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Pentangle's History

Pentangle is NKU's student-run journal featuring essays pertaining to all areas of literary studies, including film and other media.

Pentangle's name alludes to the famous image in the Middle English poem, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, where it is a symbol of truth and perfection. The journal seeks to highlight excellence in academic writing and scholarship.

Submission Guidelines

Pentangle solicits submissions of critical essays pertaining to all areas of literary studies, including essays on film and other media. Book reviews should be for books written in the last two years. All submissions must be in MLA format (8th ed.) and typed in Microsoft Word. Submissions should be at least 500 words and no more than 8000 words. Please email all submissions to pentangle@nku.edu. When submitting manuscripts, please include a brief biography and contact information.

Editorial Policy

The editors reserve the right to edit submissions for grammar and punctuation. Editing may also include revisions to thesis statements and transitional sentences as well as other changes that clarify the work. The editors will work diligently to ensure that the integrity and intent of the author's work is maintained.

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Editor's Note

Dear Readers,

It is our honor to present you with the tenth edition of *Pentangle* magazine. *Pentangle* is NKU's student led literary journal whose intent is to elevate excellent writing.

We are proud to continue the work done in previous editions and celebrate a decade of student writing. This edition continues that tradition with a variety of topics covering issues of race, sexuality, and modern social media use. We also include a special topic of "Film Analysis." We think the engaging writing and varied topics will present something of interest to all readers.

We want to thank all the contributors who offered submissions. This journal would not be possible without them. We are excited to present their creativity and hard work to you. We also want to thank our faculty advisor Dr. Gazzaniga for providing us with advice and support in the process of compiling this edition and congratulate her on becoming the new chair of the English Department.

We are very excited to bring these works to you. We hope you enjoy!

Sincerely,

The Editors

Isabel duBarry and Gen Blasi

Power in *When Winter Come: The Ascension of York*

Ezra Knapp

When Winter Come: The Ascension of York by Frank X Walker is a book of poetry focused on the life of York, the enslaved man who accompanied Lewis and Clark on their expedition out west. These poems show the audience York's multitude of new experiences throughout this expedition, one of the most notable being how he is given snippets of freedom and power during their journey. While these small moments of power might seem like a positive experience, they are an abuse of Lewis and Clark's power, showing how they truly view York as nothing more than property, and will just as quickly take that power away from him.

Through my research, I have discovered a massive detail that was not addressed in *When Winter Come: The Ascension of York*: York and his parents were enslaved by the Clark family long before the expedition, and York became a personal attendant to Clark as they grew up. While Walker does not mention this in the "Introduction" of the book, it is clear this previous connection between the two shows a harsh betrayal when York is not granted freedom upon returning home.

To give background on York and Clark's relationship before the expedition, York and Clark were almost the same age. Old York and Rose, York's parents, were enslaved by John Clark, William's father, and upon having children the same relative age, decided that York would become Clark's personal attendant. Since he was young, York accompanied Clark everywhere he went. Not only was York chosen for the expedition because of his skills, but also to act as a symbol of consistency and comfort for Clark (Davis, "York's Early Life"). Taking York on the expedition could have solidified two contradicting ideas: the idea in York's mind that he was being given special treatment, and the idea in Clark's mind that York was his property and was only accompanying him for his convenience, not because he favored him. These contradicting ideas set up a complicated return from the expedition, with York expecting freedom for himself and his family to be waiting for him, which was not granted by Clark.

York's assumptions are only solidified because he is given a taste of power and allowed to fully explore what that means for him. As an enslaved man, empowerment is something that he would not have experienced to this extent until now, making it a particularly important and memorable

event. Throughout the expedition, he is allowed to take a Nez Perce wife and "reserve" her for himself, the first time that he was able to guarantee that his wife would only have relations with him. His Nez Perce wife introduced him to freedom and happiness that he could not experience with his enslaved wife back home. His time with his Nez Perce wife also brings to light the power of a name in indigenous cultures. Mentioned in the poem "In the Name a the Father" York mentions how the expedition names islands and rivers, even naming some after him, without stopping to think if they already had names. The river's previous names being written over may have seemed a minor detail to the members of the expedition, but it was a major act of colonization.

Early in the book, York speaks on a lesson he was taught by his father about the power of names in the poem, "The Melting." Walker wrote,

> He says one a the tricks used
> to make a man a slave
> an kill his language
> be to take away the name
> he call hisself (6)

This poem indicates that York would have had previous knowledge of the power of names, but that does not mean he took it seriously or remembered this lesson by the time he went on the expedition. Although there is no mention of the changing or removal of names of any indigenous groups that the expedition runs into, it was frequent practice for the native peoples to be given colonized names that were deemed "easier" to remember. As Rashid explains:

> "By giving Anglo names to indigenous peoples, the policy erased the cultural significance of names, thus excluding their histories from public records. Forcing the name change was also an attempt to disrupt the relationship of the individual with their clan which consists of an extended family, but also a way to break the relationships between humans and nature. The renaming was aimed at "civilizing" the indigenous peoples and bring them in harmony, not with nature, but the capitalist centralizing system typified with clear boundaries and ownership rights on land, resources, and the environment" ("What is in a Name," 2022).

Both the overwriting of the names of the rivers that the expedition encountered and the frequent practice of giving indigenous individuals colonized names that were "easier" to remember were harmful acts that propelled the overall colonization of the indigenous groups living in America. This is also why Walker has not been told York's Nez Perce wife's

name; it is an attempt to retain the cultural significance of who she was.

York experiences power through his Nez Perce wife and her Indigenous culture, but also experiences power through the skills that originally made him an attractive addition to the expedition. Throughout the journey, he is treated as an equal by Lewis and Clark and by the other expedition members. His ability to contribute during the journey encourages the others to see him as one of them, rather than a slave who was dragged along. While this would be viewed as a positive change from being treated as property, it was a backhanded action, making the fact that York was not deemed a free man by the end of the journey a painful pill to swallow.

The decision at the end of the expedition to not free York comes as a shock to him because of his previous bond with Clark. York's family was enslaved by Clark's family, and even though he was technically a slave, the fact that he was described more as Clark's personal attendant means he saw more freedom than typical slaves of the time. York had a connection to William Clark, and while the extent of their companionship is unclear, it would be a reasonable assumption that York believed that he was favored by Clark. Throughout the book, York frequently switches between referring to Lewis and Clark as "Capt." and "Massa." The switches match the tone of the poem; if Lewis and Clark are treating York as an equal and allowing him power and freedom then he calls them captain; however, if they are acting harshly towards him then he calls them master. "Brotherly Love" is written from the perspective of Clark's siblings, watching the crew return from the expedition and making note of York's behavior. "Somewhere out there he forgot his duties as a slave. / He took advantage of our brother's weakness / for him and set a terrible example for the others." (Walker 93). Clearly York was treated as an equal during the expedition for him to return already acting as a free man, and this line confirms that Clark did treat York better than the other slaves his family owned. The combination of York's freedoms during the expedition and his favored treatment before leaving shows that York had a reasonable explanation behind his assumption that he was going to be granted his freedom upon returning home.

In contrast to how York views Lewis and Clark, they have confusing opinions of him throughout the expedition. Lewis does not have any poems written from his point of view in the book but seems to have an indifferent opinion of York through snippets of his behavior explained in other poems. Clark, on the other hand, has contrasting views of York. In one poem, he mentions how he loves all his slaves and in another poem will refer to York as nothing more than a business opportunity or piece of property. In "Master of His Own Domain," Clark states how he does see York as a rational business decision rather than a person. "Others think me cruel for

not granting manumission / to my boy, York, but what rational business man / would cut a hole in his own purse?" (Walker 88-89). From an outside perspective, Clark was honestly friends with York, and genuinely cared for him, but while he might have cared for York in a sense, he demonstrates his belief that York is nothing more than a slave to him multiple times throughout the journey. Another example of how Clark felt about York is the simple fact that he brought York with him. Other members of the expedition were chosen with care; Lewis and Clark searched for young men who matched the skill sets they needed but also ensured that all the men were unmarried (Davis, "York's Early Life"). While this allowed them to remove all sense of guilt when brutally raping multitudes of people during their journey, it was a choice made from a place of consideration; Lewis and Clark did not want any of these expedition members to die and leave their families and wives behind. York was not shown the same consideration. He was very publicly married and was still taken on the expedition, showing Clark's disregard for York's personal life and the impacts this journey might have on his family back home.

With York viewing Lewis and Clark as equals that genuinely valued him, and Lewis and Clark not caring for him in the slightest, there was bound to be a moment where the harsh reality was revealed to York, which occurs when Clark does not grant York his freedom. York is led to believe that he will return home a free man due to the freedoms and power he is granted during the expedition, but Clark reveals in his poems that it was never his intention to free York. As mentioned previously, York receiving the freedom and power to act as a free man during the expedition is something monumental to him, but it is just an average day for both Lewis and Clark. They are both accustomed to the power that they hold and having power over others that they can grant or remove on a whim. In "Five Things I Don't Know" Clark expresses his confusion over York's assumption that he would be freed, which shows how Clark is so used to having authority and power that he does not understand why York saw it as such a big deal. As Davis stated, "The two men had been side by side since childhood, had survived great dangers and accomplished a feat of great magnitude together. But the malignancy of slavery stood between them, as it always had" (Davis, "York's Fate after"). York saw the way he was treated during the expedition and concluded that it meant he would be free upon returning home, while Clark knew from the beginning that would never happen, leading York to feel confused and experiencing a betrayal from one of his closest friends.

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The Wisdom of Ambivalence

Harrison Hall

Understanding the narrator's story in *Invisible Man* as a "redemptive" story first requires the reader to identify what sin or what evil has occurred, who has delivered it upon who, and who is responsible for the atonement required of each subsequent redemption. The novel is filled with characters that are hypocritical paradoxes of themselves, openly kind men that speak prejudice behind closed doors, proud Black men that become obsequious in the presence of white men with power, and respectable socialite housewives with racist fantasies of rape and brutalism. If there is to be "redemption" then there are obvious transgressions at the surface to vindicate before focusing on the flawed individuals – if possible: slavery and systemic racism, unabashed public racism, the inability of whites to acknowledge they still perceive Black Americans as tools to be used and not as human beings. All those wrongs are too large for any individual to fix, however. There is no panacea for four hundred years of enslavement and another hundred years of playing in the theatre of freedom, where on paper there is liberty but in practice there are only more polite shackles—shackles whose optics are slightly less unsettling to the self-congratulating white Americans that assuaged their guilt with the thought of personally delivering the Emancipation Proclamation and manumission by hand to each slave in 1865. The narrator only realizes the futility of trying to cure the nation's illness after a series of transformative disappointments, disappointments that open his eyes to the selfish motivations of men that profess interest in the betterment of all humanity. Through this understanding and

transformation, he is redeemed. The narrator sees that it is only through an acceptance of self that he can break the bonds of conformity that every other modal of living had offered him. "But now that I had found the thread of reality," the narrator says, "how could I hold on?"

Dr. Bledsoe betrays the narrator in a way that lingers. It takes him time to come to terms with the insidious nature with which the Doctor climbed the social hierarchy, while also tearing down Black men around him that he deemed unfit or threatening, men that presented themselves as "too black." Dr. Bledsoe was the crab in the bucket personified, pulling down any Black man that came close to escaping the confines of expectation. The Doctor's phony letters of recommendation were particularly painful for the narrator because, "... he was the example of everything I hoped to be: Influential with wealthy men all over the country; consulted in matters concerning the race; a leader of his people; the possessor of not one, but *two* Cadillacs, a good salary and a soft, good-looking and creamy-complexioned wife." And here is the narrator in his naïve youth, more concerned with the materialistic trappings of success than equality or justice. Even as Mr. Norton ostensibly forgives the narrator, Dr. Bledsoe tells Norton, "You can't be soft with *these* people." As if he had transcended his own skin color and was superior to all other Black men. I think it is fair to categorize Dr. Bledsoe as an Uncle Tom, although he retains a position of esteem and power, he leads a double life that denies his own heritage. He holds a bizarre reverence for his antique shackle, a thing that he believes symbolizes progress for Black Americans. The narrator's understanding of his own "redemptive cultural life" eventually leads to his renouncement of this symbol and his own understanding of Dr. Bledsoe as a man. He wore a mask to integrate himself into the throngs of upper-class academia, and in doing so blinded himself to himself. There was no truth left of his being, and the narrator's rejection of this "idol" was integral to his own path to self-discovery.

How the narrator is treated in Chapter 11, following the explosion, marks a pivotal shift in his perspective of the world around him. It is his rebirth. Either the concussive blast at the paint factory, or the subsequent electro-shock has wiped his mind clean. He says, "my mind and I were no longer getting around in the same circles." And we know that it was not only his memory that was knocked loose, but his respect for "powerful" men as well. Through his own existential questioning while coming in and out of consciousness, "What is your name? Who are you? Who was your mother?" He feels that his ego has shifted and altered allegiance, no longer hindered by the guilt of impressing those he had left behind in the South. His part of "redemptive cultural life" here is remembering the feeling of freedom he had in childhood singing the rhyme of Buckeye the Rabbit, that there was a time that he was not held captive by the machine, a time when he had

chosen his own identity and he had been Buckeye. Just before he is released from the electro-shock machine (by being cut from the cord attached to the stomach node – can't have a more metaphoric rebirth than that) he says to himself, "I could no more escape than I could think of my identity. Perhaps, I thought, the two things are involved with each other. When I discover who I am I'll be free." And Ellison is hitting us on the head with the moral. If we are all "cogs in the machine" as Brother Westrum says in chapter 18, then we are not individuals and we are replaceable. But the narrator has divined a new purpose, a new way of escaping the control of the machine that he did not ask to be born into: name yourself. Erica Jong wrote, "To name oneself is the first act of both the poet and the revolutionary," and the narrator seems poised to become both upon his return to the surface.

The narrator ends the novel with a philosophy of resistance through division. Division to him is not accepting any single reality to be the entire truth, it is the understanding that contrasting emotions and experiences are all entities in the "absurd diversity" of humanity. The narrator understands finally that neither blind allegiance to progress nor reclusive, stoic individuality are answers to the question, and that there is not even a question being asked. The best any of us can do is to retain ourselves through honesty and self-assessment, and to help further the betterment of humanity where we can; but only if we are not consumed by the movement in the process. Holding two contradictory ideas in mind at once is a difficult, uncomfortable thing to do, and it is why it pains the narrator to draft his story. But in that uncomfortable acceptance of contradictions, there is an acuity that allows for a fuller, more nuanced understanding of our humanity, and the possibility for us to shed that old skin and grow into something greater.

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Queerness as Commodity in Nikky Finney's *Head Off & Split*

Miki Schutte

According to a 2018 article on NBC News, "Lesbian" was the sixth most-searched term by male users on the world's most popular porn website (Kacala). Further on, the article notes that very little of that lesbian pornography is made by women and, on average, was "very different in terms of content and aesthetic than the films that are made for and by queer women," (Kacala). Why then, is the most prominent representation of lesbian sexuality made by and for men? Where are the honest and beautiful depictions of genuine queer love?

In her National Book Award winning collection *Head Off & Split*, Nikky Finney writes boldly and beautifully about several nuanced topics, including her own sexuality and lesbian sexuality in general. As a Black lesbian writer, she writes extensively about her experience as a gay woman and in this collection discusses it in a double-edged way; she talks about both the negative outward perceptions of queerness and the beautiful bubble of intimacy shared between queer lovers. As the abundance of male-made and male-consumed lesbian pornography proves, lesbian relationships are often portrayed in inaccurate, incomplete pictures. But Finney does not simply despair in this misrepresentation; she writes her own representation, honoring her own experience first. While discussing her sexuality in relation to writing during an interview with The Oxford American, she said, "What I am revealing, what I'm sharing with the world is some kind of activism, but

I don't feel like I have to do it in a way that supports or aligns with anybody else—I feel responsible to myself first. I have to be willing and ready to say the things that I'm willing and ready to say" (Elliot). Honoring this idea in her collection, she explores how lesbian intimacy flourishes and blooms even without external representation and approval. In her poems "Orangerie", "The Clitoris", and "The Aureole" Finney explores the outward ideas of queer sexuality, flipping them inward to redefine her identity on her own terms, utilizing vivid imagery and metaphors.

The poem which explores this theme most extensively is "Orangerie". In the poem, Finney describes lesbian sex through a series of fruit images, comparing herself and her lover to pineapples, grapefruits, and oranges. In the second portion of the poem she writes, "The long twin inches of my hands take the / whole night to ski the two pineapple halves / of you; brown baklava pieces over a caramel / cooler of skin. The monsoon is early" (Finney 54). In describing the act of intercourse, she continually returns to fruit—a consumable thing. This echoes the idea of lesbian sex as an image made to be consumed by men, in service of men's pleasure. But in the first two sections of the poem, Finney does not breach that sacred bond between the two lovers, never venturing outside their bond, never naming any outward entity doing the consuming. Instead, they seem to consume each other. Later, in stanza five, she compares the speaker and her lover to, "Two perfect halves of a pink grapefruit, skinned" (Finney 54). With the comparison to a grapefruit, she calls forth that erotic sensual imagery of a woman's genitalia, something that is, again, often misrepresented in media and even education, as she discusses in her later poem, "The Clitoris".

The third and final section of "Orangerie" marks the moment where the poem shifts to be about more than simple intimacy. Finney incorporates entities outside of these two lovers' relationship, and the poem takes a turn from joy and sensuality to a distant sort of violence as outward creatures and characters try to violate the two lovers' intimacy. She writes, "In the morning the monkeys come to eat / what's left of us" (Finney 55). These "monkeys" come to eat the scraps that remain after they have metaphorically consumed one another, thieving an incomplete picture of their love for their own consumption. Finney introduces a "Bishop", seemingly disapproving of their love, but later on she writes, "He wants one last floating midnight-note to / drop like nine miles of ripe banana down the back / of his throat" (Finney 55). This could imply that he too feels desire for their love, and retains pleasure from experiencing it, even with a facade of disapproval. However, the poem does not end with these outward forces keeping this love from the two lovers, but with the lovers taking it back for themselves, unaffected by their attempts at thievery. Finney ends the poem with, "What assuages

the purple hills all night, all the way / to the tea blue sea, cooling the fruit floating there, / twister of raw sugar, cubed, then row after row, ginger, / grated, peeled, dried, tangling tango of tongues" (Finney 55). She returns to that sweetness, that "tango" between just the two of them, forcing those uninvited guests from the sanctuary of their intimacy.

Further in her collection, in the poem "The Clitoris," Finney discusses the misrepresentation of feminine sexuality by analyzing the way the clitoris is continually disregarded and downsized. She compares it to the continent of Africa, writing, "New studies show / the shy curl / to be longer / than the penis, / but like Africa, / the continent, / it is never drawn / to size" (56). When men are in charge of describing female anatomy, much like when white people are in charge of telling Black history, details are lost, stories are half-told, and experiences are "never drawn to size," as Finney says. But marginalized people can still find joy outside the definitions created for them by others. Finney writes, "In water / desire can rise, / honor sea levels, / ignore land-locked / cartographers" (57). The "land-locked cartographers," the ones who would define a woman's sexuality for her, hold no sway in the waters of lesbian sex and intimacy, where desire and joy do not shrivel to fit into the shape of some crude drawing made by one who knows nothing of a woman's genuine love and sexuality. But even beyond a simple misunderstanding, Finney seems to imply that these "cartographers" try to purposefully hide and misconstrue that pure expression of love; in the fourth stanza, Finney writes, "Mapmakers, and others, who draw / important things for a living, / do not want us to know this" (56). Genuine female pleasure, and the discovery of it, can be the means by which certain men lose power over women's sexual expression. But Finney rebels against that containment of truth, choosing instead to celebrate the elaborate yet simple path towards both lesbian (and feminine in general) sexual empowerment.

Later in the collection, in "The Aureole" Finney takes a turn to discuss external societal expectations, and how they can affect someone's comfort with intimacy. She writes, "If I touch her there everything about me will be true" (46). Whereas in her other poems, Finney seems to defiantly disregard outward disapproval and misrepresentation, in this poem we see that disapproval affect the speaker in a negative way. Beyond unwanted desire and commodification, we see a glimpse of genuine hatred and violence in this poem, and how that hatred hinders a young lesbian's ability to express her sexuality. But the poem still ends in hope, in defiance, when the speaker is, "pulled finally to the high ground / of sweet clover" (47) by an older queer woman, doing her duty to protect queer youth.

Overall, this series of poems, and the collection as a whole, seem to

revolve around the idea of redefinition. Finney asks her readers what it means to have your identity defined for you, and she asks her readers to watch as she goes through the messy beautiful process of defining her identity for herself. In an interview for Tin House, Finney opened up about this idea, and what it means to her to be able to examine the way her various identities have been defined for her. "I've taken a word, opened it up, and stretched it out and not allowed the world to give me the first definition, but allowed my own imperfect self to swim through those waters," (Naimon). In her collection, Finney uses the external, media-made image of a lesbian as a way to inform her own exploration of the term, never letting herself or any partner shrivel into that rigid definition. She does not sacrifice the nuance; she does not cut away the mess and the violence. She refuses to shy from the reality of lesbian representation in media, and instead seizes it with an unrelenting grip, as if to say: yes, my love is made to be consumed, but me and my lover are the only ones who will ever consume it whole.

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Nuancing "no-nuance": Reflections on Genre Theory

Brady Hall

The emergence and subsequent popularization of "no-nuance" posts is seemingly a response to extraordinarily strange circumstances surrounding the time period 2020 through 2021. A continuous stream of similarly unthinkable events created a recurring rhetorical situation which prompted the formation of the genre. People were bombarded by the Coronavirus pandemic, capital insurrection, election tension, murder hornets, protests for racial justice, and a slew of happenings that brought about increased polarization worldwide. That societal divide contributed to a mass feeling of insecurity, effectively forging a desire to safeguard personal beliefs while everything appeared to oppose what people previously thought to be true. Essentially, before the inception of "no-nuance posts," a need for security in belief was evident, and so the potential users and audiences were evoked.

"No-nuance" posts are a simple and easy way to spread ideas that the author or creator does not want to provide any further explanation for. Characteristics include associations with TikTok: being limited to 60 seconds or less, having the sole hashtag "no-nuance" attached, and silencing all audience responses by removing the comment section. All the traits serve a purpose in accomplishing and fulfilling the needs of the users. The worldwide mentality that followed the previously outlined recurring rhetorical situation developed those needs, hence the establishment of the new genre.

Features of the "no-nuance" genre support the intentions of its users by allowing for no elaboration and limiting audience feedback; this was especially made possible on the TikTok platform. TikTok is a social media app most popular with youth, but increasingly seeing users of all generations, identities, and walks of life. Because of the app's favor amongst a wide range of communities and posts being limited to a quick 60 seconds, it became the place where "no-nuance" videos were born and thrived. As they persisted and gained traction, new forms of the genre, such as written posts, emerged, reaching into additional platforms such as Reddit, YouTube, and a host of others. Despite attempts to diverge from TikTok, "no-nuance" posts had become so intertwined with it that other social media apps failed, in comparison, to adequately support the attributes of the genre that had generated so much attention in the first place.

A principal factor in evaluation and analysis of the genre revolves around what its mere existence can say about those involved with it. The series of world crises and its world-changing effects ushered in all sorts of negative emotions and experiences, notably exacerbated by the isolation everyone felt. It follows that in order to overcome that isolation, people would want to engage more with others, but the opposite was accomplished by "no-nuance videos". It almost seems that people value social interconnectedness observably less than their egos and unrelentingly held firm resolutions. The reason for that value partially stems from a widespread sense of insecurity in individuals and, further, larger communities.

The sole hashtag "no-nuance" being attached to the posts became a defining feature. The importance of hashtags, though often underestimated, is great; they work in tandem with the video-allocating algorithm in distributing media the viewer is likely to interact with. Echo chambers, or communication systems closed from rebuttal and lacking outside perspectives, are, in part, created by usual hashtag combinations that are typically employed in targeting specific audiences. Because "no-nuance" posts often don't contain unique hashtag combinations, they garner attention from people who may not engage with similar content regularly.

In the beginning stages of the genre, light-hearted opinions and jokes dominated the videos being sent out. The insignificant posts, such as which ice cream flavor they like best or whether dogs or cats are superior, did not incite much frustration; in short time, evolution into the social and political sphere took hold and popular topics of debate such as abortion, racial equity, LGBTQ rights, and other polarizing issues became a staple subject of argumentation. Expectedly, people were upset by the unfamiliar content on their pages, but with no immediate outlet to direct their opinions, as a result of the removed comment sections, they had no way to make counterarguments.

An obvious benefit to lacking a comment section might be making audiences think over whatever was said rather than remaining firm in all of their beliefs and inevitably going to meaninglessly bicker. On the other hand, harmful rhetorics can be, and were, pushed without any backlash. The silencing of all audience interaction and response leaves the creator or author in an unopposed mindset, subtly affirming their notions for everyone involved. Similarly, uneducated audiences are given no space where alternative viewpoints might be elaborated on, and thus are left without appropriate clarification. That unchecked flow of potentially deleterious content becomes a festering wound worsened by absorbing outside deception. The mainly young TikTok demographic, then, was put at risk of internalizing ideologies present in unfiltered videos, effectively perpetuating harmful ideals or beliefs that might not merit a place in public discussion. This, although accomplishing a motivation of the genre's users, emerged as a dangerous slide by which many ignorant people were carried. The Harvard Political Review detailed, in "The Dangerous Subtlety of the Alt-Right Pipeline" the extent to which radical partisans used this time to construct a public identity that vulnerable youth might relate to. In the digital age, information is readily available with a quick internet search, but as a result of the vast and intimidating quantity of information, the majority of individuals do not look beyond the original source of content.

In analyzing the motivations and effects of the genre, teasing out what it says about associated communities, as a whole, becomes possible. The "no-nuance" genre encapsulates, in a microcosm, the frustration, anger, insecurity, and fear brought about by a rapidly changing world. As this state of reality continues, interaction with and use of the genre will likely persist or conceivably lay the groundwork for a new genre that might take place. Likewise, when people cease to use it anymore, that too could reveal a valuable sentiment; hopefully that sentiment will be joyous marvel at what was overcome, or at least be more positive.

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"Septimus Consults the Soothsayer": A *Stardust* Scene Analysis

Lisa Kuhn

When one watches a film, subtle details of the scenes may seem incidental. This is rarely the case. Almost every aspect of each scene is carefully planned, from the dialogue to the camera angles and the set lighting. If a viewer is clever enough, they may even find smaller details that point to the rest of the plot. The 2007 film adaptation of Neil Gaiman's novel *Stardust* is no exception. Director Matthew Vaughn crafted a film that, although somewhat different from the novel, remains true to the heart of the story even in the minor details. In the specific scene where the character Prince Septimus consults a soothsayer, there are many strategically placed layers that reveal the true nature and purpose of Septimus and his rival, the witch queen Lamia.

According to the Internet Movie Database website (IMDb), *Stardust* was filmed all over Britain and, for the scene in question, at both Isle of Skye and Iceland. It premiered in North American theatres in August of 2007. The $9,169,779 it earned on opening weekend was a disappointment for the $70,000,000 estimated budget. Despite an underwhelming debut, the film went on to earn $137,515,140 worldwide, as well as 11 nominations and five awards, including a Hugo Award for Best Presentation in Long Form. This beloved underdog film stars Claire Danes as Yvain, Charlie Cox as Tristan, Mark Strong as Septimus, Michelle Pfeiffer as Lamia, Jason Flemyng as Primus, and Robert De Niro as fan-favorite Captain Shakespeare. The plot

follows Tristan, a smitten young man who rashly vows to bring home a fallen star to win the heart of the lovely Victoria (Sienna Miller). Much to his surprise, the star turns out to be Yvain, an injured and distressed woman who was knocked out of the sky by a flying ruby. The stone in question is being sought by brothers Septimus and Primus, who need it in order to prove their worth as the next king of Stormhold. Meanwhile, Lamia seeks Yvain for her heart. She and her sisters plan to cut it out and eat it in order to restore their youth and beauty.

The scene examined in this analysis begins with Septimus standing on a beach. He is vexed by the misdirection of a soothsayer traveling in his company. The soothsayer claims to merely be relaying what the runes have revealed. Septimus, suspecting something, cheerfully tells the soothsayer to ask a few more questions. The answer to the pivotal question, "Do you work for my brother?" confirms his suspicions. He kills the soothsayer, then consults the runes himself for directions. The scene transitions to Lamia consulting her own runes.

The first noticeable thing is the scenery in which we find the characters. Septimus stands on a sunny beach dotted with slabs of ice as rocky cliffs loom in the distance. Waves crash against the shore and winds buffet him. Lamia, also blown by a gale, stands beneath dark clouds on a moss-covered cliff. A lake lies at the foot of the hills. The different locations share significant features. The rocky terrain mirrors the hardness of the characters' hearts. Both are en route to kill their victim: Septimus is after his last living brother, and Lamia is after the star. The howling winds stand for the challenges laid before them on their dark quests. Water symbolizes fluidity, like that which they both use to trick others for their personal gain. Septimus stands under a bright clear sky, showing that he has no need to hide his intentions from Primus. By the late king's decree, only the last living male heir of the Stormhold bloodline can restore the color of the ruby and become king. Both brothers have the same goal, but Septimus has already killed most of their five dead brothers. Lamia is shrouded by clouds to showcase her necessity for deception. Her beauty is merely a disguise, and she must approach Yvain with a convincing kindness in order to get the full power of her heart. The apparent coldness of both locations lets the viewer know that these characters have little warmth for anybody else.

Camera work tells a great deal about the unfolding of the action in the scene and highlights the building tension. At this point, the movie is only a third of the way complete, so the rising action is still in progress. Both the first and final shot of the scene pan the Icelandic and Scottish landscape, not only displaying majestic scenery, but also telling the audience that the set locations matter to the story. The first close-up is of a backlit Septimus, simmering with controlled rage, as he stares intensely out at the sea while his

men, out of focus, approach him from behind. This reflects both his dark mood and the notion that Septimus is the key character here and that the other characters matter little. This is emphasized by the fact that he doesn't bother to face the other men until about 40 seconds into the scene. He has the majority of the dialogue, and the camera rarely focuses on anyone else's face except his. Even in wide shots, the soothsayer's face is hidden by the angle at which he stands. We only see his face when he responds to Septimus. Whenever the runes are tossed, an elevated shot focuses on the movement and landings, indicating that the resulting symbols are essential to the plot.

There are three significant camera shots that do the most effective work for the scene. The first occurs at 1:33 into the scene; a powerful close-up of Septimus as the runes are falling, soon to reveal treachery. The look of cold certainty on his face is chilling. There is no denying that he will kill the frightened soothsayer. The second and perhaps most impressive shot is a bird's-eye view of the final rune toss. The runes rise towards the camera and out of focus. As they fall, they shift back into focus as black runes landing in Lamia's black-gloved hand. The third shot is a close-up of Lamia as she gazes at the hidden answer, then lifts her eyes with a seductive smile spreading across her face. The transition is masterfully executed and does a beautiful job connecting the two villains. Finally, the scene closes with a wide shot of the witch queen as she turns to approach her cart.

The use of color and lighting here are symbolic. Both villains are swallowed in black, an obvious nod to their status as villains. The soothsayer stands out starkly against the other men in red and orange, a sign that he does not belong. The cliffs surrounding Lamia are verdant green, a color typically indicative of life and growth. Much like her appearance, it is a deception. The green moss belies shallowness, barely hiding the unforgiving volcanic rock beneath. The red etchings on the black runes tell of blood to be shed. Septimus's blue skies and sea point to his royalty. Even the revelation that his favorite color is blue is an important detail. We later learn that the blue-clad slave girl, Tristan's mother, is actually Septimus's missing sister Una. She is the only sibling he erroneously does not view as a threat to his ascension to the throne.

Music plays a part in manipulating the emotions of the audience and telling them what to expect. Ilan Eshkeri (IMDb) composed a fun and engaging score that sweeps each scene with its aural beauty. Stringed instruments creep in quietly, a deep-noted horn carrying the sound from underneath as the scenery comes into view. It fades into the background as dialogue begins. A note of discord faintly shudders as Septimus turns around with a false smile. The bows slice the strings, and a horn blast ushers each fall of the runes. A high note cries shrilly as the audience begins to

realize that Septimus has diabolical plans for the poor soothsayer. Then, as doom approaches, horns bleat out a warning. Finally, the tension breaks and the tempo increase as the action theme plays through the rest of the scene. The music is so fitting because it frames the scene without overpowering the action taking place. It continues playing in one's head long into the rest of the film.

Even the Runes shown in the scene are there on purpose. The runes chosen are of the Elder Futhark in Norse tradition. The meaning of each rune also connects to the situations, goals, and destiny of both characters. This particular set is from Tyr's aett, which "demands mastery of the self and integration with the worlds in order to earn a place among the honored ancestors." (Grove and Grotto) Tyr, the Norse god of war, law, and justice, is an appropriate deity to involve because Septimus and Lamia are both leaders and warriors.

Ingwaz (seed) looks like two V's embracing each other. It means expectation, harmony, unity, isolation, stored energy, and contentment. Lamia and Septimus expect to find Yvain and as a result, find contentment with what they will take from her. Septimus displays stored energy on the beach when he maintains a fairly controlled demeanor. Unity and harmony are not necessarily found among him and his brothers, but there is some shared with Lamia and her sisters. Both are isolated from their families by their choices. Othala (homeland) is shaped like a fish. It means inheritance, ancestral gifts, home and family, responsibility, maturity, and nobility. These themes are prominent, as well as being central to the plot of the story. Even maturity is relevant because although he is not present in this scene, the main story is largely about Tristan's journey into manhood. Othala appears inverted, which can mean the opposite result is to come. The inversion indeed points to the demise of Septimus and Lamia, neither of which earns any inheritance. According to Sofia Visconti in her book Runes, the symbols are sometimes associated with flowers or plants (Visconti 127). It is especially telling that the inverted Othala is associated with the snowdrop, the protection talisman that Una gives to Tristan via his father (Visconti 132). Laguz (lake) looks like a hook. It represents water, cleansing, emotional balance, psychic and sexual energy, and fluidity. The most relevant of these are water and fluidity. Both characters are near bodies of water, reflecting their fluid transition between one identity and another. For Septimus, from prince to king, and for Lamia, from crone to beautiful lady. Lamia exudes sexual energy and utilizes psychic energy through her use of magic. Septimus's psychic energy is expressed through his intimidating presence. Both actors are considered attractive by industry standards, so perhaps that may also contribute to the sexual energy in question. Between the two of them, the prince shows the most outward emotional balance. Finally, we

come to Berkana (birth tree). It appears as a somewhat flattened capitol B and symbolizes birth, renewal, sanctuary, and the womb. Lamia's change of appearance is a kind of renewal. Septimus is of noble birth, but unknown to him so is Tristan. This perhaps foreshadows the later revelation of Tristan being of the Stormhold bloodline through the womb of his mother, Princess Una.

As is shown from close examination, the scene is specifically built both to tell the villains' stories and to tie the scene into the rest of the film's plot. Nothing shown here is insignificant. Even Septimus, named for his place as the seventh son, wears buttons and a waistcoat cleverly adorned with stylized sevens. Matthew Vaughn's talented creativity combined with Mark Strong's and Michelle Pfeiffer's incredible acting skills and Ilan Eshkeri's expert score blend to tell an engaging story that dissects the two antagonists.

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"Made for a Particular Purpose": How Particular Plot Devices Develop Subgenre in Mystery Films

Catherine Ginn

What makes a mystery? Why, the plot, of course – not much mystery in that. By the very definition of the mystery genre, any book or film considered to be a mystery must have a plot that follows a crime (like a murder or a disappearance) from the moment it is committed to the moment it is solved, in which case, there is no more mystery. But what makes the different subgenres of mysteries? What makes a hard-boiled detective mystery . . . hard-boiled? A Gothic mystery . . . Gothic? A cozy mystery . . . well, cozy? For now, there may be some mystery in that, but by the end of this essay – an "academic" mystery, if you will – we will know – at least, we will have a developed and plausible theory. So, to begin, let us go back to the beginning: the plot. This in itself is what makes a mystery a mystery, but there are – in particular – two devices of the plot which, in a mystery film, work together to develop the subgenre: *mise en scéne* and character. To illuminate this, I will describe how *mise-en-scéne* and character work together in the films *The Big Sleep* (Hawks,1946), *Rebecca* (Hitchcock, 1940), and *Murder on the Orient Express* (Lumet, 1974).

Howard Hawks's *The Big Sleep* (1946), based on Chandler's 1939 novel, is categorized as a "hard-boiled detective" mystery and as "film noir." This is a result of the fact that the leading male character – Phillip Marlowe – is a tough, unsentimental, and cynical private

detective ("shamus" as they were typically referred to in the early to mid-twentieth century). These traits result from his career investigating what we can assume (from the effects they had on his personality) were rather disturbing crimes on the streets of Los Angeles. As portrayed by Humphrey Bogart, Marlowe is generally unemotional – only ever displaying the sensation of mild amusement both infrequently and briefly and the emotion of love (for the leading lady) towards the end of the film. The only time outside of this that he seems to show any emotion is shown through the *mise- en-scéne* of his office when he meets with his de facto client, Mrs. Vivian Rutledge. Vivian is the daughter of the man who hired him, his only means of relaying information to his true client, General Sternwood, and the leading lady whom he eventually falls in love with. In this scene, by way of the changing camera angles, we get a reasonably good look at the entirety of Marlowe's office. However, very few parts of this look are in sharp enough focus for us to discern any details. The clearest parts are his desk and the system of square, black, metal filing cabinets behind it. This rather dominating and aggressive background keys us in on some of the more subtle traits of a "hard-boiled" detective, which also helps to develop a "film noir" tone for the movie. While the shape, color, and material of the cabinets hint at the detective's severe and unbending nature, their placement also suggests that he never likes to be far from the information they hold because he is too much of a cynic to trust anyone – even himself – to be able to accurately recall the details of any case he has worked on. Beyond Marlowe's desk and filing cabinets, the only other clear parts of his office are the photographs of a man on a horse and a man in a full police uniform. Based on the fact that he, at the start of the move, does not seem to have anyone – other than his friend and colleague Bernie Ohis – in his life, it is logical to infer that the man in each of these photos is Marlowe himself. The presence of the photos themselves suggests a sense of nostalgia he has for the life he led before he began working as a detective and became so put off by the world. So, we can see how, in the case of *The Big Sleep* (1946), *mise-en-scéne* is used to confirm and further develop character, which is itself what categorizes the movie as "hard-boiled" and "film noir."

The opposite is true for *Rebecca* (1940) (adapted from the 1939 novel of the same, written by Daphne Du Maurier), where it is primarily the *mise-en-scéne* that develops the movie's Gothic element and the characters which reinforce it. This is clear from one of the very first scenes. The film's second scene opens with a shot of water churning and breaking on dark rocks. From there, the shot travels upwards to an unidentified man, clothed in a dark suit, standing at the edge of the high cliff at the top of

the rocks. Here, the shot rests and begins to tighten on the man's face, which seems to show a mixture of horror and sadness (and, perhaps, a slight bit of lunacy). The mixture of emotion and the churning of thoughts that the man is experiencing are foreshadowed by the shot of the water churning by the rocks at the bottom of the cliff, and the breaking of the water on those rocks also foreshadows an upcoming break of the emotions the man is experiencing, and the thoughts he is having. For, soon, a woman comes round the corner of the path leading up to the cliff, spots the man who is standing precariously close to the edge, and – having seen (to an extent) the expression he was making and (much more clearly) the way he was moving closer to the edge – cries out for him to stop. This breaks him from his spell, and a short conversation ensues between them. Once the conversation is over, and the woman has walked away, the shot refocuses on the man's expression, at first a bit muddled, then brightening a bit. Behind him is another shot of the water; however, this time it is from a wider angle, allowing the audience to see the bright sky, the calmer (though not entirely peaceful), and more romantic-looking deeper waters. The man, we are later told, is George Fortescue Maximillian de Winter (commonly referred to as either Maxim or Max), the leading male of the mystery, currently (within the movie) believed to be mourning the death of his wife (who drowned in rough waters). The woman we are never properly introduced to, as she is never actually named, but we do get to know her very well because she and Maxim end up falling in love and getting married. The scene's arrangement, with the woman interrupting his, what we could assume based on the way he was getting closer to the edge of the cliff, dark thoughts, and the surrounding landscape being shown as brighter and more romantic, foreshadows the affect that the woman will have in Maxim's life. The interplay between what is occurring in nature and the weather and what is happening within and between characters witnessed in this and many more scenes to come is just one way in which "the Gothic" element is woven into the plot. It is a common, and often crucial, characteristic of Gothic literature for parts of the story's landscape – often "remote and rugged" and "imposing" – to behave in ways that represent the emotions being experienced by the characters ("Features of Gothic Literature," 2016). Although the behavior of nature and weather that we are shown first in *Rebecca* and the characters which represent other elements of Gothic literary style are not seen until later in the film, it is clear that nature – functioning as a part of the *mise-en-scéne* – primarily affects the Gothic characteristics of the film.

However, the case is once again different in how the cozy element is developed within the plot of *Murder on the Orient Express*, Sidney Lumet's

1974 film adapted from Agatha Christie's 1939 novel. Here, *mise-en-scéne* and character function equally in their partnership to develop the coziness of the mystery. We are – visually speaking – introduced to our main cast of characters almost as soon as the film begins. They all have different interactions with the vendors at the train station and one another before the Express departs the station, creating an even more rich initial setting than that of *Rebecca* and a setting that is extremely more dynamic than that of *The Big Sleep*. Though each character may not be dressed or accommodated as lavishly as the next, they are all wearing clothes that look warm – in terms of both tone and thickness – and comfortable, and all quarters – shared and private – of the Express are decorated in a similarly warm color palette and comfortable fabrics, and they are rather tight. Our primary personal introduction to each character shows us more of who each character is personally. For example, American widow Harriet Belinda Hubbard is a woman who loves to talk. While Swedish missionary Greta Ohlsson may not be speaking for the simple pleasure of doing so, she often says something about God. Signor Bianchi, a director of the train line which owns and operates the Express, is a very excitable and enthusiastic Italian man, and his friend, Belgian detective Hercule Poirot, is much the same. On it goes. As the story goes on – more particularly, as the crime (the murder of a man who claimed he was called Ratchett and was a mass manufacturer of baby food) is discovered and investigated – we learn each character's backstory and experience even more of their eccentricities. Poirot sleeps with a net on his head and another over his upper lip to protect his precisely styled hair and mustache; he responds very dramatically to only mild – however clever – humor (i.e., with a roar of laughter) and delivers information with the same panache. After hearing each individual recount the details of how they spent the night of the murder, Signor Bianchi is utterly convinced that each of them is the murderer. Princess Natalia Dragomiroff, like Poirot, has a very dramatic accent – though Poirot's is Belgian and Dragomiroff's is Russian – and this drama extends to how she presents herself – in terms of both countenance and clothing. Also, in the process of the investigation, we are told two different love stories: that of the Adrenyis and that of Colonel Arbuthnott and Miss Debenham. These all help to endear us to the characters, adding to the warmth and coziness we feel while watching the movie. In the end, the murder is revealed to have been committed by the entire cast (excluding Poirot and Bianchi) as a means of revenge on Ratchett, actually an American mafioso named Lanfranco Cassetti, who is responsible for the deaths of an upper-class family and one of their employees, each of whom was loved, in

some way, by a member of the murderous cast. After deducing this and relaying it to the entire group, Poirot shares that he – much like the audience – is not sure what is the right thing to do because he believes that – however heinous it may have been – the murder was also deserved. This, and all the other details about the characters and *mise-en-scéne* , insert a sense of relatability and – in some ways – calm, comfort, and comedy into the mystery, which causes and develops the sense of coziness the audience feels as they watch.

So, there is the solution to our "academic" mystery. While it may be the plot that categorizes a book or movie into the mystery genre, it is the plot devices of character and *mise-en-scéne* that work together to develop the mystery's subgenre. In *The Big Sleep* (1946), the *mise-e-scéne* helps to emphasize the traits which make Philip Marlowe a "hard-boiled" detective and which – subsequently – make the movie a piece of "film noir" fiction. *Rebecca's* (1940) usage of nature to introduce and reflect the characters' emotions, and foreshadow specific personal experiences, lands it squarely in the Gothic subgenre. And, finally, is it the closeness and comfort of the tight quarters of the Orient Express and the information we are given about the characters traveling on it that gives the audience a cozy feeling when watching *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974).

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Catherine is currently a senior at NKU working towards a degree in English for Secondary Education and History and with a minor in Honors. Her goal is it to one day – hopefully soon – begin teaching a course designed not only to provide high school juniors and seniors with the experience and skills needed to successfully adapt to and perform in a university environment, but to also introduce them to literature that they may not otherwise get a chance to study. In later life, she would absolutely love if she could begin a career curating literary collections for bookstores, focusing mainly on providing the public with the opportunity to experience the wonderful storytelling and poetry found in the literary canons of Ireland and Scotland. Currently, she enjoys reading literature from the aforementioned canons, as well as analyzing the settings and characters in popular films and television series.

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Brady Hall is a sophomore at NKU with aspirations of working at the intersection of law, teaching, and rhetorical study. He is endlessly fascinated by writing's ability to mold perceptions of truth and empower those who use it well. Brady shares his love for reading and writing by promoting literacy as a free tutor for Boone County students and residents who have fallen behind in their studies. If you hear Taylor Swift or Beyoncé playing, follow the noise and you'll find him.

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Harrison is a senior English major at NKU. He can be found most evenings standing over a hot pot on the stove, cooking meals for his friends and family, and listening to the smooth serenades of Nordic black metal. He adores the written word and hopes that his passion for it will someday afford him a career that isn't manual labor. Harrison's son, Buddy, is both his biggest advocate and his reason for working so hard over the last four years to prove his literacy.

Ezra Knapp
Ezra Knapp is a sophomore at NKU and is working toward a B.A. in English with a minor in Women and Gender Studies. They are working toward a micro-credential in ASL and Literature, Inclusion, and Justice. They want to become a College Academic Advisor, hopefully focusing on an English program. They spend the majority of their free time either crocheting, rock climbing, or listening to music 24/7, and are always looking for new music recommendations!

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Lisa Kuhn is an NKU graduate student who is currently set to earn her MA in English in spring of 2023. Two of her critical analyses have previously been published in *Pentangle*, as well as several articles for the online humor journal, *Sneer Campaign* and two poems in The Asburian. She co-hosts the book and pop culture podcast, *The Neverending TBR Podcast*, with her friend and NKU English alumna, Kaitlyn Craig. While Lisa's next career move is to become a famous author, her real goal is to be the next Stevie Nicks. If that doesn't happen, she'll be happy with being a famous writer and hopefully a singer in a band with her future husband (whoever that is). By the time this issue is published, she will finally have a stamp from London on her passport, thanks to Dr. Alberti and his Harry Potter study abroad course.

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