River. The Epic makes it clear that Sundiata was not only interested in freeing his people from tyranny, but that he was after glory and riches, a theme familiar and apparent in works like Beowulf and the Iliad. The emperor even said he wished to surpass the legendary stature of Alexander the Great. The Epic of Old Mali also references Sundiata’s grandson, Mansa Musa (King Musa), as an important king of “illustrious memory, beloved of God.” It is under Musa that the empire reached its pinnacle of power and achievement.

Mansa Musa ascended the throne in 1312, but his impact was made clear when, in 1324, he made the pilgrimage to Mecca, called the Hajj. The superficial impression he made is seen in several fourteenth century European maps that bear his image, and in the rumor that his extravagant distribution of gold left the value of the precious metal depressed in Egypt for years. The deeper impression began in Mecca where he built hostels for Malian pilgrims. This building program continued throughout his journey home and consisted of mosques, palaces, and the University of Sankoré. The cities of Gao and Timbuktu, along with others throughout sub-Saharan Africa, benefitted from the prolific construction. This program, along with Musa’s “new zeal for securing the future of Islam in his empire,” set the stage for a new academic and spiritual standard that the Empire of Mali would thrive under. The importance of Islam in West Africa was the natural next step in Mali’s evolution.

The Mali Empire saw an increase of Islamic influence upon Mansa Musa’s homecoming. The king returned with non-African Muslims and “sent scholars to study Islamic law in the Moroccan city of Fez.” Musa commissioned the Djingareyber Mosque and, along with its attached school, it became a center of knowledge for hundreds of scholars in Timbuktu. As Steve Kemper states, “Religion and learning are intimately connected in Islam. The Arabic word for mosque is the masculine jami; the feminine form, jami’a, means university.” The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) cites the Djingareyber Mosque as playing “an essential role in the spread of Islam in Africa.” Mosques and their associated schools continued to be built in sub-Saharan Africa, most notably the Great Mosque in Djenne, until the early twentieth century. The influx of Islamic activity in Timbuktu and the surrounding region led to the increased level of scholarship and value placed on books.

Fourteenth-century Timbuktu housed 25,000 university students—more than the entire population of London at the time. Timbuktu had become an esteemed place of learning. “Most of the scholarship was religious, but also included mathematics, astronomy, Islamic law, rhetoric, geography, botany, medicine, and music.” The eventual collapse of the Mali Empire did not signal the end of its legacy of literacy and religious passion. Between 150 and 180 schools taught basic reading and recitation of the Qur’an in
Timbuktu during the sixteenth century, and even the illiterate kept the Qur’an in their households. So great was the importance of the Qur’an in Timbuktu, that when new copies were commissioned or donated to a mosque, it was noted by eminent scholar-historians of the time. While the Qur’an and Islamic scholarship were certainly at the forefront of Timbuktu’s learning, the academic schools prospered as well. Timbuktu was not merely a synthesis of literature and philosophy from around the world. There is evidence that fifteenth-century Malians knew much more than their European counterparts in areas of science and mathematics. Michael Palin discovered scientific texts in Timbuktu that demonstrate knowledge of the eclipse, the lunar cycle, and the rotation of celestial bodies. In fact, “the highest levels of scholarly efforts in Timbuktu matched and in some cases surpassed their brethren in the greater Islamic world.” These books were supplemented by the work of Ahmed Baba (1556-1627), Timbuktu’s premier scholar, who wrote at least seventy works in Arabic. Still, the guiding force of Islam can still be seen in these intellectuals. Alex Ulam reports that these scholars promoted peace and “traveled great distances to mediate and resolve conflicts with the guidance of their Islamic faith.”

The love of learning encouraged by the Muslim faith led to a reverence for books. Baba’s personal library consisted of 1,600 volumes, and even he said this was one of the smallest collections in the city. “In Timbuktu, literacy and books transcended scholarly value and symbolized wealth, power, and baraka (blessings).” This view of literacy led to a massive build-up of private library collections among the wealthy. Because of the value placed on books, coupled with the fact that every mosque possessed libraries, there are about 700,000 surviving books from medieval Africa in Timbuktu.

As Timbuktu grew as an example of Islamic prosperity and knowledge, the greater Muslim world was focused on developing enormous public library collections. “The majority of Muslim libraries maintained a tradition of open access to scholars from around the world.” However, Timbuktu was different in that there is no evidence of public libraries. Its collections were limited to private collectors only. It may be that Timbuktu’s remote location encouraged its wealthy citizens to hoard books for their own collections. More likely is the fact that there were not enough literate residents to demand a need for public access to books. Timbuktu never housed more than three hundred scholars at a time, and these literati had open access to the volumes in the mosques. The scholars also lent each other books for their studies.

While Islam was vital in the advancement of literacy and bibliophilism in Mali, and Timbuktu especially, it is Muslims that threaten this very legacy. Fighters of an Islamic fundamentalist group, Ansar al Dine, took over Timbuktu in June 2012. These militants proceeded to violate and destroy shrines and tombs at Timbuktu’s mosques, including two tombs at the Djingareyber Mosque. While private collectors had hidden, packed, or otherwise protected their manuscripts, the rebels controlled the Ahmed Baba Institute. Luckily, only electronics and vehicles were stolen, and the ancient texts remained undisturbed. The rise of jihadist and terrorist activities in Africa is an absolute danger to the medieval manuscripts of sub-Saharan Africa, and it may be Islamic fundamentalism that destroys that which it helped create.

Without the powerful rulers of the Mali Empire, the booming scholarship of Timbuktu and other West African cities would not have come to fruition. Furthermore, these leaders propagated Islamic ideals and stimulated religious passion that translated to intellectualism and a love of books. While the greater Muslim world from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries focused their efforts on public libraries, Timbuktu held to a tradition of privately owned collections. 700,000 antiquarian volumes still reside in Timbuktu and give the world’s scholars insight into the culture of medieval West Africa.

Notes

1. Niane, *Sundiata: An Epic*, vii-1. Griots were oral historians appointed by members of royal families. The position was important and respected, and often these men tutored the young princes of these families.


7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.


14. ibid.

15. ibid.

16. ibid.

17. ibid.

18. ibid.

19. ibid.

~Dr. Robert Brown
Mali’s Literacy and the Islamic Influence

18. Abraham, “Timbuktu’s Ancient Manuscripts,”

Bibliography


Contemporary American Indian literature responds to the effects of assimilation and colonization by utilizing and adapting traditional rituals. Themes found in contemporary works, such as that of Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, help students, Natives and non-Natives, understand the importance and dynamics of storytelling in the oral tradition. At times, controversy arises when examining the accounts of sacred narratives being presented to readers rather than the ancestors and tribal people who hold it significant to their lifeways. Silko explains that relationships are essential in the act of storytelling and that the process of telling stories can allow humans to alleviate the experience of despair caused by colonialism and assimilation. Silko uses this novel as a way to create a new ceremony in order to increase the understanding that recovery from despair requires balance and harmony brought about through the sacrifice motif found in Laguna tradition.

Silko uses the characters in her novel to guide the reader through the process of healing that is taking place during the “story” she has created. Although very fictional, characters such as Tayo and Rocky represent real experiences lived by many people in the Laguna community. Gender roles play a major part in the course of telling stories and using healing practices. In this novel, Grandma seeks out the traditional Laguna and Navajo healers in order to help Tayo heal for the better of the entire community. Grandma continues to support traditional lifeways when appearing in Tayo's dreams (Silko 33). Auntie influences Rocky to go to school and the military and acts poorly towards Tayo. Tayo's mom had relations with Laguna and therefore he is half white. Auntie “could see what white people wanted in an Indian” (Silko 57). Grandma and Auntie represent the traditional-modern divide associated with the complexities that negatively impact Laguna and other tribal communities.

Academic scholars researching Silko's work give an interesting mix of responses, usually focusing on her outstanding storytelling and overall themes found in her novel. Monica Avila, one reviewer, sees that through the main character readers can see a person of multiple ancestry fight to understand his heritage and save his community from witchery. In the context of the novel, witchery is associated with disease, death, destruction of the land and resources, and the decimation of Laguna culture brought on by the evil in human hearts. Tayo's experience seems to be affected by assimilation, WWII, socioeconomic depression, drought, and disconnection. Avila believes that these afflictions come from witchery whose “entire existence is dedicated to robbing the Earth of its life force” (54). In the process of describing witchery, Avila sees that the characters in the novel believe that “witchery is an avoidance of responsibility” (54). Tayo recalls things that Emo ironically says regarding what the Indians received after their military service and efforts in WWII. In this way, Emo is not taking responsibility for his actions or attempting to heal so as to help his community regain balance and shed the trauma they experienced during the war. Therefore, Emo is afflicted by witchery and Tayo understands that he must set aside his selfish traits and follow through on the quest to better his community.

Old Ku’oosh is associated with rejuvenation and restoring life in the Laguna reservation and speaks of caves and stars. After being called by Grandma to check on Tayo and others returning from the war, Ku’oosh noticed that some of the traditional ceremonies used on war veterans were not effective. This complication has to do with the changes made to the roles of men in tribal societies caused by assimilation and colonization. Typically, the men defended the homelands and hunted for the community. Given the new technology, like the atomic bomb and machine guns, modern warfare ravages the mental state of returning warriors. When Tayo and Ku’oosh talk, Tayo talks about not knowing whether or not he actually killed another human in the war. Ku’oosh says that...
“In the old way of warfare, you couldn’t kill another human being in battle without knowing it” (Silko 36). Then Ku’oosh adds that because of the taking of another life the warriors “had things they must do otherwise the K’oo’ko would haunt their dreams” (Silko 37). This concept is usually associated with healing, reciprocity, and balance.

A hunter sprinkles cornmeal in the presence of a freshly killed deer in order to show respect for the taking of its life for the nourishment of human beings. This is associated with the same concept of showing respect in traditional warfare for the lives taken and those who defend their nation. When Tayo returns home from war he is stressed due to his war experiences, such as the instance when he mistook a dead Japanese soldier for his uncle Josiah (Silko 8).

Ironically, the atomic bombs were composed of uranium, which was mined by Lagunas and was developed and tested in the desert south of the community. Tayo realized the connections between the mechanics of modern warfare and the increasing imbalance and negative impact it had on the Laguna community.

Throughout the novel Emo is associated with racism, barbarism, anger, and the imbalances caused by the war. In his quest, Tayo realizes that “As long as people believed the lies; they would never be able to see what had been done to them or what they were doing to each other” (Silko 191). Emo not only turned against his friends in the Laguna community, but had no regret for the taking of another human life. Therefore, Emo is associated with the witchery of irresponsibility and the spreading of instability. Silko uses the experiences from the war and the complexities associated with it to show the need for new ceremonies because witchery has infiltrated the community through irresponsibility. The balance can only be restored by banishing the witchery from the community, which has resulted in the colonial forces of modern warfare, the misunderstandings of culture shock, and the incompatibility of modern forms of psychiatry to deal with returning war veterans. Tayo’s journey to find healing allows Silko to illustrate the need to explore innovative ways to respond to these negative impacts while relying on traditional forms of Laguna ritual.

The ceremonies used for allowing the returning warriors to regain balance used traditional concepts such as reciprocity and responsibility, whereas the psychiatrists used drugs and counseling. The military also confused the Laguna soldiers during their campaigns in the war because the appreciation and brotherly spirit diminished afterwards. Silko affirms that “They never saw that it was the white people who gave them that feeling and it was white people who took it away when the war was over” (43). These circumstances based on equality and race are important because they stress the need for restoring balance, which is represented through conversations between Tayo and local healers like Ku’oosh and Betonie.

Unlike Ku’oosh, Betonie is a Navajo healer and has an unusual sense of blending together the modern and traditional concepts to create a new type of ceremony that will allow Tayo to find his connection to his heritage and community. Betonie’s stories about his grandfather, Descheeny, and his methods of ceremony and healing suggest that ceremony must adapt to fit the modern era. Betonie says that “It became necessary to create new ceremonies” because of the impact of contact and the colonization of tribal societies (Silko 126). Tayo must understand that “They want us to separate ourselves from white people, to be ignorant and helpless as we watch our own destruction” (Silko 132). Although assimilation has changed many aspects of the Laguna life for Tayo and his community, Betonie suggests that ceremony will out the effects of the disconnection, abuse, and disruption caused by the inability to merge into modern society. Tayo’s participation in the Scalp Ceremony brings the witchery to the surface so that the community understands that changes have to be made to go forward in life (Silko 169). Betonie and his helper, Shush, use Navajo rituals to cure the emotional distress of modern warfare, destruction of the land, and the ever-present destruction of the people. These motifs suggest that the metaphysical must be accessed in order to heal those who have lost their way in the destructive forces of the modern period.

Susan Dunston, who researched Silko’s work and its metaphysics, feels that Silko uses observations in a cultural context in order to analyze the relationship between the Earth and human beings. Dunston says that “When Silko, as do many other Native Americans, refers to the Earth as our mother, she is not making sentimental metaphor but describing a physical relationship” (140). In the novel, Tayo talks about disliking Emo and knowing that Emo hated him for being half White. Given the war and the uranium that caused devastation to the Japanese and Lagunas, Tayo was respecting the relationship between humans and the Earth by sacrificing himself to heal his community. The healing ceremony that Tayo undergoes represents the balance of life on Earth. During WWII, the US military used nuclear warfare on the Japanese without considering that bal-
ance. If Tayo is associated with Silko and the Laguna communities’ real life experiences then Tayo is fighting for the Earth. Novels like Silko’s show the “understanding we have of the world and ourselves that underwrites what we do in and to the land” (Dunston 149). This shows the relationship between traditional warfare and its opposition to modern warfare.

Paula Gunn Allen believes that there are two levels to the stories found in the novel. This includes ritual based on witchery and recovery and relates to the clash between order and destruction (Allen 379). Allen, from a community near Silko’s home at Laguna, was raised with the same ideological concepts and thinking prescribed by the Laguna community. When it comes to sharing the sacred and spiritual customs with outsiders, traditional communities have ethics and morals encoded in their behavior that prevents the transmission of their sacred knowledge. This action is the process of keeping the community’s life-ways and mythic connections alive and allows them to continue to survive and pass on their traditional knowledge to future generations. This worldview encompasses the cycle of life and death and relationships involving balance and reciprocity. At times this worldview even considers sacrifice a means of helping out the entirety of one’s home community, for example Tayo’s journey to rid himself and the community of witchery.

Allen believes that Silko’s work may violate taboo by sharing the sacred and mythic clan stories of her community with outsiders. Allen states that “I believe I could no more do the kind of ceremonial investigation of Ceremony done by some researchers than I could slit my mother’s throat” (383). Allen feels that the ceremonial, or traditional, stories should not be studied by outsiders and that those associated with these stories should not share them unless the stories are kept inside the home community’s cultural context. Fortunately enough, Allen reveals that she read Silko’s novel differently and did not probe it to deconstruct the sacred. In Allen’s response to Silko’s novel she concludes that she herself is in conflict with her Native obligations and her professional requirements, feeling that she should teach more about the detailed significance behind Silko’s stories of recovery and witchery. Ultimately, Allen feels that Silko’s concepts on healing and recovery should be shared.

Leah Sneider comments on the research and theories of Robert Nelson regarding Silko’s novel. Sneider states that Nelson realizes that there is a “departure-recovery motif in Ceremony common to Laguna ceremonial stories and story cycles” (Sneider 98). In Silko’s efforts to transform a traditional storytelling method in order to help her community, controversy has affected the scope of scholarship on her novel. Simply, conflict can occur when traditional myths and oral traditions from tribal communities are shared with the public. However, Silko is using the format of storytelling from her community in order to help her community and the outside world understand that healing is essential in influencing balance in the modern world. Sneider also reflects upon further research by Nelson in view of the characters, function, cultural context, and motifs of the relationships found in Silko’s work. There is a relationship between witchery and recovery as revealed by Tayo, who overcomes the evil within himself and the Laguna community through ceremony performed by Betonie so that he could recuperate and regain balance. The “text itself becomes a storytelling performance” (Sneider 98) and acts the same way as Tayo’s healing journey, allowing the reader to understand the healing motif in contemporary American Indian literature. As Betonie points out, the power of recovery comes from acknowledging that modernization has created many changes in the community, land, resources, animals, and people.

Tayo and the Laguna experience highlight the conflict between traditional and modern lives. WWII negatively impacted the lives of those living in the Laguna Pueblo because their land was a rich source of uranium used to defeat the Japanese. The responsibility, reciprocity, and recovery motifs found in Ceremony allow readers to understand that healing is explained and initiated through ceremony and storytelling. The creation of stories in printed text is a contemporary phenomenon involving American Indian literature. Silko uses her novel to allow her community and others to heal from the negative impacts of living in the modern world. Not being able to use traditional ceremonies was a result of the spread and enforcement of assimilation and colonization of Native societies, making it harder for the communities to heal and recover. Yet, Silko presents the reader with the opportunity to undergo the transformative process Tayo experiences through Betonie’s Scalp Ceremony. The healing process in the ceremony dictates that humans can recover from the sorrows of the many negative forces of the modern period by relying on self responsibility, sacrifice, and finding balance. Tayo, and the readers, can escape the complexities of the modern period by reading a healing story. Silko uses her role in her community to help others realize that humans have a responsibility to maintain balance with each other and the Earth. 🌍
Works Cited


Identity in Faces in the Moon

By Kenley Patanella

Identity is a concept that involves many personal aspects, including one’s past experiences, heritage, and culture. In Betty Bell’s novel Faces in the Moon, Lucie struggles with identity due to her adverse childhood and complicated family relationships. When she has to return to her childhood home after news of her mother’s stroke, Lucie finds herself in a place of reflection. She struggles with confronting her past, which is shown by using point of view shifts. Once she succeeds in telling her past, she realizes that her family and the oral tradition are important in gaining a stronger sense of identity. Faces in the Moon uses point of view, the importance of family, and the oral tradition to depict Lucie’s struggle for and discovery of identity.

The point of view switches throughout the novel to help depict Lucie’s struggle. The novel starts in first person point of view, when Lucie finds out about her mother’s hospitalization and comes to Oklahoma. Returning to her mother’s home causes her to begin recollecting when she too lived there as a child. She acknowledges this part of her past, but when she talks about her childhood self, she refers to her as if she is a different person. She says, “their real companion is Lucie, . . . the child whose place I have taken” (Bell 6), which suggests that she feels that her adult self has merely replaced the child. Lucie does not feel like the same person she was when she was a child, which is shown by the way she refers to childhood Lucie in the third person. According to Meredith, “Lucie, as a child and as an adult, is caught up in abuse and fear in a disconnected way through the first half of the book” (para. 1). The abuse she faced as a child affects the way she sees herself as an adult and in the way she views her child self. The disconnection shows how Lucie feels distanced from her childhood, and with such a detachment from her childhood self, she struggles to confront her past. Bell shows this detachment structurally by switching the points of view between past and present Lucie.

Once Bell begins the story of Lucie’s childhood, the novel switches to third person point of view as Lucie delves deeper into her memories and living with her great aunt. While the third person point of view shows the distance the narrator feels between herself and childhood Lucie, it also allows her to tell the story of childhood Lucie. She faced much adversity in her childhood, and as an adult shut out her childhood memories. Before she was unable to confront her past, but now being back in Oklahoma and facing her mother’s death, she has to. Lucie’s lengthy reflection of her childhood with the use of third person shows how once she finds a way to confront her past, her story becomes easier to tell, aiding in her struggle with identity.

By the end of the novel not only does the narrative voice return to first person, but also Lucie is able to accept her mother and recognize the role that family plays in her identity. As Roberts states, “Grace is the link between Lucie and her past, but she represents a fragile link fraught with memories of abuse, abandonment, and violence” (95). In order to embrace her past in her discovery of identity, Lucie must realize the role that her mother plays in her life. Lucie and her mother have a complicated relationship due to the past and their personal differences, but Lucie spent a majority of her childhood being raised by her mother, which means Gracie was an important influence in her life. Gracie’s influence continues to play a role even in Lucie’s adulthood, which is demonstrated when Lucie returns to Oklahoma due to her mother’s stroke, initiating Lucie’s confrontation of the past and discovery of identity. As Lucie explains, “It takes a long time to remember . . . to make a story. And sometimes it takes a call in the night before the story is known” (Bell 22). The call in the night that she is referring to is when she received a phone call informing her that her mother was in the hospital. Gracie’s stroke caused Lucie to return to Oklahoma, which sparks the story she recalls in the novel that allows her to embrace her past and find her identity. It is only
Through her close reading of Bell's novel, Kenley explains several ways the text demonstrates notions of struggle and identity. She also has a nice writing style, and she makes her points clearly, and I am very pleased to see her take on some complex topics here.

~Dr. Jesse Peters

Identity in *Faces in the Moon*

when Lucie has to return home for the sake of her mother that she is able to find herself.

Lucie is able to reflect on her mother's influence and importance in her life when she finds the journal that Gracie wrote in. The journal starts with a letter to Lucie in which Gracie expresses the love and pride she feels for her. Lucie then reads only some of the pages before burning the entire journal. Seeing her mother's writing gives Lucie the ability to reflect on the hardships her mother had gone through without having a choice. As she watches the pages burn, she states, “I did not hate her then,” just as she did not hate her when she recalled listening to her mother’s stories (Bell 185). Lucie finds admiration and love for her mother most strongly through her storytelling, and Lucie preserves her mother’s influence as a storyteller in the oral tradition by burning her written stories. Lucie’s desire to preserve her mother’s oral tradition shows that she accepts her mother’s influence in her life, specifically as a storyteller.

Embracing her mother as an influence through means of the oral tradition aids Lucie in finding her own identity through storytelling. As she recalls the story of living with her great aunt, this flashback turns into a main plot line of the novel. In facing her struggle with identity, her recollection of memories creates her story and “Lucie takes on the role of the storyteller in the narrative” (Roberts 96). Lucie embraces her role as a storyteller in a scene near the end of the novel. After learning of her mother’s death, she sits at the kitchen table, smoking her mother’s cigarettes and using her aunt’s lighter. The kitchen table is where they would always share stories, and sitting at this table, using her mother’s and aunt’s materials represents how she has become one of them—a storyteller. The symbolism that Bell uses with the burning of the journal and the kitchen table demonstrates how Lucie is able to understand the role her mother played in her life and how she identifies, like her mother, as a storyteller.

Another aspect of family that is crucial in Lucie’s fight for identity is connecting to her family heritage. When Lucie lived with her great aunt Lizzie, Lizzie told her much of the family's history, especially about Lucie’s grandmother, Helen. Lizzie also often suggested that Lucie and Helen were very similar. Once when describing Helen, Lizzie said, “She knew who she was” (Bell, 123). The resemblance Lizzie saw between Helen and Lucie demonstrates that Lucie has the potential to have a confident sense of self, just as Helen did. In learning about her grandmother and family history, Lucie is able to know about where she comes from and can find inspiration from her heritage to be confident in who she is.

Lucie’s confidence in identity is demonstrated strongly in the final scene of the book, when she is in the Oklahoma Historical Society room. After remembering how her great aunt Lizzie taught her about the family’s history, Lucie “weaves together strands of family history and racial heritage in an attempt to construct a coherent sense of self” and goes there to prove that her grandmother’s father existed (Sanchez). She faces a conflict with a man working there, who smirks at her confusion at the question, “Who do you think you are?” (Bell 191). She responds aggressively and states her lineage, which includes those most influential—her grandmother, her great aunt, and her mother. Her confident answer to who she thinks she is includes listing those from her past, indicating that she has discovered the connection of her identity and her heritage.

Betty Bell’s *Faces in the Moon* shows Lucie’s struggle for and discovery of identity. The novel uses point of view switches to depict her detachment from the past and her need to confront it. The return to first person point of view shows that Lucie is able to accept her past, and in doing so is able to realize her identity. The novel also emphasizes the importance that family plays in one’s identity, and how the oral tradition can be used in finding identity. Lucie faces her mother’s death and realizes the influence that her mother had in her life, especially as a storyteller. While recalling a story from her past, Lucie reconnects with her childhood self and finds her role in the family as a storyteller. She also embraces her family heritage, and by the end of the novel is confident in herself and where she came from. The novel demonstrates how one can regain a sense of self after reflection of adverse times.

**Works Cited**


In the early 1990s I can remember watching a movie with my mother entitled *Fried Green Tomatoes*. As a child I did not remember details about the film, just the basic storyline. As an adult it became one of my favorite films as a Southern woman. When going through the list of films for this class I was surprised to see it listed as a religious piece. This piqued my interest and the next chance I had I sat down and watched a film I had seen twenty or more times with new eyes. In this research paper I will analyze the religious references and the blending of religion and culture in this film.

*Fried Green Tomatoes* is a film directed by Jon Avnet and based on the novel *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café* written by Fannie Flagg. The film tells the story of Evelyn Couch, a lonely housewife who by chance meets Ninny Threadgoode while on a visit to a nursing home to see her husband’s aunt. The two form a friendship as Ninny recounts the story of Idgie Threadgoode and Ruth Jameson’s life during the 1920s in the town of Whistle Stop, Alabama.

When analyzing this film we must take into account the setting of rural Alabama during the earlier part of The Great Depression. Culture for women during this time still centered around being a wife, a mother, and serving God. According to *The Great Depression: The Jazz Age, Prohibition, and Economic Decline, 1921-1937*, the majority of American women still held conventional ideas about marriage. Divorce became more common in the United States, but it was still very rare. Most people still considered divorce as a serious source of shame (Bingham 2011, 11-12). When watching *Fried Green Tomatoes* it’s easy to see some of these cultural values in place. Ruth, in one scene, states that she is always doing what she is “supposed” to do. This includes marrying the man she is “supposed to,” that man being Frank Bennett. After marring him, he becomes abusive and Ruth, being the good wife, hides the abuse and even turns away Idgie’s visit for fear of what he may do.

During this time period, according to one source, the rebellious women wore short skirts, had their hair cut in a bob, and shocked the older generation by smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, and staying up late (Bingham 2011, 11-12). This sounds similar to the character of Idgie. She defied the cultural norm of long skirts and lady-like attire by wearing men’s clothes throughout most of the film. Idgie also enjoyed drinking and hanging out late at the local river club with the people who are “not church going folks” (Flagg 1991).

The relationship between Ruth and Idgie is blurred between that of best friends and that of lovers. Ruth is the only book in the Bible that discusses female “friendship” (Reinhartz 2003, 54). The use of the Book of Ruth is apparent in this movie. The most obvious example is Ruth’s name. The next use of the Book of Ruth can be seen when Ruth’s mother dies. Ruth sends an obituary to Idgie showing her mother’s death. She also sends a quote from the Bible’s Book of Ruth: “Whither thou goest, I will go. Where thou lodgest, I will lodge. Thy people shall be my people” (Flagg 1991).

Other comparisons to the Book of Ruth are the age differences between Ruth and Naomi, and Ruth and Idgie. Naomi and Ruth are separated by a generation (Reinhartz 2003, 64). In the film’s opening flashback we see Ruth flirting with Buddy, Idgie’s older brother. Adolescent Idgie and teenage Ruth are obviously separated by a few years of age. Another comparison of the two stories lies with the loss of loved ones. Buddy, the love interest and older brother, is killed in a train accident, leaving a void for both women. Ruth gives birth to Frank Bennett’s son, whom she names Buddy Jr., symbolically restoring the void in their lives. Naomi has lost her sons and husband and it is Ruth’s birth of a child that fills that void.

If we dig deeper into this subject we can find many scholars have thought Ruth and Naomi from the Bible to be a lesbian couple. When referring to...
Lacy takes a favorite film of hers and finds religious references and concerns as well as filmic and cultural values that the average viewer—including herself in her many previous viewings of this film—fails to consciously notice. In the process issues of race, class, and gender come into view, including the controversial issue, at least when the film was made, of whether the intimacy between female leading characters might involve a sexual relationship.

--Dr. David Nikkel

Fried Green Tomatoes

queer biblical scholars, “all seem to agree, however, that the Ruth-Naomi relationship offers a powerful biblical example of same-sex intimacy” (Masenya 2012, 50). In the Bible Ruth chooses to cling to Naomi, whereas in the film Ruth clings to Idgie. “Both the biblical book and the film are clearly open to lesbian interpretation; they are just as open to other interpretations as well. In both cases, however, the possibility of a lesbian reading does not rule out or override the fundamental emphasis on profound friendship as an element both in sexual and non-sexual relationships between women” (Reinhartz 2003, 65). This statement by Reinhartz is evident in the relationship between Evelyn Couch and Ninny Threadgoode, as well as with Ninny and her devotion to Mrs. Otis.

From the Bible itself, one can see the striking comparison of Ruth and Idgie to Ruth and Naomi’s relationship. In Ruth 4:16-17, Ruth gives birth to a son and Naomi cares for the child. “And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it. And the women her neighbors gave it a name, saying, ‘There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed; he is the father of Jesse, the father of David.’” In Fried Green Tomatoes, Ruth gives birth to a son and Idgie is charged with raising Ruth’s son, Buddy Jr., just as with Ruth and Naomi from the Bible.

When Fannie Flagg was asked about the nature of the relationship between the two women, her response was, “Well, I’m not sure [about the sexual link between Idgie and Ruth]. Those were innocent times in that part of the world and . . . I’m not sure people knew the word ‘lesbian.’ Maybe they didn’t have a name for the girls, and maybe it doesn’t matter.” The actresses seemed to have differing perspectives on their characters as well. Mary-Louise Parker, who played Ruth, stated “I do think things are stated between the lines. It was obvious why it wouldn’t be in the movie—it’s completely obvious!” Mary Stuart Masterson defended her character by saying, “Whatever you think their relationship off-screen is, it’s up to you. The way she dresses doesn’t mean she’s gay. She just doesn’t feel like being a conventional stereotypical female in the eyes of society at that time because it wasn’t her. But I don’t think that’s even a relevant issue” (Berglund 1999, 142-143). The question of whether or not the two women are involved in a same-sex relationship is avoided by all except Mary-Louise Parker, who hinted that the real reason for the blurred lines on this topic came from the desire for a box-office hit. According to Berglund, money was at stake and in interviews the filmmakers and actors wanted to “have their tomatoes and eat them too by continually shifting the parameters of the film’s meaning” (Berglund 1999, 147). The film, having been adapted from Flagg’s novel, leaves many important moments between Idgie and Ruth out. In the book, on the day Ruth leaves town to marry Frank, Idgie says to Ruth, “oh no you don’t [love him], You love me . . . You know you do. You know you do!” (Flagg 1990, 70). After reading Miles’ chapter on homosexuality and film, it is clear to me this film was made in search of box-office success and avoided depicting an open lesbian relationship.

Another religious aspect is that the Bible shows up over and over again within the film through the quotation of passages or direct reference to the Bible itself. Films set in the southern United States often portray characters that attend church, cite the occasional biblical passage, and interact with clergy (Reinhartz 2003, 57). God is referenced many times in Fried Green Tomatoes. As we are introduced to the Threadgoode family, Buddy consoles his little sister, Idgie, with a story about God and the oysters. “All the millions of oysters in the sea, God comes along and he sees one and says I’m going to make that one special. He puts a little piece of sand inside it and it turns into a pearl.” Idgie then asks, “What if God made a mistakes?” Buddy replies, “Well the way I see it he doesn’t makes mistakes. He made sure we got together didn’t he?” Religion and God are used as a source of comfort and understanding here. This was and is a common theme within Christian culture. God is commonly used as a source of comfort and explanation when people find themselves in distress. Within the next few minutes of the film, God’s word is used again when Buddy is killed. At his funeral the preacher reads Psalm 23, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” This psalm is often recited as part of the funeral liturgy or by characters facing mortal danger or death (Reinhartz 2003, 58).

Representing the clergy in this film is Reverend Sproggett. Ruth and Idgie’s mother attend his church. Idgie is depicted as the rebellious one who refuses to attend church and pokes fun at the reverend. In one scene, the church sign says, “Why did Noah let two snakes on the boat, when he had a chance to get rid of them once and for all?” (Flagg 1991). He shouts, “snakes and serpents take many disguises,” as Idgie rides by and shouts back to him, “finally preaching about something you know about!” She also refers to the people who attend church in an earlier scene as the “same people over at the river club doing anything but praying.” The reverend preaches about temptations of the serpent, and insinuates that Idgie is one.
of those members in their society. Ironically, later in the film during Frank Bennett’s murder trial, he lies to save Idgie. Nobody will dispute the preacher, so he swears upon a copy of Moby Dick instead of the Bible while providing her alibi, and the case is dismissed. He does this in exchange for Idgie to come to church in order to save her, just as Noah saved the serpents. Idgie replies to the exchange, “I don’t know what’s worse, church or jail.”

Religion can also be used as a crutch in Southern culture. In Fried Green Tomatoes, Ruth prays for comfort while dealing with the violence her husband Frank subjects her to. When she gives birth to her son, she speaks about God and praying. Ruth says, “I remember I would have the same reaction after Frank would beat me . . . thanking the Lord for giving me the strength to take it.” Then she goes on to say, “But if that bastard ever tries to take my child, I won’t pray. I will break his neck.” It is striking that she would make such a bold claim as to pray for her own strength to endure a beating, yet not rely on God to protect her son. In so many films that are based in the South, cultural aspects like conventional marriage and the man being the head of household are portrayed. This film supports these cultural norms in some ways and defies them in others. During the time period in which this film is set, blacks and whites are divided. Idgie goes against the cultural norm and serves food to colored people. She also goes way beyond that and lives with them as family, shunning her own middle class white family.

Idgie makes me think of Tillich and his ways of looking at religion. Tillich talked about the moral function of the human spirit. Idgie was a far cry from a religious woman, nor would I describe her as close to God. She was, however, the perfect example of how someone who was not necessarily close to God could choose to be moral and good. God’s spirit was in her and she didn’t even have to try. Idgie was the person who broke into a boxcar and handed food to the poor. She did this not because she was religiously inclined to, but because her moral compass led her to believe in helping others.

One final aspect of culture found in this film is the treatment of African Americans. This film depicts a white world with African American characters playing the help, a world that may seem to be exaggerated by overly racist characters. Taking into account the film was set in the South during the early 1900s, though, this may have been the true experience for African Americans. The characters of color in this film, such as Sipsey and her son Big George, live apart from the white characters and remain in servant roles throughout the film. Racial stereotypes of African Americans have continued to play a role in American culture. “Extraordinarily sensitive to, and reflective of, popular attitudes, films have mirrored racism in society” (Miles 1996, 118).

Sipsy’s famous line, “The secret’s in the sauce,” is a reference to the murder she and Big George committed in order to protect Idgie, Ruth, and Buddy Jr. This line was used in the marketing of the film, elaborating Sipsy’s wit and courage. However, Sipsy was still just the help at the end of the day. In Seeing Is Believing, Miles discusses another Hollywood film, The Long Walk Home, “which despite her [Odessa’s] dignity strength and courage her character never departs from a stereotypical representation of African Americans, the Mammy” (1996, 123-124). This could not be more true of Sipsy’s role in Fried Green Tomatoes.

Sipsy and Big George are the actual heroes of the film, saving and protecting the two white women who play the central characters. Keeping with the Hollywood box-office goal of a hit film, Idgie, the white character, becomes the hero by going on trial to protect her two African-American servants. This film also minimizes African American oppression by allowing exaggerated characters to use racial slurs and protest African Americans being served at the Whistle Stop Café. Our heroines Ruth and Idgie are kind to the help, allowing them to eat in the café, in contrast to those who mistreat the African American characters of the film.

In conclusion, this film has been a true eye-opening experience for me. So many times I sat down in front of the television and mindlessly watched these characters. After this religious and cultural examination of the film, there is so much more to be said about Fried Green Tomatoes. It is a film about relationships, the Bible, racism, secrets, and so much more. After my analysis of this film, I believe that it is the hidden meanings and undertones that make this film great. Maybe it’s the undefined love between two women, the secrets among friends, or the hidden story of Ruth that speak to audiences. So I close with Sipsy’s famous words and motto of the film: “The secret’s in the sauce.”

Bibliography


