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# PENTANGLE



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# PENTANGLE

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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](mailto: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 ninth edition of *Pentangle* magazine. *Pentangle* is NKU's student-led literary journal whose intent is to elevate excellent writing. With this year being one of the first semi-normal school years since the pandemic started, we wanted to celebrate by presenting to you a wide variety of different essay topics. At *Pentangle*, we believe in the importance of literature and its accessibility to everyone. We also believe in and want to encourage engaging and fun literary study to each of our readers and the community.

This year, each of our submissions offered something different and exciting to the publication. The topics included in this edition range from novels like *The Lord of the Rings* all the way to music icons like Bob Dylan and Dolly Parton as well as many other fascinating topics in between. We as editors really enjoyed getting to work with each of the contributors and getting to know them through their writing. We are very proud of the work that we and each of the writers have accomplished, and we are excited for each of you to experience it.

We hope you enjoy this edition of *Pentangle*.

Sincerely,

The Editors

Kaitlyn Craig, Kristina Hartig, Annalysse Klaber, Alexi Kreutzjans,  
and Zoe Vilvens



# Gender Roles Challenged in Tolkien's *The Return of the King*

Sierra Mitchell

At first glance, the roles of gender in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Return of the King* are seemingly irrelevant. After all, when considering the novel, a concept such as gender or gender roles is not an aspect that immediately jumps to mind, rather images of The Ring, Frodo, Smaug, or even Gandalf do. When reading *The Return of the King*, however, it is obvious that there is almost a complete absence of female characters and an over-abundance of male characters. A point of interest here, then, is that though there is a serious lack of female characters, there is not a lack of femininity and the book itself is not overly masculine. Many of Tolkien's lead characters such as Gandalf, Aragorn, and Samwise take on both masculine and feminine gender roles throughout the novel. In opposition, Eowyn who is arguably one of the most important female characters in *The Return of the King*, portrays masculine gender roles in place of her own feminine roles. Though there are no characters in *The Return of the King* who represent a true form of gender fluidity, it is evident that Tolkien favors a certain balance of traditional masculine and feminine gender attributes in his male characters.

The female characters in *The Return of the King* take on the stereotypical feminine gender roles almost entirely, with only one evident exception, Eowyn. Even with this exception, there is a lack of female representation with the meager number of influential women in *The Return of the King* resting at three with Eowyn, Ioreth, and Arwen. Eowyn's first appearance in *The Return of the King* is when there is friction amongst her and Aragorn, regarding his declaration that her duty is to her people, when Eowyn instead wants to take part in battle (Tolkien 47).

The issue here is that Aragorn sees Eowyn as a woman defined by stereotypical gender roles, expecting her to accommodate his wishes and to fulfill to her duty of taking care of the townsfolk. In this situation, Eowyn rejects this idea of being confined by stereotypical gender roles by asserting her desires to fight in battle, a role associated with masculinity. Take for example Santa Claus's bold proclamation in C.S. Lewis' *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, "Battles are ugly when women fight" (105). What makes women in battle so ugly? Feminine gender roles place an importance on women to be passive and nurturing, and the very idea of battle clashes with

these roles. Or, perhaps it is the feminine gender role that women are to be beautiful; therefore, the possibility of them being injured or disfigured in battle is what makes the idea “ugly”. However, as pointed out by Fredrick and McBride, battles and wars are ugly regardless of which genders are fighting (29), and the battle of the Pelennor Fields is no exception.

With Eowyn's revelation that her only fear is to be caged (Tolkien 47) we can speculate that it is not a physical caging in Dunharrow that Eowyn is fearful of, rather it is the constraints of the female gender roles that men such as Aragorn, Theoden, and Eomer are trying to impose upon her. For Eowyn to break the constraints of Aragorn's gendered thinking, Eowyn must suppress her female identity and portray a male, Dernhelm (Fredrick 35). While the male characters can keep their male identity while toggling between masculine and feminine gender roles as we will see later, it seems as though Tolkien struggled with the reverse when it came to Eowyn. This is further proven with the fact that Tolkien wrote and rewrote Eowyn's character, and even at one point writing her as a man (Fredrick 35). Though Eowyn suppressed her feminine gender roles during the battle of the Pelennor Fields, it is her acceptance of her female identity that allows her to defeat the Lord of the Nazgûl. As he exclaims that no man may kill him, Eowyn laughs and in defiance shouts that she is not a man, but a woman, then lands the final “skilled and deadly” blow which defeats the Lord of the Nazgûl (Tolkien 114).

Tolkien did not necessarily have qualms with femininity itself; rather, it seems his issue was with women depicting masculine gender roles. Perhaps he saw women in masculine gender roles as a threat to the role of men in society. After all, during the creation of *The Return of the King* women had begun to take on more roles in society due to World War II (Hatcher 44). This could account for the criticism Eowyn receives from Aragorn in the Houses of Healing. Aragorn compares Eowyn to a white, shapely lily (Tolkien 145); flowers are commonly used in metaphors for women as flowers are beautiful, soft, and delicate; women are meant to manifest these characteristics as well, according to traditional female gender roles. Aragorn takes this a step further by saying though Eowyn is beautiful like a flower, her real wound is not from the Lord of the Nazgûl, but rather an internal, icy one: “a frost that had turned its sap to ice” (Tolkien 145). Women are referred to as icy or cold when they do not show emotion, typically when receiving attention from a male. With this, Aragorn attempts to diminish Eowyn's critical accomplishment and place her back into the female gender role. It is important to consider that in this moment while Aragorn is trying to push Eowyn back into strict female gender roles, he is simultaneously acting out a female role as a male. He is in a



healing position during this criticism, which is considered to be a feminine trait, further showing that Tolkien embraces femininity for men, but not masculinity for women.

Only when Eowyn discards her masculine attributes and fully embraces her feminine roles is she finally considered to be healed. During her time in the Houses of Healing she becomes receptive to Faramir who pities her, and Eowyn begins to embrace her femininity, "something in her had softened, as though a bitter frost were yielding" (Tolkien 256). Once Faramir confesses his love to Eowyn, she sheds the remaining masculine gender roles she had once portrayed and becomes "healed" in doing so, "I will be a healer, and love all things that grow and are not barren" (Tolkien 262). The emphasis on the word grown and barren in the context of Eowyn's healing can be connected to feminine fertility, as women bearing children are able to "grow" and women who are unable to bear children being considered barren.

Though Ioreth and Arwen do not get the type of character arc treatment that Eowyn gets, both of their roles reflect gender expectation, too. During the battle of the Pelennor Fields, all women and children were to be evacuated from Minas Tirith. The only women "permitted" (Tolkien 133) to remain in the white city were those able to heal and tend to the men injured from battle. This situation in itself is heavily steeped in conventional gender roles with the men going out fighting and the women waiting at home waiting to tend to them when they return. We meet Ioreth in the Houses of Healing, where she is first introduced plainly as an "old wife" (Tolkien 138), an allusion to the idiom "old wives' tale". Old wives' tales are stories that are usually oversaturated with superstitions and exaggerated to the point of containing minimal truth. However, in Middle-earth it seems that old wives' tales hold some sort of value since Ioreth mentions the healing hands of a king, and then we immediately see Aragorn healing the injured.

In contrast to Ioreth, Arwen only appears in *The Return of the King* once all conflicts are resolved, and Aragorn is crowned as the king of Gondor. Not only does Arwen exhibit strictly feminine gender roles, but it can be argued that in her case it is more of a role of hyper femininity, since her role is particularly exaggerated. From the previous novel we know that she has chosen to give up her eternal elven life to live a mortal one with Aragorn, and throughout the course of *The Return of the King*, Arwen is entirely absent. With this, Arwen is completely removed from the masculinity of battle and war, having not being involved. This can be seen as being extremely passive, a characteristic of a hyperfeminine gendered role, as it can be assumed that Arwen is simply sitting and waiting for Aragorn – out of sight, out of mind, and being completely preserved. She

appears only when purity has been restored to Minas Tirith, which is when she and Aragorn can then be married, with purity and domestication both fulfilling female gender roles.

All the men who are considered to be successful in their efforts in *The Return of the King* exhibit traits of both masculine and feminine gender roles, whereas those who exhibit strictly masculine gender roles meet their doom. Gandalf, who is successful in his plans to defeat Sauron, is no exception. When we are first introduced to Gandalf in *The Return of the King*, we see him portraying an interesting role for the small hobbit, Pippin. Gandalf keeps Pippin wrapped up in his cloak, with Pippin coming in and out of consciousness, not really knowing what is dream or reality. Pippin is scared and in pain, and Gandalf speaks soft words (Tolkien 3) to him to reassure Pippin that he will be okay. This entire situation can be seen as an allusion to a child in a womb, with Gandalf acting as the mother, taking arguably the most feminine gender role possible. Later, while attempting to offer comfort to Pippin after he pledged his allegiance to Denethor, Gandalf puts his arm around Pippin as an act of physical comfort, and Pippin could see the care, sorrow, and joy (Tolkien 17) in his eyes. Again, Gandalf opts to take the more feminine gendered route by attempting to emotionally support Pippin through these scary and confusing times.

Though Gandalf's portrayal of feminine traits, he is able to aid the healing of Pippin after the negative effects of the Palantir and becomes a pillar of support for Pippin. As Miller points out: "Gandalf... who seem[s] least fearful of these feminine spaces and to best appropriate their power" (147), however, the same could be said about him taking on the standard masculine gender roles. Later, Gandalf is seen getting impatient with the herb-master of the houses of healing: "... 'go and find some old man of less lore and more wisdom who keeps some in his house!' cried Gandalf" (Tolkien 143). In this moment, the gathering of the *asea aranon* or, kingsfoil, is of the utmost importance as Faramir, Eowyn, and Merry are in desperate need of healing. Though Aragorn has politely asked for the herb and expressed the importance of speed in its gathering, Gandalf demands the herb-master go off and find the herb, insulting his relaying of the lore in the process – a trait of hypermasculinity. Gandalf also expresses his masculine gender roles while speaking with the Sauron's herald, the Mouth of Sauron. Gandalf decided that the terms the herald has expressed are unacceptable, so Gandalf takes back Frodo's items by force, with aggression and dominance being the highlighted masculine gender roles.

Aragorn is also a successful man in *The Return of the King* who displays both masculine and feminine gender attributes. Aragorn is known commonly as a Ranger at initially, with the duty of a Ranger being to kill servants of the enemy, whether that be Sauron or Saruman. The conclusive

goal of the Rangers is to protect Mordor, not to obtain power. The creed and actions of Rangers can be seen as a healthy balance of masculine and feminine traits: masculine since they are fighters, feminine since they are protecting. However, this is not truly the first time we see feminine traits in Aragorn. Looking at Aragorn's lineage, there is a hint of Elven blood that runs through his veins (albeit a small percentage, it is there nonetheless). One of the most notable physical characteristics of Elves is their extraordinary beauty, with beauty being a very prominent feminine attribute.

Aragorn again presents traditional masculine gender roles in *The Return of the King* when he is able to command the army of the dead: "... I go to Pelagir upon Anduin, and ye shall come after me. And when all this land is clean of the servants of Sauron, I will hold the oath fulfilled" (Tolkien 53). In this passage in *The Return of the King*, it is discovered that not only is Aragorn using the Paths of the Dead as a shortcut, but he also had another goal in mind – to command an army of the dead to fight against Sauron. His assertiveness and kingship are shown here, both of which fall directly into the masculine category. In the Houses of Healing, we learn that the lore Ioreth's is so proud to repeat, "The hands of the king are the hands of a healer" (Tolkien 138) is not a nonsensical legend, but authentic indeed. Aragorn enters the Houses of Healing and begins his work on healing Faramir, Eowyn, and Merry. Not only is Aragorn the masculine king of Gondor but has the traditional feminine trait as a healer. Aragorn is altogether successful; he gets to marry his waiting bride Arwen and ascends to be the king of Gondor. With the idea of the ruling king of Gondor having masculine as well as feminine traits, it reflects how gender trait balance is important in male characters. Tolkien attempts to make a "change of ideals that dissociate the binary dichotomy men/masculine and women/feminine" (Ruiz 25).

Frodo's most trustworthy companion, Samwise (or Sam for short), is yet another male in *The Return of the King* who successfully incorporates both traditional male and female gendered traits. Similar to the position of Gandalf to Pippin, Sam depicts a motherly role towards Frodo. After Sam defeats the orc Snaga and is reunited with Frodo, he sees that Frodo is in an impoverished state; his clothing has been removed and he is awfully near starving. Sam assumes a motherly role and begins his search of Cirith Ungol with the new goal of finding clothing for the naked and defenseless Frodo, as well as some sort of sustenance: "... but first you want some clothes and gear and then some food... I must go and see what I can find. You stay here" (Tolkien 199). In this moment Frodo is not unlike a baby, as he is defenseless and is unable to do anything for himself. Sam steps up and

wholly embraces a motherly role to ensure that Frodo can receive the basic necessities he desperately needs.

Sam's love for Frodo demonstrates classic feminine characteristics as well. Once the two are reunited in Círiath Ungol they share a moment full of love and tenderness, "he [Frodo] lay back in Sam's gentle arms, closing his eyes... Sam felt that he could sit like that in endless happiness" (Tolkien 197). The gentleness and tenderness of this moment clearly displays traditionally gendered female characteristics. With logic erring on the masculine end of the gender spectrum, Sam demonstrates this with his problem-solving skills. With the ring being too much for Frodo to carry the closer they get to Mount Doom, Frodo gets to the point where he can no longer physically move on his own. Sam knowing that he cannot carry the ring (the mere suggestion would cause Frodo to snap at Sam, something Sam cannot emotionally handle) he offers the next best thing: "I can't carry it for you, but I can carry you and it as well... Sam will give you a ride" (Tolkien 233). This act of problem solving, along with physically lifting and carrying Frodo can both be seen as Sam expressing conventionally male gendered actions.

Not only does Sam offer to physically carry Frodo to his end destination, but Sam offers his physical protection as well. Gollum reappears to the hobbits right as Frodo is nearing his goal, with the intention of taking back the precious ring. Sam, becoming the unconditional protector for Frodo, decides on challenging Gollum directly: "'Now!' said Sam. 'At last I can deal with you!' He leaped forward with drawn blade ready for battle" (Tolkien 237). Not acting out of sheer impulse like he did with Snaga, Sam is deliberate in his physical challenge with Gollum. Full of love for Frodo, and the responsibility he has taken for him, Sam asserts his dominance to Gollum. Near the end of Tolkien's conclusion for *The Return of the King*, Sam takes on the most conspicuous feminine gender characteristic yet: he becomes a symbol of fertility. With Saruman and Wormtongue removed from the Shire, the hobbits can now begin to rebuild. Sam takes the seed and dust given to him by Galadriel and spreads it about the Shire to bring it back to life: "So Sam planted saplings in all the places where specially beautiful or beloved trees had been destroyed, and he put a grain of the precious dust in the soil at the root of each" (Tolkien 330). Not only does Sam represent fertility in the Shire through his gardening, but he fertilizes new hobbit life as well when he and Rosie Cotton decide to have children.

In *The Return of the King*, Tolkien creates two distinct male character types. One of which are the males who embody a balance of traditional masculinity and femininity. In the end, these characters turn out to be the most successful in the novel. The other male character type are males who represent hypermasculinity, who wholly reject all femininity. These

characters, such as Denethor or Saruman, ultimately face destruction in their respective ends. Tolkien's representation of female characters is considerably more involved, however. The breakdown of the female character type is comparable to the male's, as there are two distinct types. There is the female character type who embodies both traditional masculine and feminine gender roles as well as the female character type who embodies hyperfemininity.

In the female character type however, these gender characteristics do not determine success. Arwen, for example, is a perfect illustration of hyperfemininity. She is entirely passive and almost completely missing within *The Return of the King*. As Drout points out: "Arwen remains in the domestic sphere, weaving and waiting" (233). She only makes her appearance in *The Return of the King* once balance and safety are restored, and she returns only to marry Aragon. Eowyn, on the other hand, is a female character that represents conventional male and female gender roles. Though obviously successful in her battle with the Lord of the Nazgûl, she is often pitied for her actions. In the Houses of Healing, Aragorn looks upon her with pity as he heals her. Even as she is being carried from the carnage left behind on the Pelennor Fields, "Have even the women of the Rohirrim come to war in our need?" 'Nay! One only,' they answered. 'The Lady Éowyn is she... we knew naught of her riding until this hour, and greatly we rue it' (Tolkien 119-120). Rather than highlighting her achievements, it seems that men are regretful of her typical masculine actions.

In essence though, the gendered duality of Tolkien's male characters transcends his time. In 2021 it is not at all uncommon to see gendered duality, fluidity, and androgyny in male, female, and non-binary characters. However, in the mid 1950's when *The Return of the King* was published, there was a very clear and unmistakable division between typical male and female gender roles. Tolkien bravely and successfully challenged this belief in *The Return of the King*, showing that men can embrace their femininity and still be a man.

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# **“Savage Servility”: Themes of Greed and Violence in Robert Lowell’s “For the Union Dead”**

Alexi Kreutzjans

Robert Lowell’s “For the Union Dead” is arguably his largest and most unapologetic statement of post-war society and what he seemingly believed to be the widely unacknowledged cost of greed and violence in America. In form, the poet reimagines the standard Eliot-esque method of writing poetry: that is, he places his own self and life within the context of Southern Boston and the apocalyptic qualities of war, but he does this in a manner that speaks to the world at large – not simply his own experiences. In this way, he adopts what might be considered a Wordsworthian approach in this work that expands beyond personal turmoil and, rather, connects it to more universal images that speak to wider audiences. Lowell asserts his political statement that the things one does to save the world may in fact be what destroys it and elicits a double meaning from the idea of freedom in the “power to choose life and die,” which he brings attention to in the tenth stanza.

These complex and revolutionary ideas ring true from the very beginning in the poem’s epigraph, which, though short and maybe simplistic at first glance, asserts a truth that is often misunderstood by its readers. Many times, when considering the Latin phrase “Relinquit Omnia Servare Rem Publicam,” it is the word *servare* that gains attention and misinterpretation, particularly as a supposed cognitive of the verb *to serve*. While this does

comply with one of the most common interpretations of Colonel Shaw as a symbol of free will and heroism, this is arguably a false ideal just as it is a false cognate, and an ironic one at that. William Nelles, author of the journal article "Saving the State in Lowell's 'For the Union Dead,'" comments on the misleading introduction by the epigraph. He states, "(*Servire*, which is the word for 'to serve,' is a derogatory term applicable only to servants. If this term had been used, the epigraph would have been ironic indeed: 'He leaves all to be a slave of the state.')

The idea that Lowell would be advocating an ideal of military service is sufficiently suspect in itself..." (pg. 640). As Nelles goes on to explain, Lowell was imprisoned during his life for refusing to serve in the second World War and abiding by his pacifist convictions. Thus, it is more fitting that the word *servare* should mean "to save," as it introduces Lowell's warning that one's efforts to save the world may be in turn what destroys it. Nelles makes mention of an interview with Lowell in which he says almost those exact words: "My theme might be summed up in this paradox: we Americans might save the world or blow it up; perhaps we should do neither." Rather than a standing and enduring reminder of the brave American hero in his aging monument, Shaw is reminiscent of the old themes and ideals that still endure, which he and his men fought to extinguish. This becomes evident in the first stanzas.

The very first line of Lowell's poem says, "The old South Boston Aquarium stands / in a Sahara of snow now." When condensing the first line to its most raw and forward language, that is, "the old South stands," and combining it with the title, "For the Union Dead," the first line is suddenly reworked into an image of the thing that Shaw and his men died trying to irradicate. As Nelles thoroughly examines in his article, "The ideal the soldiers fought to save, the union of the nation, is dead, and the embodiment of the enemy, the old South, has survived" (641). He then goes on to explain the allusion to the ditches and the spaces that are "nearer," this being racism, which is one of America's largest enemies in history. Like the poem, it pervades and endures with time, never to entirely dissipate, which is a theme that injects itself into the line, "the drained faces of Negro schoolchildren rise like balloons." This is reinforced by the vivid language that follows, such as the descriptions of the children as "drained" and "weakened."

Once more there is imagery of war when relating the line, "the space is nearer" with the nuclear warfare that took place in Hiroshima, in which the mind gives way to haunted images of the mushroom cloud. The events that took place on this day were continuously justified by the president himself, who stated that the atomic bomb was used once so that it would never be used again. In this way, it is not only Lowell himself who enforces these themes of violence and the conviction that it is those who attempt to save



that end up doing the most damage. In other words, the earth is destroyed by those who think they are saving it, resulting in not only the fruitless deaths of soldiers, but the lives and ideas of those that they are supposedly attempting to spare, namely those that were killed in what Nelles refers to as the “nuclear holocaust.” Thus, it is not truly the themes of “self-sacrifice” and bravery that endure according to the poem.

Another way in which Lowell makes implicit the idea that military service abides inherently to the ideals of violence and “potential for destruction” (Nelles, pg. 641) is his description of the Colonel as a soldier who “rejoices” and “waits / for the blessed break.” Such a grand biblical reference suggests Shaw’s approval of the battle and glorification of the slaughter of his own men for the sake of the supposed American ideal. The fact that his men are black suggests that his image of bravery and war conflicts with the grim state of the negro population in Lowell’s earlier reference to the schoolchildren and metaphorical associations of the “balloons” and the “drained faces.” This contradiction is further emphasized when the poet reveals the state of racism in Shaw’s father, who refuses anything other than a grave, where he would be buried well and away from his black brothers in arms. Not only are the soldiers dramatized and glorified in their death, but also in memory. Though half the soldiers had been killed by the second month following the march, they are brought to life by William James, who “could almost hear the bronze Negroes breathe,” not two months later, but thirty-five years. Both Lowell’s depiction of the political and social injustice, as well as ideals of war and service of the time serve as the poet-speaker’s own voice as he not only reflects on his personal past but gives insight into the cultural present. Nelles describes this representation as, “a reading of the poem that not only accounts for the frequently negative tone of the presentation of Shaw and his ideal of service, but also brings the meaning of the poem into line with what we know to have been Lowell’s convictions” (642).

One more contribution to themes beyond imagery in this piece is much of the word choice itself. This can be traced all the way back to the beginning of Lowell’s work when he recalls his days at the South Boston aquarium. The juxtaposition between his boyhood joy of scrambling and fingering the glass in an attempt to immerse himself in the bubbles and the fish with the presently forgotten and desolate landscape, windows “boarded up” and “broken,” amidst the snow drifts creates an initial sweetness that turns sour in the mouths of his readers. Even in the midst of describing the things that once evoked such joy and playfulness for a young poet-speaker, the fish seem to embody a static, grim quality; he states that they are “cowed, compliant.” Moreover, as creatures stuck and confined behind the glass, they are bound for “the dark downward and vegetating

kingdom of the fish and reptile,” which creates for the reader a deep sense of anxious foreboding. Lowell moves forward with his work and the poet-speaker emerges in the present, which author Ron McFarland describes in his article, “For the Union Dead by Robert Lowell.” McFarland makes thoughtful inference on the meaning behind the speaker’s observations, stating, “In the world at hand, he finds that the dinosaurs, in the form of steam shovels, still exist, gouging an ‘underworld garage.’ The ‘heart of Boston’ is being crowded by luxuries in the form of parking spaces, and the Puritan legacy of the ‘tingling Statehouse shakes with the ‘earthquake’ caused by the construction.” Both Lowell and McFarland’s language suggest that the speaker is drawing attention to themes of materialism in the poem, or appearance over true substance. Additional words and images of tingled and tingling (which the latter makes mention of) do even more to evoke the previously mentioned sense of anxiousness and tension. The monument that stands as a symbol of Shaw and his ideals of service stands as a “fishbone in the city’s throat,” which also speaks to appearances as well as the notoriety of the South for its racist qualities, even in the present 60’s. Much like the fish in the aquarium, the Colonel and his legacy of “choice of life and death” are static and “out of bounds.”

Finally, Lowell reverts back to his original tone, reiterating previous ideas and themes. McFarland describes these references as a, “warning against nuclear war and racism, depicting Shaw ‘riding on his bubble’ and waiting for it to pop, and in the last quatrain he indicts the society that he sees as greedy in its desire for luxury cars and insensitive to the value of such an institution as the city aquarium.” Lowell brings his poem to an end by uniting the first and last of major themes: greed and, above all, the physical violence of war juxtaposed with the political, social, and moral violence of racism and materialism. Lowell’s final stanza speaks to this when he states, “The Aquarium is gone. Everywhere, / giant finned cars nose forward like fish; / a savage servility / slides by on grease.” The ingenious phrase “savage servility” is oxymoronic, combining multiple themes and attributes in itself, the “savage” a symbol of war and the “servility” reminiscent of a mundane workday; McFarland uses the example of a salesman, who, though outwardly good and opposite to that of a raging fighter, would inwardly support the racist and battle-hardened ideals of a declining and nearly lost generation.

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## **Audre Lorde and Her Redefinition of Love: “Martha” (1970), “To Martha: A New Year” (1978)**

Hailey Beggs

Audre Lorde was born in New York City to West Indian parents. She had two children with her husband Edwin Rollins, a gay, white man, before they divorced in 1970. She attended Hunter College and Columbia University and worked as a librarian for several years before publishing her first book of poetry in 1968, which gave voice to issues of race, gender, and sexuality. Her teaching experience, her place as a black queer woman in white academia, and her struggle with cancer went on to inform her life and work. It was in her 1970 collection, *Cables to Rage*, that Audre Lorde released her first overtly lesbian poem, “Martha.” This led up to her 1978 book, *The Black Unicorn*, which contained the poem “To Martha: A New Year.” These two poems are connected on the basis of subject matter—Martha, but reveal different explorations within her life and poetry. We cannot assume her poetry is a direct account of her life at the time, but we can assume it captures an essence of what she was going through based upon real events reflected in her life and her poetry.

Lorde’s “Martha” recounts the months of recovery following a past lover’s car accident: “Martha this is a catalog of days / passing before you looked again.” The speaker establishes that the poem is not set in chronological order; “Someday you will browse and order them / at will,

or in your necessities." While it is not in chronological order, the poem reveals information bits at a time until the reader ends with a clear picture as to what has happened. Throughout the poem, different themes and ideas reveal themselves, the most prominent idea being transience love. Transience love is the belief that love for one person only lasts a short time. This is a belief that Lorde holds and is evident from her early poetry. Later in her career, we see this belief dissipate as she brings to light the love she has for Martha in "To Martha: A New Year."

The second stanza takes the reader to a place outside the hospital, a house that the speaker has taken for the summer. This introduces the idea of seasons that is carried throughout the poem. In this stanza the speaker refers to the season of summer, "I have taken a house at the Jersey shore / this summer." It is not until the fifth stanza that the speaker circles back around to the house. The speaker relates her lover's recovery to the second coming of Jesus after he has ascended to heaven, and insists she is "free from that lack of choice / which hindered your first journey / to this Tarot house." It is implied that Martha got into the accident on the way to the speaker's house and the damage done to her memory has freed her from the obligation to be at the speaker's house.

One focus throughout the poem is dialogue. The third stanza describes the state Martha is in, "On the first day you were dead." She goes on to describe Martha's appearance and then ends the stanza with "No words. / No words." Lorde does not disclose who is not speaking, whether Martha is too feeble to speak or if the speaker is at a loss for words. The repetition of the phrase and the line break implies that the lack of words goes both ways, "We scraped together the smashed image of flesh / preparing a memory. No words." This presents the concept of imagining someone as they once were; which in this case the speaker is remembering Martha before the accident. The speaker prepared a memory, but no words came from Martha to reassure the speaker of this memory. The repetition of "No Words" in the following lines implies that the speaker is at a loss for words concerning the situation at hand. The following stanza jumps to the eighth day, "you startled the doctor/speaking from your deathplace / to reassure us that you were trying." This is when the possibility of dialogue is first introduced. It is through the use of dialogue that the speaker expresses the love she once had for Martha:

*I need you need me*  
*le suis Martha I do not speak french kissing*  
*oh Wow; Black and Black... Black and... beautiful?*  
*Black and becoming*  
*somebody else maybe Erica maybe* who sat  
in the fourth row behind us in high school  
but I never took French with you Martha  
and who is this *Madame Erudite*  
who is not me?

The speaker describes the sun setting on her and Martha’s season, “The sun has started south/our season is over.” In this line Lorde uses the concept of a season metaphorically, the season of the speaker and Martha is over. Later in the poem the speaker touches back on this concept, “We have loved each other and yes I hope / we still can / no Martha I do not know if we shall ever / sleep in each other’s arms again.” The speaker still loves Martha but has realized they cannot be together. Therefore “Our season is over” does not mean the speaker does not love Martha, but that their time together as lovers is over. The speaker consults Martha later in the poem asking her what they learned from their brief season, “you journey through darkness alone / leafless I sit far from my present house / and the grackles’ voices are dying / we shall love each other here if ever at all.” They will love each other from a distance, if ever at all.

The indirect story of love told through this poem defines the transience of love between two people, a common theme in Lorde’s early poetry. We see the evolution of Lorde’s belief in love through her poetry, she later comes back to the subject of Martha in her poem “To Martha: A New Year” published in 1978, eight years after the publication of her four-part poem, “Martha.” Here, she talks of the longing she feels for Martha after all this time. Lorde mentions losing Martha, despite her continuing to pull through in her recovery in the final stanza of “Martha” when she states, “You cannot get closer to death than this Martha / the nearest you’ve come to living yourself.” Despite Martha being the closest she’s been in months to living (“the nearest you’ve come to living yourself”), she is so far from who she used to be (“You cannot get closer to death than this Martha”). In “To Martha: A New Year” she touches on the love she feels for the Martha she

once knew, "I do not know your space now / I only seek a woman whom I love / trapped there / by accident." The woman trapped there by accident would be the Martha she knew before the wreck ("trapped there / by accident"); from this it is inferred that Martha was not the same after the car wreck and the woman she loves has since slipped away.

Audre Lorde's belief in the transience of love is displayed in her poem, "Martha" but the fact that she calls back to Martha eight years later in "Martha: A New Year" proves her change in opinion and her change in poetic theme. Even throughout the poem "Martha," the speaker cannot bring herself to admit she does not love Martha, rather insisting that their time together has come to an end, and they are to move onto a different season in their lives. She does view the woman she loves as trapped due to the personality change Martha faced with the damage to her frontal lobe, but Lorde returns to her season with Martha in "To Martha: A New Year" and admits she still has love for the Martha she once knew.

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**“What is the Source of This Mystery?”:  
Writing as Creative and Spiritual  
Transcendence in Joy Harjo’s  
*Crazy Brave***

Lisa Kuhn

Poet Joy Harjo uses writing as a form of creative and spiritual transcendence. She does this by reaching into her toolkit of musical and artistic skills, Creek/Mvskoge heritage, and her desire to see beyond the physical. In her memoir *Crazy Brave*, the reader can see a myriad of examples of this. While she is certainly not the first person to do this, her method is unique. Joy Harjo’s writing style is like an acid trip to the ancestral plane. She taps into spiritual movement and mythology by raising the narrative out of the story and gazing down at it from above. By weaving the narrative with the dream sequence, she creates a hypnotic story. This reflects both her Creek/Muskogee Storyteller heritage and her multimedial artistic skills, such as painting and music. Her work brings the message that the physical world is only a temporary stopping point for the human soul. Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary defines “transcendent” as “exceeding usual limits: surpassing” (*Merriam-Webster.com*). Harjo does exactly that in a multitude of ways in her work, never staying in one form for long.

One type of transcendence found in Harjo’s memoir is spiritual. Why do humans look to religion or spirits? For many people like Harjo, the reason is the desire to be more than we already are. It is a search for our origins, our

destination after this life, and whether there is anything after. Not everyone is on this search. Some accept only what they see, basing any decisions and future plans on logic and scientific evidence. They may be on a search, but it is one that concerns the here and now: how can I make life better while I exist? Harjo imparts this wisdom about the search for meaning: “Though we have instructions and a map buried in our hearts when we enter this world, nothing quite prepares us for the abrupt shift to the breathing realm” (Harjo 260). In short, life is quite jarring at times. Other seekers may follow a more formulaic search, perhaps by participating in organized religion. Some may follow ancient traditions, handed down through the generations, but do not necessarily subscribe to widespread spiritual practices. Then there are folks who follow their own path, seeking answers in a variety of sources. Whatever path a person finds themselves on, the goal is to be different than how they were when they began. These seekers most likely have practices that aid them in their search for meaning. This is where writing enters the picture. Writing is a tool of transformation. It is where a person can shapeshift into a storyteller, tasked with sharing deeper truths. A writer both remembers and invents, reaching inside for ideas and experiences while also looking outside themselves to the wider world. Joy Harjo is such a writer.

*Crazy Brave* contains elements that, to a non-Native reader, may appear to be fantasy. It is a mistake to leave this conclusion uncontested. When Harjo writes lines like “My father and I surfaced in an ancient memory once when I was in my thirties” (Harjo 30), she means it. She occupies a fluid reality, an attribute of both her Creek/Mvskoge world view and her unique personality. Spirits come through with messages: “Someone accompanies every soul from the other side when it enters this place” (31). Visions, both dark and light, manifest: “...I woke up in the midst of a struggle with a dark being” (58), and “A light brighter than any I had ever seen appeared at the head of my bed” (64). Harjo also shares her innate alarm system she refers to as “the knowing” (74). Whatever way readers may feel about these incidences in Harjo’s life, there is no denying that through her prose she is able to transcend mere physical form and the limitations of that state of being. Real or imaginary, the transcendence is clear. John Scarry, in his article “Representing Real Worlds: The Evolving Poetry of Joy Harjo,” remarks on Harjo’s literary voice and ability to seamlessly change from scene to scene. He observes: “This apparent surreality of many of Harjo’s settings and situations is not really a distortion; it is simply a presentation of reality observed through the poet’s prism” (Scarry 286). A prism is a fitting metaphor of her perspective.

Harjo was a musician before becoming a poet. Her background in this medium influences her approach to the writing process. Scarry tells us more about how this muse is even stronger than her painting: “It is music,

however, that is an even more dominant influence on the poet. She has been described as listening to music more than reading the work of other poets... when she writes poetry she does not start with an image but rather with a sound” (Scarry 286). In *Crazy Brave*, she recounts how music, specifically jazz music, was the first thing that drew her into existence. She recalls upon hearing it for the first time: “My rite of passage into the world of humanity occurred then, through jazz. The music was a startling bridge between familiar and strange lands” (Harjo 18). Based on this passage, one could say that music was the first thing that gave her the desire to live. Music initiated her first transformation, going from a formless being in the ancestral realm to entering her mother’s womb as a human. In Marilyn Kallet and Judith Ortiz Cofer’s anthology *Sleeping with One Eye Open: Women Writers and the Art of Survival* (University of Georgia Press, 1999), she recounts: “...as I began my own particular journey, I found a way towards the realization of knowledge in this world, a way to hear beyond the ordinary waves of language... I am still on that journey” (Harjo 152). In other words, Harjo finds in music a way to look beyond what is in front of her and what she has the physical ability to communicate.

Identity is another form of transcendence represented in *Crazy Brave*. Like other Native folks, Harjo’s cultural identity is greatly affected by white colonialism. The United States has done a shameful job in its relations with the Indigenous peoples of the North American continent. Depictions of Native people are usually outdated stereotypes based on old western films: generic, beaded-and-feathered warriors on horseback spouting sage wisdom in broken English for needy white people. This stereotype is destructive and does not match anyone’s authentic Native identity. Not only is this stereotype a lazy caricature, but it also ignores the centuries of damage done to the tribes that predate the colonists and conquistadors. It puts the wonderfully complicated and richly diverse tribal cultures into the suffocating and racist category of “Other,” further separating them from being rightfully included in general American society.

Writing is a form of agency and a tool for cultural empowerment against the problematic image that continues to be perpetuated. Here, Harjo can shed this false identity by creating her own story and connecting to her ancestors. She is in good company here, because there are many Native creators working to establish true-to-life Native images in literature and popular culture. Authors like Tommy Orange write novels exploring the nuances of Native identity and reclaiming one’s heritage. Horror author Stephen Graham Jones subverts tired tropes regarding Natives, like the “Indian burial ground,” while exploring issues of colonialism. Screenwriter and actress Devery Jacobs and Sterlin Harjo, writer and director of the new hit comedy series *Reservation Dogs*, are also making names for themselves

and their communities in the media. In her article “Native American Lives in Between Cultures in Selected Contemporary Self-narratives,” Professor Edyta Wood educates about the importance of Native writers like Harjo telling their own stories instead of white writers assuming Native voices on their behalf. In her opening line, she points out that:

With very little presence of Native American authentic representations in popular culture, American literature, or American consciousness in general, it seems to be quite appropriate and justified that contemporary indigenous writers would choose the form of self-narrative to write about their experience (Wood 183).

In other words, why let someone else speak for you when you can say it better yourself? Native writers are transcending stereotypes by raising their voices.

Harjo transcends her individual identity by tapping into the collective consciousness of inherited cultural memory. She takes this responsibility seriously: “I am the oldest of the living relatives of our family line. My generation is now the door to memory. This is why I am remembering” (Harjo 21). She takes great care to pay attention to the legacies left by her ancestors, confessing that “As I write this I hear the din of voices of so many people and so many stories that want to come forth” (21). Those who have left Earth have not left her. Kevin Bezner, in his article, “‘A Song to Call the Deer in Creek’: The Creek Indian Heritage in Joy Harjo’s Poetry,” he discusses the integral presence of Harjo’s tribal heritage in her writing. He says “In Harjo’s poems, the past infuses the present. In fact, it never stops occurring simultaneously with the present time and so becomes, like the old Creek within her, a physical presence” (Bezner 44). To put it another way, the call of memory in her writing does not obey linear chronology. Even non-Native writers who do not purposely reference their influences still do so unconsciously. We are all a collection of our past experiences fused with our future plans. Harjo echoes this sentiment: “No one ever truly dies. The desires of our hearts make a path. We create legacy with our thoughts and dreams” (Harjo 149). We leave behind what we create in life.

Storytelling is a practice of continuing oral traditions common in many tribal communities. This practice is front-and-center in Harjo’s writings, especially *Crazy Brave*. As previously mentioned, Harjo cherishes the responsibility of honoring the memories of her ancestors. This is a large part of storytelling. She transcends her own vision to see the bigger picture. *Crazy Brave* shows many examples of stories handed down from ancient times. On page 28, she recalls a story of Rabbit, who made mankind, only to regret it after mankind becomes destructive. Stories like this are instructive as well as creation stories. They teach hard truths, providing insight into how to change the future. Storytelling allows the teller to transcend the past and

present. Stories are what remain after the final transcendence—death—takes place. They are rebirth. Harjo's book is full of this practice.

Joy Harjo is a gifted writer with an incredible ability to change shape before the reader by simply using words. She refuses to be stagnant. Her skill with the written word is ever evolving into yet a higher form than it once was. Nobody can hold her back. Seekers may find that her words are a map to fabulous treasures that grow more valuable over time.

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## Literary Characters Within “Desolation Row”

Ashley Hopkins

“Desolation Row” is a remarkable song written and sung by Bob Dylan in 1965. The song is 11 minutes and 21 seconds long, which seems to be a lengthy song, but not for this American songwriter. This song concluded Dylan’s sixth studio album, *Highway 61 Revisited*. The lyrics in “Desolation Row” represent a lack of order, suggesting strong themes of urban chaos. Throughout the song, Dylan uses famous literary characters, the biblical characters, and non-fictional famous people as motifs that demonstrate the blurred lines of good and evil. Even those publicly seen as good can be caught glancing into the chaos of the world.

The second line of the song states that “the beauty parlor is filled with sailors” and “the circus is in town.” While the circus people and sailors are not main literary characters, they set the tone for chaos that is desolation row. The first actual literary character that is well known is Cinderella in line 7. The second verse of the song “Desolation Row” goes as follows:

- 7 “Cinderella, she seems so easy “It takes one to know one, “ she smiles
- 8 And puts her hands in her back pocket Bette Davis style
- 9 And in comes Romeo, he’s moaning “You belong to me, I believe”
- 10 And someone says, “You’re in the wrong place, my friend  
You’d better leave”
- 11 And the only sound that’s left after the ambulances go
- 12 Is Cinderella sweeping up on Desolation Row”

The lyrics state that Cinderella seems so easy, replying “it takes one to know one.” In this context, “easy” is being used as an interchangeable word for slut. However, the precious princess is not rebutting that she was called a slut but rather stating “it takes one to know one,” meaning it takes a slut to know a slut. Originally, when Cinderella was being written, she was referred to as a “cinder-slut,” not having the modern day meaning of a sexually active woman but instead meaning a woman with low standards of cleanliness. Cinderella was given her name from sweeping up the ashes of the fireplace and constantly being covered in ashes; now, in this song, the Disney-fied princess who represents innocence is sweeping up the chaos of desolation row.

Within lines 7 through 12 of the song, Romeo from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* makes his appearance to state that “You Belong to Me I Believe,” speaking to Cinderella. However, in the next line someone speaks to him “You’re in the wrong place, my friend, you’d better leave,” which illustrates that Romeo is in the wrong story. He is not meant to lay claim to Cinderella, but instead is meant to be with Juliet. Line 11 claims that the only sound after he is told to leave is the ambulances going by, which can be seen as an attempted suicide upon realizing that Juliet is gone. Romeo in Shakespeare’s work kills himself thinking Juliet is dead. If he’s in the wrong story on desolation row, where the chaos is occurring, it can be assumed he would make the same choice to take his life. This attempt triggers the EMS teams in the ambulance and leaves Cinderella to clean the mess.

Neither Romeo nor Cinderella is a villain in the source works from which they are drawn, but Dylan places both of them as participating on desolation row. Romeo contributes to the chaos with his death, and Cinderella is sweeping it up.

In the song “Desolation Row” there are multiple references to biblical characters. Lines 14 and 15 state, “The fortune telling lady has even taken all her things inside / All except for Cain and Abel and the hunchback of Notre Dame,” a reference to the biblical story of Cain and Abel. The lines also contain a statement about a fortune telling lady and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, named Quasimodo. In a song of chaos and a gradual decline of stability, Cain and Abel are excluded from hiding. Genesis Chapter 4 of the Bible tells the story of Adam and Eve’s sons (Cain and Abel), the oldest who was a farmer and the younger who was a shepherd. Both of the sons were to give tribute to God; however, God favored the shepherd’s sacrifice creating the farmer to become envious and outraged. Cain kills his brother as the envy takes over his body, since God had accepted Abel’s sacrifice and rejected his. This is supposed to be the first murder in history. Since Cain commits this crime, he is condemned to a life of wandering by God; however, before being condemned, he attempts to hide from God for



his crime. Within “Desolation Row” we have both the characters, and they are not hiding. Although they are the first murderer and therefore the first murder victim, neither one of them hides from desolation row.

Line 14 and 15 also introduce Quasimodo, the Hunchback of Notre Dame. Quasimodo is also known to hide from the public, but in line 15 the fortune teller takes all her things inside, excluding Cain, Abel and Quasimodo. The hunchback is known for hiding within the bell tower from the public because of his deformities; however, he does not hide from desolation row and is left to be part of the chaos. The fortune teller that Dylan mentions could be seen as Esmeralda, a gypsy who befriends Quasimodo. Dylan could be suggesting that Cain, Abel and Quasimodo are part of her things, and when she takes the rest of her belongings inside, she is not including them to hide as they were once supposed to be in their original stories. Here, Dylan is suggesting that people like the characters listed who invoke chaos are not to hide from desolation row but are free to be part of it.

Another biblical reference in the song is the Good Samaritan. The lyrics state “And the Good Samaritan, he’s dressing, he’s getting ready for the show / He’s going to the carnival tonight on Desolation Row.” A Samaritan was simply someone who was known to inhabit Samaria. Located in Luke 10, the Good Samaritan helped a man who was dying on the side of the road after being robbed and saved his life. This parable tells readers of the Bible to “love your neighbor as yourself.” In modern day, people state someone being a “Good Samaritan” as someone who is a charitable or helpful person. Dylan made reference to the first murderer and the first victim, and they are made an exception for not having to hide from Desolation Row. Yet, here we have the charitable man, the Good Samaritan, who is heading out to the carnival on Desolation Row. The brothers who are known for corruption and chaos are excluded from Desolation Row and the biblical character who is known as good is attending. It shows how corruption can impact even those least expected. Dylan seems to be stating that even those who do not seem corrupt can be caught within the chaos and lack of order in the world.

In the fourth verse of “Desolation Row,” the audience is introduced to another Shakespeare play character, Ophelia from *Hamlet*. In *Hamlet*, Ophelia drowns herself in the river, retold in the following the lyrics,

21 “To her, death is quite romantic she wears an ironed vest  
22 Her profession’s her religion her sin is her lifelessness  
23 And though her eyes are fixed upon Noah’s great rainbow  
24 She spends her time peeking into Desolation Row”

God promises a great flood to Noah within the Bible after he builds his ark in Genesis Chapters 7-9: “God put the rainbow in the sky as the sign of his promise that he would never again destroy the earth with flood,” (Genesis Chapter 9). Ophelia is looking out at a promise of no more great floods that will corrupt the Earth but still sees into the chaos of desolation row. Ophelia’s “sin is her lifelessness” in the river when she dies wearing an “iron vest,” which is the embracing fact of her hope that is represented through Noah’s rainbow. Again, Dylan intertwines biblical characters with classical literature characters to prove that all are hypnotized and see into the destruction of the world on desolation road.

The fifth verse of the song starts with “Einstein, disguised as Robin Hood with his memories in a trunk / Passed this way an hour ago with his friend, a jealous monk,” using another literary character, Robin Hood, and the famous non-fictional character Einstein. Here, despite being a real person, Einstein is disguised as a fictional character, stowing his memories as if they were treasures in a trunk. While Einstein is well known for his genius in discovering the theory of relativity, Robin Hood is known for stealing from the rich and giving to the poor. In this verse, Einstein is carrying his memories like a treasure disguised as Robin Hood, who is known to steal the treasure. Given that the memories can be related to the mind, it is shown that Einstein is trying to protect them from desolation row. Robin Hood as a symbol of a vigilante would fit into the chaos of desolation row rather than a genius who is known for science. This verse can also be seen as a way of Einstein stealing his memories from the rich to give them to the poor, just as Robin Hood does with actual treasure. Passing by a monk, another tie to religious figures in the song, he also meets with Robin Hood’s merry men. Within the desolation row, science is disguised as traveling with religion. Science and religion together play a part in man’s enlightenment and leading to chaos among men.

Dr. Filth is mentioned at the beginning of verse six of “Desolation Row.” Dr. Filth is an actual doctor who was known in the Holocaust for cutting off the genitals of victims and placing them into a pouch of skin. The lyrics read, “Dr. Filth, he keeps his world inside of a leather cup, / But all his sexless patients, they’re trying to blow up,” showcasing the doctor’s actual crimes. Since this verse is during the holocaust, the patients can be seen as a gateway to the gas chambers that were used, as gas is highly explosive. The lines following the opening of verse six are “Now his nurse, some local loser, she’s in charge of the cyanide hole / And she also keeps the cards that read, “Have Mercy on His Soul” / They all play on the penny whistles, you can hear them blow / If you lean your head out far enough from Desolation Row.” This verse showcases Dr. Filth as a character who is not literary but from history as Einstein was.

The line “Have Mercy on His Soul” contributes further to the use of the Bible within the song. The “have mercy on my soul” from Psalm 57 is used by a nurse who is helping Dr. Filth. The nurse can be seen as a common member of society who is turning a blind eye to the horrors that are happening in front of her but reads from the bible to pray for it to be better, even though she does nothing to make it better.

Verse nine references famous authors Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot.

- 49 “Praise be to Nero’s Neptune, the Titanic sails at dawn
- 50 Everybody’s shouting, “which side are you on?!”
- 51 And Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot fighting in the captain’s tower
- 52 While calypso singers laugh at them and fishermen hold flowers
- 53 Between the windows of the sea where lovely mermaids flow
- 54 And nobody has to think too much about Desolation Row”

Nero is the Roman emperor and Neptune is the God of the Seas. Meanwhile, Dylan states in the same line the “Titanic sails at dawn.” Already within this verse there are ties to classical mythology as well as real events such as the Titanic. The God of the Sea is being praised while the Titanic is getting ready to sail out. The two poets Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot are in the captain’s tower of the Titanic fighting while the calypso singers from Greek mythology laugh at them. Sirens are laughing at them as if the high rich culture that came with the two authors is being mocked by the commoners that were the fisherman and sirens. Again, there is a connection to classic literature such as mythology tales tied in with famous poets. Throughout the encounter with the poets and the mythological creatures, no one has time to think about the chaos as they are on a sinking ship, the Titanic. While the social classes battle, desolation row is still happening but no one involved is thinking about it.

In conclusion, Dylan uses biblical characters, various literary works, and real-life people as a motif to push the idea that urban chaos and lack of order does not distinguish between good and evil characters, but is inclusive to all. Although some characters such as Cinderella, Romeo, and the Good Samaritan are seen by most as good, moral people they are caught attending and peeking at the corruption within desolation row. People who are seen as bad or typically hiding from the general public, such as Cain, Quasimodo, Dr. Filth, and Robin Hood, are welcome and no longer have to hide when desolation row comes around. Ultimately, “Desolation Row” uses famous literary, biblical, and historical characters to demonstrate how the lines of good and evil are blurred.

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# **Dolly Parton's Literary Songwriting**

Kaitlyn Craig

Dolly Parton is one of, if not the most influential woman in music history. She has really paved the way for so many other women after her to make their place in music and show what they can bring to music that men can't. Dolly has had a career that has lasted almost 60 years, and she has become the household name she always dreamed of being. But, she started from very humble beginnings in the Smoky Mountains in East Tennessee. Dolly Parton is very inspired by the old folk tradition of telling stories and passing them down generation to generation, which is very important to the history of where she is from. This tradition had a lot to do with her childhood, she would sing songs and tell stories to lift the spirits of her family members in their hard times. a short story than how one typically expects of a song. Three Dolly Parton songs that do this are "Coat of Many Colors", "The Grass is Blue", and possibly most famously, "Jolene".

Dolly Parton's song "Coat of Many Colors" is a very personal story of Dolly's that she is sharing with her audience. It is a story about Dolly's actual childhood. Her family was very poor, and it was nearing late fall in East Tennessee. Someone gave some rags in all different colors to Dolly's mom, and so she sewed them into a coat for Dolly for the winter. The song says, "As she sewed, she told a story from the Bible, she had read about a coat of many colors Joseph wore and then she said perhaps this coat will bring you good luck and happiness," (Parton 1968). The lyrics of this song don't lean into the traditional rhyme

scheme of most songs, and she isn't doing much vocally with her voice. This makes it sound like she is really cades, she is still that little blonde girl from the Smoky Mountains. This song leans into the folk mountain region storytelling tradition the most because she also talks about the Bible in it, and faith is a big aspect of folk tradition, specifically in that area of the country. As mentioned in the quote before, she talks about how her mom told her the story of Joseph and his coat, and how he was also persecuted and targeted for it, just like she was with hers. She was so proud of her coat, and the kids at school were picking on her about it, but she didn't understand because she knew that it was made with love and that it was very special and from her mother. She holds true to being proud of who she is, and this is also very Dolly. You cannot argue that Dolly follows the crowd and goes with what everyone else is doing. She is very iconically herself and she doesn't care about what others are saying negatively about her. She leans into it and usually forms a joke out of it, like her famous quote, "It takes a lot of money to look this cheap."

Dolly has also made two movies of the same name of "Coat of Many Colors". The movie *Coat of Many Colors* takes the same story from the song and expands the details of it to make it into a film. It follows Dolly's family as her baby brother is born prematurely and then passes away shortly after birth. It follows the story of Dolly getting her coat of many colors and then dealing with the bullies at school. The family faces a lot of hardship throughout the course of the film, but in the end, their faith brings the family together again. She also made a second film called *Christmas of Many Colors: Circle of Love*. It follows the same themes of family struggles, and the family giving up their Christmas presents in order to help their father get their mother the wedding ring they could never afford. These stories are both based on real events that happened in Dolly's life. But the story that started it all was the short story that is presented in the song "Coat of Many Colors". Dolly says that this song is one of her most important and her most special because of the personal meaning it carries for her. She really used this song to share a piece of herself with her audience.

A song of Dolly's that also tells a story "The Grass is Blue". The title song of that album also follows a short story format and uses an extended metaphor throughout the song to get her point across. "The Grass is Blue" is about how she just had a relationship end, and she is very upset about it. But in order to keep going with life and to convince herself that everything will be ok, she convinces herself that the opposite of everything around her is also true. One of the choruses of this song shows these metaphors and the statement that she is trying to make. It reads, "Rivers flow backwards/ valleys are high/ mountains are level/

truth is a lie/ I'm perfectly fine/ and I don't miss you/ the sky is green/ and the grass is blue" (Parton 1999). This song seems to take such a simple approach, but it is so effective and so beautiful in the way that it portrays the story. It causes listeners to be fully immersed in the story of the woman trying to continue on with life after a breakup, something that pretty much everyone can relate to. The background music of this song is almost haunting, which is very popular in bluegrass music. Bluegrass music originated from the area of the country that Dolly is from, so she is really leaning into her roots. This song also mentions a lot about nature by talking about the sky, grass, mountains, eagles, etc. This is also a big theme in bluegrass music, it is very connected to the nature around them. The story that this song tells is very sad. It is one about loss and recovering from said loss. It almost sounds silly when she is making these statements like "the sky is green", but it is really all to say that the opposite is true and that she misses the relationship that the other person involved ended.

One of Dolly Parton's most popular songs also follows this theme of telling a short story through song. "Jolene" is a song that pretty much everyone knows. Even people who aren't typically country music fans love "Jolene" and the iconic story that it relays. Dolly said in an interview once that she wrote "Jolene" about this bank teller who had a crush on her husband. She said that everyone has their insecurities and that this is the song that came out of that particular instance. "Jolene" is basically a woman begging another woman to stay away from her man even though she knows she is more attractive and could easily take him. Some of the lyrics of the song read, "Your beauty is beyond compare with flaming locks of auburn hair with ivory skin and eyes of emerald green. Your smile is like a breath of spring, your voice is soft like summer rain, and I cannot compete with you Jolene." (Parton 1974). The interesting thing about how this song is set up is that it has a definite hook in the intro of the song, almost like the hook of a good movie. The instrumentals in the beginning of the song are very catchy, and not only do they make the song instantly identifiable, but it also makes the listeners pay more attention to what is coming next. Movies and television shows typically follow this same technique of having a hook to get the audience interested in the story to come. This is interesting because it is almost like she purposely structured this song to be like a short film. It has the hook, describes the characters, sets the scene, gives the conflict, it has basically all of the necessary story elements. This song has more rhyming and is more of a typical song than "Coat of Many Colors", but it still has a definite chronological story that it tells. It goes on to say that her husband talks about her in his sleep, and it gives more

details throughout the story. She also says, “You could have your choice of men, but I could never love again. He’s the only one for me Jolene.” (Parton 1974). There isn’t particularly an answer, or a resolution to this story. But I think that is partially what makes the song so memorable and artistic. Many songwriters have written Jolene’s response to the song, so that is giving artists even more abilities to take the story and expand it.

Dolly’s storytelling and her sassy honesty are what has gotten her the massive fanbase that she has. People love her ability to take them away with the stories in her songs. The book *Dumplin* by Julie Murphy and the film by the same name is about a girl named Willowdean Dickson who is a massive Dolly Parton fan. She is overweight, but her mother is a famous beauty queen in their small town, and she now runs the annual pageant. Willowdean decides to enter the pageant almost as a joke, and she has a group of other “outcasts” who decide to do it with her. It starts as a joke but then it becomes something that she needs to prove to herself, her mother, and the community. It is a story about following the lessons of Dolly Parton and being boldly yourself. This story is pretty much the perfect way to explain Dolly’s fanbase. It is so widespread, it includes people from every walk of life. Dolly’s unique personality and her unabashedly being herself has also made her an icon to the drag queen community. Her exaggerated appearance is something that they love to replicate, and she is a common appearance in drag bar theme nights. She even lost a Dolly Parton look-alike contest to a drag queen once. This widespread fanbase is all because of her willingness to be honest and open with her audience in the way that she tells stories through her music.

Dolly’s career is one of the longest and most successful in music history. But she has kept to her roots and traditions throughout the entirety of it. She has never lost that ability to just write a song that tells a story and brings everyone together. After all of that success and all of that time in the industry, you would think she would be jaded or have changed from her small-town self, but she hasn’t. She is still very grateful for her ability to share her talent and her songs with her fans, and she still remembers what it was like to be a little girl in a run-down home in the mountains of East Tennessee. She is so humble and she uses a significant amount of money to help those in need. She does this in so many ways, but some of the most notable are starting Dollywood to bring jobs to her hometown of Gatlinburg, Tennessee, starting the Dolly Parton Imagination Library which is now in five different countries bringing books to children, donating money to fund COVID vaccine



research, and even donating \$1000 per month for over 900 families who were impacted by the fires in Gatlinburg a few years ago. She uses her platform to help so many, and that is so respectable and humbling from a person of her status. She is still going strong and releasing music and other projects at 75 years old.

# Contributors

## **Haley Beggs**

Haley is a soon-to-be graduate and she has spent the last five years working towards her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Acting and her Bachelor of Arts in English. She is an avid poetry lover, cheesy romance novel consumer, and an early 2000's television fanatic. She spends much of her time hanging with those she loves, writing, or attending hot yoga classes and attempting not to vomit. She eventually intends to work towards a graduate degree in English and teach at the collegiate level. Until then, she is working on freelance writing opportunities.

## **Kaitlyn Craig**

Kaitlyn Craig is a senior English major on the Writing Studies track at NKU. This is her second year on the Pentangle editorial team and her first time being published in it. Kaitlyn loves reading and crocheting, and her dream job is to work in literary publishing post-graduation.

## **Ashley Hopkins**

Ashley Hopkins is a graduating Senior at NKU, getting her Bachelors in English and minoring in Anthropology. She is also receiving a Micro-Credit in Literature, Justice, and Inclusion. She loves long boarding, hiking, and video games. Currently, she owns a Lash Business in Newport, KY and is planning her wedding for May 2023.

**Lisa Kuhn**

Lisa is a giant book nerd who loves to talk and accidentally make up words. She is currently in the Master of English program at NKU. She loves dissecting and analyzing texts, which is why she chose to pursue the Literary and Cultural Studies track in the English major. Lisa believes that written works have cultural value and historical significance, which is what inspired her analysis of Joy Harjo's memoir.

**Sierra Mitchell**

Sierra Mitchell is a junior at NKU who is working towards her bachelor's degree in English Secondary Education. She plans on becoming the most powerful, unstoppable, and definitely not nerdy English teacher. Sierra lives with her supportive husband who always makes sure she doesn't forget to eat, as well as a dog and two cats who always make sure she doesn't get enough sleep.

**Alexi Kreutzjans**

Alexi is a senior at NKU and will graduate this spring with a major in English and a focus in Spanish. Her English major track is Literary and Cultural studies, so she is a strong advocate for reading and research. She plans to attend graduate school in the same area of study, where she will pursue her interests in Victorian and Gothic literature. Her biggest wish is to become a college professor, where she will be able to share these passions with her own students.

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