Pop Culture Matters

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Proceedings of the 39th Conference of the Northeast Popular Culture Association

Edited by

Martin F. Norden and Robert E. Weir

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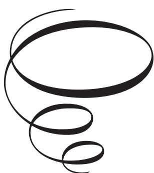

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PREFACE

NEPCA AND THE ONGOING EVOLUTION OF POPULAR CULTURE STUDIES

ROBERT E. WEIR

In 1974, a small gathering of scholars assembled at what was then called Southeastern Massachusetts University—now the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth—to hold the first "annual" conference of the Northeast Popular Culture/American Culture Association (NEPCA). At least that was the plan. In 2017, NEPCA held its 39th conference and even a casual glance reveals that the math doesn't add up.

NEPCA has indeed met annually since 1986, but, in the early days, NEPCA conferences were small—in the dozens—and in some years, the call for papers didn't yield enough submissions to justify the expense of launching a conference. By the 1990s, though, NEPCA conferences began to gather steam.

Flash forward to 2017, when NEPCA met on the campus of the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Nearly 250 proposals were submitted and 195 were accepted. That may sound modest by the standards of national and international conferences, but it's a lot for NEPCA, which relies almost entirely on volunteers. The 2017 conference was both exciting and nerve-wracking, as it strained the energies and abilities of NEPCA planners, most of whom are fulltime academics with numerous other duties to which they must attend.

The same organisation that once pondered whether it had a future at all is now at another crossroads. Should NEPCA remain intimate and limit the size of its conferences, or should it evolve into a larger organisation with fulltime staff? This is, of course, a luxury problem. Thus far, NEPCA has chosen the path of deliberate smallness, as it better aligns with the goal of being an organisation that welcomes graduate students, adjuncts, and independent scholars, not just the professoriate. What the future holds is unknown, but there are reasons why it took time for NEPCA and other such groups to get established.

There is a difference between that which is ubiquitous and that which is respectable. NEPCA struggled early on because, though popular culture was well established, *studying* popular culture was decidedly unpopular. When Bowling Green State University (Ohio) Professor Ray Browne started the *Journal of Popular Culture* in 1967, it was the first publication of its sort. The first national conference of the Popular Culture Association (PCA) took place in 1971—three years before NEPCA formed as one of its regional affiliates. In 1972, Browne spearheaded the creation of a separate undergraduate degree in popular culture; for many years, Bowling Green was the only place in North America where one could major in it.

Popular culture has become a global commodity, but it is a relatively recent phenomenon insofar as human history is concerned. It has only dominated in Western societies since the early twentieth century, when the masses embraced radio, movies, and recorded music. A basic sociological tenet holds that institutions change far more slowly than individuals. It took the academy much longer to warm to popular culture—if indeed it has yet done so.

Creative and expressive human endeavours can be lumped into three distinct categories: folk, elite, and popular culture. Until the 1920s, popular culture would have been the smallest of these, and folk culture the largest and most diverse.

Folk culture catered to distinct subgroups that didn't necessarily engage in similar traditions, activities, or preferences with other subgroups. This was especially the case in the countryside, the last places touched by the nineteenth century transportation revolution. Famed Irish singer Tommy Makem of The Clancy Brothers once told me that, when he was a child in the County Armagh village of Keady, he never heard terms such as "Irish music" or "Celtic music." He hastened to add that the songs and tunes he heard in Keady were quite different from those of a village just twenty miles away. The same patterns confronted scholarly "songcatchers" combing the Eastern Appalachians in the 1910s and 1920s. They held also in urban cities such as Boston, Chicago, London, New Orleans, New York, and Philadelphia, where it took several generations of acculturation before Irish, Italian, Polish, and other immigrants evolved hybridised cultures and pan-ethnic identities. These were often stronger in diasporic communities than in the homelands.

Elite culture, though, came to dominate the academic gaze. Many of those with education, money, and breeding viewed folk culture as debased, unsophisticated, and crude. Elites excluded the masses by walling them out or pricing them out. The carriage trade descended upon symphony and opera halls decked to the nines—visible reminders that the hoi polloi were

not welcome. Not that the masses yearned to be among the elites; their own music halls and working-class operas were far looser, more expressive, and cheaper than what took place in stuffy venues frequented by old-money families and the upwardly mobile middle class.

The interloper was popular culture, a form marked by homogeneity of form, spectatorship, commercialism, and inclusivity. Popular culture has always existed, but it wasn't always the preference of the generalised masses. After all, popular culture is *consumed*, whereas folk culture is usually created. There was and is, for example, quite a gap between playing cricket or baseball, and paying to observe such a match. Pop culture must also be endlessly replicated. One sees the *same* movie in London, England, or London, Ontario. Above all, it is heterosocial and intraclass; individuals are willing to cross gender and social class boundaries to partake of it.

Until the 1890s, just a few activities within North America or the United Kingdom passed muster as popular culture, among them traveling circuses, country fairs, and professional sports teams. By the end of the nineteenth century, though, popular culture was on the rise. Vaudeville, amusement parks, bicycling, arcades, and dance halls proliferated. Even then, improvements in technology and transportation were needed before popular entertainment was woven into the fabric of everyday life. Though it is more properly a *mass* culture product, few if any inventions so thoroughly transformed Western culture as the automobile. It became the conveyance of choice to deliver patrons to popular culture venues.

By the 1920s, it was clear to any dispassionate observer that popular culture had triumphed. The key word, though, is "dispassionate." Movies, for example, were denounced by the upper crust, adored by the working classes, and slowly embraced by the middle classes who broke with elites over the allure of movies. No one, though, quite knew what movies portended. Did they cause crime—even Jane Addams thought they did—or did they simply need to censor content and move to nicer venues, the position of many middle-class patrons and reformers? In the 1930s, political radicals held out hope that movies could educate the masses, perhaps even turn patrons into revolutionaries. Many, especially European and American communists, quickly denounced movies when it became clear that erstwhile comrades much preferred romance, musicals, and screwball comedies to agitation, propaganda, and political doctrine.

In the backlash from the 1930s on, disdain for popular culture thrived within an influential core of critics, educators, ideologues, legislators, politicians, regulators, and self-appointed guardians of public taste. The masses continued to consume, but jazz, movies, sporting events, amuse-

ment parks, and other such things supplanted folk culture as the new symbols of crassness and mindless escapism. They became "low" culture, a term that presupposes there is "high" culture. By the end of the 1950s, television had undergone the same pattern as movies—from promise to disdain. In 1961, Newton Minnow, chair of the US Federal Communications Commission, famously pronounced TV a "vast wasteland." Among academics, "culture" was mostly synonymous with classical music, works from the literary canon, fine art, opera, poetry, and "serious" theatre. Indeed, academics often lifted the shrillest voices in declaring popular culture a danger to Western standards.

All of this occurred and became entrenched before the founding of the PCA and NEPCA. What changed? The short answer is: quite a bit and not enough. One problem facing rearguard defenders of high culture is that it became clear that much of what they declared low culture rubbish was not. By the early 1960s, a new generation of North American and British critics embraced *auteur* theories of film criticism pioneered by the French in the late 1940s. It simply became untenable to look at the works of directors such as Bergman, Fellini, Godard, Kubrick, Kurosawa, or Varda and declare them junk. In like fashion, jazz shed its subcultural skin and began to be taught in universities that were once the sole reserve of classical music.

The role of the late-1960s/early-70s counterculture had a (still-understudied) impact on how popular culture was viewed, especially in the realms of music, literature, and art. Those consuming rock and pop music were acutely aware of the attacks on rock n' roll in the 1950s, and the dearth of mainstream critics who took it seriously beyond then. Underground newspapers became a breeding ground for a new and serious breed of writer: the rock critic, many of whom had way better vocabularies and deeper grasps of theory than entrenched reviewers. Dylan, The Beatles, and others were upgraded from pop stars to "poets" and "musicians." The same happened in literature, when questions of voice and authority began to erode the foundations of the canon. Visual artists such as Andy Warhol and Peter Blake embraced the term "pop art," and, before long, the prices that their art commanded soared.

French theorists Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron coined the phrase "cultural capital" to describe the ways in which knowledge and consumption of culture confer status and access to mobility for the initiated. By the 1980s, cultural capital assets skewed heavily toward the popular end of the scale.

Again, however, academia was slow to adjust. By the time I got involved with NEPCA in the mid-1980s, pop culture remained suspect

within the upper echelons of colleges and universities. Those who conferred tenure, salary increases, and travel-to-conferences stipends had been conditioned by academic traditions that equated popular culture with frivolity lacking in serious intellectual rigour.

It would be comforting to say that this has changed, but it's more accurate to say that the transformation of attitudes is ongoing. It remains true that there are just a handful of places where one can obtain a graduate degree in popular culture; usually one has to sneak in through the backdoor under the aegis of some other programme such as comparative literature, communication, English, film studies, music, and so on. Within Britain, the most common avenue is to subsume popular culture analysis within the broader "cultural studies" label.

The rearguard is crumbling, though. New buzz phrases such as "visual literacy," "critical thinking," "educational animation," "data visualisation," "media analysis," and "multiliteracy" echo throughout secondary education. Students no longer obtain or process information the ways previous generations have done so. More to the point, they are prone to collapse barriers. If you will, they see nothing wrong with encountering Shakespeare as a play, a film adaptation, and a graphic novel. Or, as one essayist in this collection does, finding Boethius in a videogame.

My own specialty of history is in the throes of transformation due to the emergence of digital humanities. Academic deans and tenure and advancement committees find themselves under the gun for continuing to value journal articles read by tens over blogs read by thousands. They face questions over whether a book written for specialists should be deemed more valuable than developing a dazzling software package that enhances student learning.

Indeed, scholars continue to struggle to offer courses that use popular culture to lure students into studying things they'd otherwise ignore. I discovered this firsthand when I was tapped to offer a course in American culture since World War II through the lens of The Grateful Dead. When you teach at a public university, you can count on the fact that there will be taxpayer and ideological backlash against such an offering!

The storm was weathered because the course was academically rigorous, pedagogically sound, and ideologically balanced. That's also why NEPCA is thriving and the future of popular culture studies is bright. The greatest justification for the discipline comes from the scholars whose intellect, exacting research, and careful musing make it clear that popular culture is *not* low culture lacking in content, aesthetics, or meaning. They remind us also of the academic absurdity of ignoring the activities, preferences, and consumption patterns that define the *de facto* culture of

much of the global citizenry. If the goal of the academy is to advance human understanding and prepare students for the world beyond their campuses, it's a disservice *not* to teach them how to analyse popular culture. It is ubiquitous. It does confer cultural capital. And for this moment in history, there is no turning back to the cultural dominance of the carriage trade.

NEPCA proudly offers its best rationale for studying popular culture: the work of serious scholars who will make you see that popular culture is nuanced and infused with meaning. In the pages that follow you will encounter emergent and established scholars from various backgrounds, nations, and perspectives. The collection is deliberately diverse and contains, we hope, something new for everyone.

INTRODUCTION

POP CULTURE MATTERS

MARTIN F. NORDEN

The circumstances that led to the publication of this conference proceedings volume started innocently enough. They began while I was attending the 2015 Northeast Popular Culture Association (NEPCA) conference, held at Colby-Sawyer College in New London, New Hampshire. It was the seventh or eighth NEPCA conference in which I had participated, and I was scheduled to present a paper titled (drum roll, please) "'We're Not All Dead Yet': Humour Amid the Horror in James Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein*." My Frankenstein-on-screen panel was set to begin immediately after NEPCA's annual conference luncheon, which also doubles as the organisation's business/awards meeting. As the luncheon meeting was winding down and I was preparing to leave for my panel, I happened to espy Rob Weir, NEPCA's longtime Executive Secretary and coincidentally a University of Massachusetts Amherst colleague. "Ah, a familiar face," I thought. Rob and I taught in different departments and rarely ran into each other on the sprawling Amherst campus, but I knew him from previous NEPCA gatherings and remembered him as a very sociable person. At that moment, however, he wasn't characteristically chatting with someone; he was merely pouring himself a cup of coffee. Seizing the opportunity, I walked over to Rob and greeted him. After an exchange of pleasantries, I decided to keep the conversation going with what I thought was a casual question: "Has UMass Amherst ever hosted the NEPCA conference?"

In retrospect, I should probably change the word "casual" to "causal," as my simple inquiry did end up causing something rather significant. Little did I know that my naïvely posed question would lead to my involvement in what would be the largest event I had ever planned and administered: the 2017 Northeast Popular Culture Association conference. Held at UMass Amherst on 27-28 October 2017, it was the organisation's biggest gathering to date; more than 180 attendees participated on approximately fifty panels. A lively mix of professors, graduate students, and independ-

ent scholars addressed numerous sub-areas of popular culture, including film, television, digital media, music, health, food, literature, pedagogy, and sports, often in conversation with such critical issues as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. The conference featured a plenary presentation by Sut Jhally, founder and executive producer of the Media Education Foundation, a nonprofit organisation that was celebrating its twenty-fifth year of creating video productions that critically examined the social and cultural impact of American mass media. It was an incredibly diverse, supportive, and inclusive gathering. Though NEPCA is relatively small and nominally a regional organisation (it is a regional affiliate of the Popular Culture/American Culture Association), the conference amply demonstrated that NEPCA has developed a broad reach. Though the majority of the participants hailed from the New England states, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, we had numerous participants from more than fifteen states outside of the US northeast. In addition, our participants included presenters from Turkey, Tunisia, South Korea, Brazil, Switzerland, Canada, India, Thailand, France, and the UK. I am delighted to note that such a global mixture has become the norm for NEPCA conferences.

The conference was a test of my not yet fully developed organisational skills, and I hadn't anticipated all the issues that might come up: for instance, panelists' inquiries about where and how to print out their papers. In general, though, I found the conference a very gratifying experience. I appreciate the fact that I as programme chair was able to contribute to a sense of community amongst popular culture scholars by orchestrating a two-day event for them to meet, exchange ideas, and comment constructively on each other's work. I am especially pleased to note that nearly half of the conference presenters were graduate students. With its small scale and nurturing environment, the conference was the perfect setting for graduate students to test their wings, so to speak. I find it so important to support budding scholars, not only for their own personal growth but also for the health of the professional associations in their fields. As I am fond of telling anyone who will listen, graduate students are the lifeblood of any scholarly association; without them, the organisation withers and dies.

The students appreciated the opportunity, if several post-conference blog entries are any indication. "Participating in the NEPCA conference was a spectacular experience," wrote Laura Brown, a Boston University graduate student. "Not only was I able to receive feedback and suggestions on how I can further expand my work, but I had the opportunity to sit and observe some fascinating panels." She also wrote that "the NEPCA conference was a welcoming and encouraging space that made it easy and comfortable for me, just a master's student, to engage in intellectually

stimulating conversation with assistant professors, PhD candidates, emeritus faculty, and everyone in between." Brown's fellow BU grad student, the singularly named Nadum, echoed her perspectives. "It was a wonderful opportunity to present my work at the conference and receive feedback from other scholars and professionals in the field," he wrote, adding that "I was absolutely thrilled to be able to attend the NEPCA 2017 annual conference and even more honored to present my research."[1]

This book is a direct outgrowth of the 2017 NEPCA conference. Shortly after the conference ended, Rob and I considered the idea of editing and publishing a conference proceedings volume, as we had both been impressed by the overall quality of the presented papers. We planned to treat the book as a refereed project, but at the same time we wanted it to consist of papers that were representative of the conference as a whole in terms of the range of topics covered. We issued a proceedings volume CFP and ultimately selected 29 papers out of a far larger pool of submissions. Though this final number represents slightly less than 20% of the papers presented at the conference, Rob and I believe that the included essays are a reasonably accurate cross-section of the good work presented at the conference and being conducted in the popular culture field as a whole.

As the editors, Rob and I believed the book should reflect the presentations that the authors actually gave at the conference, and not the expanded 25-30 page versions of their papers that they would have delivered had they each been given an hour to present. As readers will therefore discover, the essays are relatively short; they cover what the authors offered within their time limit of 15-20 minutes each. We did allow the authors to revise their essays lightly; for example, Yann Descamps wanted to acknowledge the post-conference *Black Panther* phenomenon in his chapter on *Steel* and its black superhero. Otherwise, the essays are as they were presented. They are rich, diverse, dense, and brief—a popular culture sampler, if you will.

The NEPCA conference was unthemed; in other words, participants were not asked to focus on a narrow set of possible topics. As a result, the offerings contained herein are quite broad. Collectively, though, they form a fascinating mosaic of different "takes" on popular culture.

For the sake of orderliness and to create some sense of structure, Rob and I decided to organise the essays into eight sections of three-to-five essays each. We settled on the following section headings: Literature, Fantasy and Horror, Film Adaptations, Twenty-First Century Television, Music Applications, Race and Ethnicity, Gender and Sexuality, and Popular Culture and Everyday Life. We felt these categories made the most sense, given the essays that we received and wanted to publish. As astute readers

will quickly observe, however, the dividing lines among these categories are often rather fuzzy. Indeed, quite a few of the essays exhibit "crossover" potential and could have fit into more than one section. For example, chapters by Geraldine Wagner on Lin-Manuel Miranda's *In the Heights* and Megan Genovese on the TV series *Elementary* could have gone into the Race and Ethnicity section, though we concluded that they fit best in the Music Applications and Twenty-First Century Television sections, respectively. Had we broadened the Film Adaptations section to include studies of films based on comic books and musical compositions, we could have included Yann Descamps' piece on *Steel* and Jacquelyn Sholes' study of Joseph Schillinger, Walt Disney, and the 1940 production *Fantasia* in it; instead, we placed them in the respective sections of Race and Ethnicity and Music Applications. We discovered that numerous pieces could have fit into the Gender and Sexuality section, including Victoria Parker's essay on *Lady Chatterley's Lover,* Stephanie Kolberg's chapter on Mother's Day and Father's Day greeting cards, and all three of the items in the Twenty-First Century Television section. In short, we were looking to balance the sections but readily understood that the book could have been configured in any number of ways. The essays often defied easy categorisation, a point that we regard as a testament to their intersectional richness.

We were aware of another problematic issue with section labels; they imply the exclusion of other worthy pop-culture topics. We want to assure our readers that many other relevant areas are represented in this volume, even though they don't have their own section headings. Intersecting with other popular-culture issues, the subjects include comic books (Descamps), graphic novels (Price), sports (Drissel), theatre (Wagner), social media (Narin), the #MeToo movement (Black, Lucas), disability studies (Parker), ageism studies (Carraghan, Jones, Wagner), war/veteran topics (Parker, Price), philosophy (Cirilla, Hunter), and pedagogy (Sterling). To revive an old saw, we believe there is truly something for everyone in this volume.

Though the essays come from a generic, wide-ranging conference on popular culture, readers will likely discover fascinating connections among them. Not only do the pieces stand on their own as individual contributions to the field of popular culture studies, but they also "speak" to each other in intriguing and sometimes unexpected ways. Readers may find that a point made by one author offers insight into the work of another. Perhaps the most conspicuous example is Alexandra M. Lucas's discussion of toxic masculinity, an extended concept that not only undergirds her own chapter but has bearing on the one that immediately follows it: Stanley Pelkey's study of the hit TV series *Dexter.* Another instance might be Nova Seals' examination of *Anna Dressed in Blood* and the relationship that her discus-

sion of gender, horror, and Barbara Creed's concept of the "monstrous-feminine" might have to James Patrick Carraghan's study of older women in "psycho-biddy" films. Carraghan's chapter in turn might offer an oblique perspective on Jennifer Drissel's investigation into the interplay of gender and aggression in Ultimate Fighting Competition events.

Readers might also discover that two or more chapters share common influences and literatures. For instance, the essays by Matthew Jones and Steffen Silvis invoke Freud's concept of *Unheimlichkeit*/uncanniness. The work of J. K. Rowling and J. R. R. Tolkien looms large in the chapters by Charlee Sterling and Cheryl Hunter. The critical race work of Patricia Hill Collins informs the pieces by K. A. Laity and Geraldine Wagner. The essays by Cheryl Hunter and William Price reflect the ongoing influence of Joseph Campbell. Interestingly, and completely in keeping with the slippery nature of this book's categories, the two essays in each of these four pairings come from different sections.

Other linkages are less apparent but no less intriguing. For example, readers might be interested to know that Neil Gaiman, whose work is the subject of two essays in this book, offered high praise for fellow English author Robert Aickman. "I find myself admiring everything he does from an auctorial standpoint," said Gaiman of Aickman. "And I love it as a reader. He will bring on atmosphere. He will construct these perfect, dark, doomed little stories, what he called 'strange stories.'"[2] If any readers find their appetites suitably whetted by Gaiman's commentary and desire additional insights into Aickman's work, they need look no further than Steffen Silvis's essay, included in this book's Literature section, on Aickman's short story "Larger than Oneself."

We encourage you to discover your own connections, engage with the provocative material, and share in the authors' passions for their work. We hope that you will happily lose yourself in the pages of this book and will see that, indeed, "pop culture matters."

Notes

The editors are grateful to the Madrid street artist r2hox for permission to reproduce the cover portrait of *Breaking Bad*'s Walter White. *Gracias, hermano*.

[1] Laura Brown, "Laura Brown Graduate Prize Summary," http://www.bu.edu/com/laura-brown-graduate-prize-summary/; Nadum, "Nadum Graduate Prize Summary," http://www.bu.edu/com/nadum-graduate-prize-summary/.
[2] Gaiman quoted in Darrell Schweitzer, "Weird Tales Talks with Neil Gaiman," in *Conversations with Neil Gaiman,* ed. Joseph Michael Sommers (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2018), 76.

PART I:

LITERATURE

For many years, the formal study of literature was limited to works that by scholarly consensus were "masterpieces." Furthermore, these seemingly ahistorical canonical works were often analysed in isolation from their socio-cultural contexts and the economic imperatives that their authors undoubtedly faced.

In recent decades, popular culture scholars have developed alternative ways of thinking about literature and new avenues for studying it. They have expanded our conception of worthy literary texts to include bestsellers, genre fiction, pulp fiction, graphic novels, and other forms that in earlier times would have been regarded as superficial, salacious, or commercial (or some virulent combination thereof) and therefore irrelevant or worse. As suggested by this book's unit on Film Adaptations, today's scholars have also demonstrated a strong interest in the adaptation of novels and short stories into films as well as the reverse—the novelisation of films—and the processes behind them.

In addition to challenging our notions of what constitutes literature, pop culture scholars are especially concerned about the various historical and contemporary contexts that envelope and inform literary works and the readerly responses to them. Though close textual analysis remains a key approach to the study of literature, it is not at all unusual today for scholars to pay close attention to the socio-cultural circumstances surrounding the creation and reception of all types of literary texts.

The five items in this section are indebted in varying degrees to this tendency, which is a variant of literary criticism called the New Historicism. Popularised by Stephen Greenblatt, Michel Foucault, and others during the 1980s and 1990s, it is a sophisticated approach that goes well beyond fundamental efforts to show how a text might reflect its day or to separate the text from its author; instead, it includes an examination of the cultural milieu out of which the text came with particular attention to other texts (literary and non-), people, and socio-political circumstances that may have influenced the writer. It is far removed from the dominant critical model that originated in the 1940s and took its name from John Crowe

Ransom's 1941 book *The New Criticism,* which typically treated literary texts as self-contained works and did not consider possible influences on them except their direct antecedents.

Victoria Parker examines *Lady Chatterley's Lover* through a disability studies lens and comes to a conclusion notably different from standard interpretations of D. H. Lawrence's world-famous novel. Most critics have tended to view Lady Chatterley's husband—the emotionally and sexually distant Sir Clifford Chatterley, a disabled World War I veteran—as emblematic of British postwar societal ills. As Parker points out, however, the title character, Oliver Mellors, is also a disabled veteran. It's a point that leads her to observe that Lawrence's negative depiction of Sir Clifford is not so much about the symbolic dimensions of disability as it is about prejudicial views against outlier bodies and non-normative sexuality.

British societal perspectives are also central to Steffen Silvis's contribution, which places Robert Aickman's 1966 short story "Larger than Oneself" within the context of religion's declining influence in post-World War II Britain. Appearing at a time of ecumenical crisis in the United Kingdom, Aickman's brief narrative is, in Silvis's words, "a metaphor for a fracturing Britain as it moves towards a post-Christian future."

Eve Kornfeld explores the complicated mix of cultural appropriation, authenticity, and exoticism in Tony Hillerman's 1984 detective novel *The Ghostway* and the tensions arising therefrom. Ostensibly rooted in Navajo culture, the novel nevertheless suggests a pandering to white, upper-class tastes and a commodification of authenticity and exoticism that Kornfeld finds problematic at best.

David Rochefort explores the corruption-of-innocence motif as it has manifested itself in social problem fiction. After defining this motif, Rochefort examines the ways it manifests itself in three twenty-first century novels: Bebe Moore Campbell's *72 Hour Hold* (2004), Lionel Shriver's *So Much for That* (2010), and Omar El Akhad's *American War* (2017).

William Price, Jr., brings the Literature section back full circle to the topic of war veterans with his study of Maximilian Uriarte's 2016 graphic novel *The White Donkey: Terminal Lance.* Treating the graphic war novel as a genre in and of itself and employing *White Donkey* as a case in point, Price notes the form's special use of colour, psycho-narration, and process for stripping away the heroic, larger-than-life qualities often attached to soldiers. As he argues, "The graphic war novel demythologises the Soldier by undermining heroic mythoi identifiable with a combat veteran to attack preconceptions about the archetype of the Soldier and even war itself."

—*MFN*

CHAPTER ONE

DISABILITY, MASCULINITY, AND GENDER ESSENTIALISM IN *LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER*

VICTORIA PARKER

I would like to begin by considering Sir Clifford Chatterley, the unsympathetically portrayed, paraplegic husband and World War I veteran in D. H. Lawrence's novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. As a reminder, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is the infamously risqué novel put on trial in 1960. It is a story about a wealthy white woman, Connie Chatterley, who is unhappy with her emotionally and sexually barren life with her husband Clifford and runs away with their gamekeeper, Oliver Mellors. One of the primary interpretations of this novel is as an anti-war text through which Clifford's disability serves as a metaphor for all that is wrong with modern society. Lawrence himself acknowledges the symbolic function of Clifford's disability in the novel, conceding in his "A Propos to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*" that "the lameness of Clifford was symbolic of the paralysis, the deeper emotional or passional paralysis, of most men of his sort and class today."[1] Many scholars appear to have accepted Clifford's characterisation and function unquestioningly. In contrast, of the relatively few scholars who have interpreted the novel through a disability studies framework, nearly all of them see in this metaphor a clearly prejudiced depiction of non-normative bodies.

In "The Chatterley Syndrome," Louis Battye perhaps provides the most scathing critique of Lawrence's representation of a disabled man. He claims that:

> Lawrence's attitude towards Sir Clifford [is] but a highly idiosyncratic restatement of the age-old half-conscious fear and hatred of the cripple . . . the primitive belief that a weak, malformed and ugly body probably enshrines a weak, malformed and ugly soul.[2]

In this context, Battye and others argue that Lady Chatterley's escape from the emasculated Clifford for a healthy lover is viewed as the only reasonable option for a beautiful young wife. However, what many of these critics fail to recognise is that Clifford's is not the only non-normative male body in the novel; as I will go on to show, Oliver Mellors, Lady Chatterley's lover and the mouthpiece for Lawrence's personal views, is physically impaired as well. Hence, I believe a full account of disability in the novel must reckon with why Lawrence upholds one disabled male as a model of manhood (Mellors), and another as his antithesis (Clifford).

The answer to this conundrum lies in the intersection between gender and disability in the novel. Feminist disability studies theorists find investigating gendered bodies meaningful within the framework of a social model of disability. This model holds that "disability" is not a medical condition (the medical or biological condition simply being an "impairment") but rather "a pervasive cultural system that stigmatises certain kinds of bodily variations," resulting in social and economic disadvantages.[3] Ableist stigmatisation coincides with the policing of gender, according to Sandra Bartky's insights as paraphrased by Kim Hall. In a society that views normalcy as being able to properly control and discipline one's body,

> disciplined bodies are also properly gendered bodies—that is, bodies whose behaviors, features, and desires flow seamlessly from binary sex characteristics.[4]

In the social model of disability, then, disability refers to the discriminating against and Othering of "abnormal" bodies, or those whose impairment prevents them from being able to "properly" express their gender.

However, to avoid an anachronistic reading of the novel, gender and disability must also be placed in their proper historical context. Lest we forget, both Mellors and Clifford are veterans of the war. Thus, both protagonists who function as models of masculinity in the novel are disabled soldiers—surely a conscious choice for an author writing during a period in which more than 750,000 men returned home to England permanently disabled.[5] One of the key challenges for disabled soldiers was to renegotiate their gendered identities. I explore how Lawrence's proposed model of masculinity is at once a radical departure from prevailing attitudes about what makes a man "a man" and a perpetuation of traditional conceptions of gender that are arguably just as (if not more) limiting.

At the time of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*'s publication in 1928, England was still attempting to recover from the long-term impacts of The Great War. Lawrence sets the novel in 1920, just two years after the end of the

war and only eight years prior to the publication of the novel, meaning that Lawrence writes about a society that is still contemporaneous with his reader's England. This society is one that had to contend with a war that had left 9.5 million dead.[6] Many of those who were lucky enough to survive returned home with physical or mental injuries.[7] The limitations of and stigmas attached to bodily injury and mental illness proved a challenge for men who wished to reintegrate into society and resume as "normal" of lives as possible. Many able-bodied soldiers perceived disability as a fate worse than death, and thus the "fear of becoming impaired, of the loss of normative corporeality and physicality, struck at the heart of masculine identity," in Wendy Jane Gagen's words.[8]

After the war, veterans had to find ways to renew their claim to manliness even when their injuries had changed the means available to them for "normal" gender expression. Contrary to popular belief, disabled soldiers in England could reclaim their masculinity despite their "mutilations." "The war-mutilated were [still] 'real men,'" expected to return to their families, get married, and find appropriate work.[9] Surprisingly, the masculine ideals encompassed in the soldier mentality easily carried over into the men's civilian lives. Many disabled soldiers renegotiated their masculinity and avoided stigmatisation through various means, including the hero status assigned to a war wound; the use of technology to be as self-sufficient as possible; demonstration of bodily discipline and strength through physical musculature; appropriate control over their emotions, including feigned cheerfulness; and a commitment to work.[10]

In my longer argument, I discuss Clifford's characterisation at length, especially in the historical context of the types of masculinity available to disabled soldiers after the war. I argue that, ironically, Clifford's character trajectory shows him renegotiating his masculine identity in ways strikingly like many soldiers of the time. For instance, Clifford's strong physique, use of a motorised wheelchair to be self-sufficient, and assertion of his manhood and upper class status through economic independence, as through his creative writing and his overseeing of the mining industry, were socially acceptable ways for disabled soldiers to reconceptualise what it meant to be a man. Had this novel upheld the traditional model of masculinity, he would have appeared to succeed. Yet Lawrence's negative portrayal of Clifford, particularly in contrasting him to the ideal embodied in Mellors, denies him any manly attributes, ultimately suggesting that his efforts are futile. For the purpose of this essay, I will focus mainly on how Mellor's status as a disabled man complicates the charges laid against Lawrence for his prejudiced depiction of disability.

Lawrence's harsh, unforgiving characterisation of Clifford often seems to be where disability studies critics have stopped in their interpretations, often leaving their arguments incomplete. Battye does this when he argues that, from Lawrence's perspective, "after Sir Clifford became a cripple he was no longer a man."[11] There are two main assumptions that critics seem to make here. The first is that Lawrence denies Clifford manhood because men with disabilities were viewed as unmanly in English society at the time. However, as I have shown, English society accepted disabled veterans' processes of identity renegotiation. Disabled soldiers *could* be seen as sexual, strong, independent men, provided they maintained other attributes of their gender identity. The second assumption supposes that Lawrence denies Clifford manhood out of *personal* prejudice towards disabled people. Yet this assumption simplifies how Lawrence's own experience as a disabled man complicates his reimagining of manhood. More importantly, this kind of interpretation also glosses over the fact that Oliver Mellors—the rival to Clifford and the model of masculinity in the novel—is also a disabled man. From this perspective, Lawrence's negative depiction of a paraplegic man's attempt to "regain" his manhood demonstrates that Lawrence's conception of gender identity departs from the prevailing attitudes about masculinity at the time. If Clifford represents for Lawrence what a man is *not*, then it is through the character of Mellors that Lawrence defines what a man *is.*

Throughout the novel, the narrator describes Mellors with adjectives connoting bodily weakness. Mellors is repeatedly characterised as "slender," "pale," and "frail," even looking "thin and ill" and persistently bothered by a troublesome cough.[12] These attributes seem at odds with pre- and post-war ideals associating "real" men with bodily strength. Readers quickly learn that Mellors' physical limitations are the effects of chronic illness: the pneumonia he caught during his time serving in India resulted in lung problems, severe enough to warrant him being granted a pension.[13] Although Mellors' chronic illness might not seem on par with Clifford's paraplegia, past and current understandings of disability have been inclusive of chronic illness. For instance, Mellors' characterisation as a recipient of a disability pension marks him as a disabled man in early twentieth century society. Throughout WWI, the British pension system classified war wounds and illnesses by "percentage" of a disability, to which a pension amount was assigned (the greater the percentage, the greater the pension). Joanna Bourke explains that "each part of men's bodies was allocated a moral weighting based on the degree to which it incapacitated a man from 'being' a man, rather than 'acting' as one."[14]

Under the government model of disability, both Clifford and Mellors would have been considered "disabled." Note, however, that in modern theoretical frameworks the term "disability" is a label of oppression and not, as the early twentieth century British government meant, a medical condition or injury. This is important for differentiating between "disability" in its historical context as Lawrence and his contemporaries might have perceived it, and "disability" as currently theorised. Thus, current definitions of disability include Mellors' impairment alongside Clifford's without distinguishing between "full" versus "partial" disabilities.

Interestingly, despite Mellors' description as a frail man of a lower economic status, bullied by his employer Clifford, Lawrence does not leave the reader with the impression that Mellors is unmanly; instead, he is perceived by readers, through the loving eyes of Connie, as more of a man than Clifford. In short, Lawrence leaves readers unable to accept Clifford as manly in part *because* of his physical impairment, but he encourages readers to see Mellors as manly *even with* his impairment. My point here is that, if Lawrence's portrayal of men like Clifford as unmanly was solely predicated on Lawrence's prejudice towards disability—the view that physical disability is inherently emasculating—then Mellors, another disabled man, would not be upheld as the ideal model of manhood in the novel. So the question remains: why is one disabled man stigmatised, and not the other? Although there are numerous differences between Clifford and Mellors, the primary factor in Lawrence's gender framework is sex: unlike Mellors, Clifford does not have a functioning penis and therefore is unable to engage in heterogenital intercourse, to reproduce, or to provide and receive sexual pleasure from his wife (or so the novel problematically assumes). Additionally, Clifford also has a negative mentality towards sex, which derives from his Western education and aligns him with an intellectually elite society that values the mind above all else.

In other words, the key difference between the two men is the phallus. This framework explains why, even though Mellors is characterised in terms of bodily weakness, he is simultaneously described as strong. For instance, Connie "cling[s] fast to his thin, strong body, the only home she had ever known,"[15] demonstrating that her relationship with him has changed her perception of his body, seeing it now as "strong" where she once saw it as "frail." In fact, the mixed language of frail and strong, delicate and powerful, used to describe Mellors, is the same language used to describe the penis. Connie feels "tender love" for the "wilting penis, as it so tenderly, frailly . . . withdrew" which can just as suddenly demonstrate the "momentous, surging rise of the phallus again, the other power."[16] Lawrence affirms patriarchal society by celebrating the phallus, which

determines the worth of a man's life. Hence, a disabled but sexually potent man like Mellors is viewed as a real man, who is conferred power and privilege in Lawrence's worldview by engaging in heterosexual intercourse.

To further underscore the distinction between the two disabled men, Mellors and Clifford, Lawrence associates the language of power, nature, youth, and life with Mellors, while he assigns symbols of death, emptiness, machinery, and weakness to Clifford. Through the associations of Clifford with death and emptiness, Lawrence underscores Clifford's impotency and reinforces the idea that Clifford is nonsexual, lifeless, and thus not a man—in some ways, that he is not even human. Ultimately, by rooting his framework of masculinity in the body, Lawrence perpetuates a biologically essential view of gender as embodied in genitalia.

Lawrence's gender framework is inseparable from his novel's purpose: to offer a solution for the "regeneration" of England. Lawrence articulates this theme in his "A Propos," in which he states that

> If England is to be regenerated . . . then it will be by the arising of a new blood-contact, a new touch, and a new marriage. It will be a phallic rather than a sexual regeneration. For the phallus is only the great old symbol of godly vitality in a man, and of immediate contact. It will also be a renewal of marriage: the true phallic marriage.[17]

Therefore, for Lawrence, the survival of England depends upon the union between man and woman where their minds and bodies "meet" in sexual intercourse within the social context of marriage.

Lawrence's focus on "regeneration" makes perfect sense when considering that, during the 1920s, increasing the war-decimated population was a great concern of the English government. One solution was marriage. English society placed extra emphasis on heterosexual marriage based on the idea that happy, satisfied couples would have more children.[18] In other words, happy marriages would beget new generations of Englanders, providing English society with enough citizens and labourers for the nation to grow, considering that so many of the younger generations were wiped out from the war. Perhaps this is one explanation for Lawrence's emphasis on procreation when he praises the Catholic church for making

> marriage a sacrament based on the sexual communion, for the purpose of procreation [since] the sense of being a potential creator and law-giver, as father and husband, is perhaps essential to the day-by-day life of a man if he is to live full and satisfied.[19]

Lawrence's beliefs that reproduction is central to sex and marriage, and that fatherhood helps define a man, take on extra significance when considering the context in which he was writing.

Lawrence's emphasis on heterosexual love, the unification of body and mind, and conception explains why Clifford is excluded from the paradigm of manliness in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. With this framework in mind, the term "regeneration" not only implies the spiritual renewal and restoration of society, but also denotes regrowth, repopulation, and human reproduction—literally, the making of new "generations." Thus the heteropatriarchal framework of masculinity Lawrence uses in his novel proves flexible enough to accommodate the bodies of *some* physically impaired men, but only those who can and are willing to have productive sex with women. Lawrence's harsh characterisation of Clifford becomes less of a direct attack on disabled male bodies than a traditional and even a religiously oriented dismissal of non-normative sexualities that do not serve the greater good of society.

Notes

[1] D. H. Lawrence, "A Propos to *Lady Chatterley's Lover,*" in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, ed. Michael Squires (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 333.
[2] Louis Battye, "The Chatterley Syndrome," in *Stigma: The Experience of Disability*, ed. Paul Hunt (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), 8.
[3] Kim Q. Hall, "Reimagining Disability and Gender Through Feminist Disability Studies: An Introduction," in *Feminist Disability Studies*, ed. Kim Q. Hall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 17.
[4] Hall, "Reimagining," 5.
[5] Deborah Cohen, *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 4.
[6] Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 27.
[7] Cohen, *War Come Home*, 1.
[8] Wendy Jane Gagen, "Remastering the Body, Renegotiating Gender: Physical Disability and Masculinity during the First World War, the Case of J. B. Middlebrook," *European Review of History* 14, no. 4 (December 2007), 529, https://doi.org/10.1080/13507480701752169.
[9] Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 73.
[10] George Mosse, "Warriors and Socialists," in *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 108.
[11] Battye, "The Chatterley Syndrome," 9.
[12] D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, ed. Michael Squires (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 112.
[13] Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, 92.
[14] Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 65.

[15] Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, 278.
[16] Lawrence, 175.
[17] Lawrence, "A Propos," 328.
[18] Ana Carden-Coyne, *Reconstructing the Body: Classicism, Modernism, and the First World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[19] Lawrence, "A Propos," 317.

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