

ISSUE #2

SAVAGE

Myths
&
Fables

Note

Autumn 2015

Choosing a theme for SAVAGE ISSUE #2 was not easy, following the success and impact of our first issue. How best to move forward with the publication led us to thinking of ways in which we had been inspired by our past year's work. Considering the theme of inspiration itself, the idea of myths and fables seemed an obvious and fruitful choice. Consequently, this issue explores the ways in which myths and fables continue to pervade the arts and everyday popular culture.

Cordelia Nagle and Marina Scholtz consider our enduring fascination with the Classical world in theatre and art respectively (p. 48 & p. 40), whilst Tom Broadley looks at myth in contemporary song lyrics (p. 13). 'What is a myth?' asks Maddalena Van Der Vatti in her interview with artist Aphra Shemza (p. 38). Her answer, 'A traditional tale attempting to explain the inexplicable', is the grounds for which Niall Adams considers the need for fables and fairy tales despite their alleged redundancy (p. 60). Meanwhile stills taken from Flora Murphy's documentary about refugees in Ukraine consider myth in the context of 'a widely held but false belief' (p. 34). Nick Mastrini similarly debunks the myth of female perfection in modern film (p. 26), whilst Rebecca Speare-Cole talks to writer and director Benjamin Leggett about his use of fable (p. 33).

Modern myths permeate society, such as that of the 'mad girl' discussed by Zsófia Paulikovics (p. 4), and are responsible for constructing the lens through which we view the world. For this reason we have collated fascinating treatments and discussions of myth and fable with ethereal and mystical images.

The result is, we hope you'll agree, both arresting and thought-provoking.

All the best,

Sophie and Lauren



Sophie Meadows (President)
Lauren Bowes (Editor-in-chief)

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Girl, Corrupted.

ZSÓFIA PAULIKOVICS investigates our prevailing fascination with the 'mad girl'.

Madness as a symbol of rebellion, liberation, and nonconformity is an age-old analogy in popular culture. Admittedly, it isn't explicitly a gendered phenomenon. From Ophelia to McMurphy, writers and film-makers alike have relied on the disturbed and demented to convey resistance to the constraints of society, and speak truths the rest of us are unable to pronounce. That said, the mad girl has been the subject of particularly obsessive scrutiny – taking on her own mythical status, which urgently needs to be investigated.

American writer and Editor Cat Marnell achieved notoriety through her infamous semi-confessional essays, providing uncensored details of her drug use and troubled mental health history. After leaving her job as Beauty Editor at the women's website *xoJane*, Marnell took up a position writing a column for *Vice* magazine entitled 'Amphetamine Logic'. Her messy bleached blonde hair, kohl-rimmed eyes, and smudged red lipstick contribute to her flagrant reputation. Which is not to say that Marnell isn't a good writer. 'I was Rolling Stone's "Hot Bukowski." I was the toast of the town. I was puking flowers afterwards; I was letting everybody down', she wrote in her final *Vice* column. She captures madness at its most hypnotic, and writes about it with a poesy into which it is impossible to not be drawn. Her column is escapism, a drug-induced fable for the Millennial. She could be narrating the stories of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* or Angelina Jolie in *Girl, Interrupted*: dangerous, manic dream-girls have always seduced.

More of us participate in this than we realise. Recently, a friend posted a picture on Instagram: Chloë Sevigny lying perched on one elbow with 'I put the hot in psychotic' written on her stomach in defiant marker. 'Mondays' reads the caption underneath. Humans have always exaggerated feelings in order to deal with them,

and translated horror into humour; after all, 'bummed-out' doesn't quite have the same ring to it as 'psychotic'. However we also have a responsibility not to unthinkingly prop up harmful misrepresentations.

Social media websites like Tumblr and Instagram contribute to the hype around self-destructive behaviour, one black-and-white Lana del Rey quote at a time. It's a dangerous area: it perpetrates a culture in which mental illness is portrayed as aspirational – something which provides an added layer of glamorous darkness to one's personality – as opposed to a condition that has the potential to destroy your life. The grim reality of mental illness is rarely shown: the side that debilitates, makes you unable to work, to exist. It is only alluring insofar as the person appears in control of their madness, which presents a rather Heller-like 'Catch 22'. Part of Marnell's appeal is her wry self-awareness. It's as if she's saying, 'Yes I'm fucked up, but at least I know it', which ultimately makes it all okay, as long as we don't see what goes on behind the perpetually-closed curtains. It's a socially acceptable expression of madness, whilst the reality of mental illness remains very much taboo.

It is also important to mention – crucial to mention, in fact – that the portrayal of madness is far less digestible to mass media when it is carried out by someone who defies Western beauty ideals. It is in equal measure fascinating and troubling that the crazy glimmer in the eyes of a young, thin, white girl makes her all the more enticing, whilst anyone who is old, queer, or a person of colour rarely benefits from admitting to any further 'shortcomings'.

So what is it about the mystique of the demented woman that creates her enduring appeal? 'The reason I write about drugs so much', said Marnell in an earlier interview, 'is that it's always been a boys' club – the shameless drug user writers' club at least. Women always write the recovery

memoirs.' This statement isn't strictly supported when we examine authors like Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, or Elizabeth Wurtzel – all of whom continue to attract a cult following with their confessional poetry and prose. However, it is true that we've come to expect a certain narrative of salvation and compulsory recovery: 'it is debilitating to be any woman in a society where women are warned that if they do not behave like angels they must be monsters' wrote Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their groundbreaking 1979 study *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Perhaps the reason the myth of the mad girl persists is because it provides some much-needed variation. She manages to pull a feat to which we all secretly aspire: embracing womanhood, being shamelessly female whilst also being crazy, and thereby breaking the norm. While women's feelings still get dismissed as less valid, while moody to depressed and everything in between gets labeled as 'being a bitch', taking 'insane' and wearing it like a crown is a radical act in itself.



SHOWCASE

The Origins of a Fractal Tectonic Aran Islands by Matthew Turner

Who wants to be the next

TOMMY WALTERS explores the Buddhist leader's mysterious background and myth-like status.

Fungus growing out of a stone pillar. A golden urn. A search for supernatural vision on a Tibetan lake. Three peculiar things which seem to have no connection, but, according to Buddhist folklore, were part of the process to select the Dalai Lama.

Rituals such as these situate the Dalai Lama within the realm of the mythological. As I sat in front of him at a press conference in Oxford however, his mortality became evident. I watched the 'simple Buddhist monk' from humble origins arrive in a convoy of blacked-out Range Rovers packed with stern security guards and an entourage of dedicated groupie-monks.

Roll up Tenzin Gyatso, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, formally known as His Holiness: the only Nobel Prize laureate to appear in an Apple advert, or to guest edit French Vogue. He is idolised by western liberals who swear by their daily meditation apps. Exiled from his country in 1959 after the Chinese occupation the Dalai Lama now lives in Dharamsala in Northern India, still presiding as the spiritual leader of Tibet. When he's not in deep meditation there, he's leading a second life racking up air miles on tour, building up his celebrity image.

As the late Christopher Hitchens once said, the 'greatest triumph modern PR can offer is the transcendent success of having your words and actions judged by your reputation, not the other way round'. The Dalai Lama has enjoyed this unassailable status for some time now, his name being successfully branded as a byword for love,

Dalai Lama?

compassion, and saintly values. But due to the superstar cult of celebrity assigned to him today, we are at risk of forgetting that this man was born into a mystical and superstitious institution, and was part of a bizarre reincarnation process.

As the story goes, in 1933, the thirteenth Dalai Lama died, passing his spirit to a newly-born boy. This boy would supposedly be identified when the Dalai Lama shifted his head from south to east on the night he was buried. A star-shaped fungus grew eastward on a nearby pillar, while high-ranking monks watched Lake Lhamo La-tso to look out for 'features of the reincarnation landform'. These obscure hints prompted parties to search 'east' for potential candidates, who were presented with ceremonial artefacts and had to guess which had belonged to the previous Dalai Lama. When this failed to be conclusive, the High Lamas looked for miraculous phenomena in the boys' looks and actions. Finally, the 'true' Dalai Lama had his name picked out of a golden urn.

That boy celebrated his eightieth birthday this year at the Global Compassion Summit in California. But now he has turned 300 years of Tibetan Buddhist tradition on its head by saying there will be no re-incarnation at the end of his tenure. He'll be retiring in a modern way, and the next Dalai Lama will be democratically elected.

This move is not just an ideological rejection of the paranormal elements in the selection process – it also seems like a political statement. The Dalai Lama has expressed fear that the traditional processes of selection are vulnerable to corruption. China, fixated to the point of obsession on strengthening its control of Tibet, believes that the next appointment should be chosen by

their central government. I spoke to Victor Chan, the BBC Chinese correspondent, who sees the Dalai Lama's decision as 'a powerful gesture of democratic reform to China ... a jibe at China's authoritarianism by reforming his own old institution. I can be sure that China will roll out a master plan again of choosing their own puppet Dalai Lama.' He could very well be correct: China is blamed for the disappearance of the eleventh Panchen Lama, the second highest-ranking official, and in 1995 tried to elect a different candidate to this role, who was rejected by the Tibetan people.

Perhaps the Dalai Lama isn't just an innocent preacher of 'love and compassion', but also a sound political operator who understands his significance in the modern world. He knows full well how to manoeuvre between great powers, and has done so by meeting nearly every single important head of state since the 1990s. He knows that in order to save his institution and spread compassion, he cannot continue to propagate his own myth.

Like his reincarnation story, however, much about the Dalai Lama will remain a mystery. With no mention of a will, any upcoming elections, or a proposal for how elections will take place, it could be argued that he is being deliberately vague about his future. All we know is that, for now, he's sticking around doing exactly the kind of 'celebrity humanitarianism' the Tibetan independence movement needs to put pressure on a threatening, imperialistic China.

Flâneur 2.0: Self-Mystification

MAYANNE SORET draws parallels between the web browser and the flâneur.

It is a Sunday afternoon; the streets of east London are bathed in the warm sunlight of an unexpected Indian summer, yet I am exploring the Sistine Chapel via a 2D virtual reality on my fifteen-inch screen. Six open tabs are neatly aligned on my Google Chrome browser: from *The New Yorker* articles to obscure Tumblr blogs, they are witnesses to my online wanderings. You may say I am a procrastinator; I would answer I am a flâneur. I am filled with intense satisfaction at the thought of scrolling down my Twitter feed, essay upon essay popping up from the other side of the hemisphere. New URLs appear and multiply, like the tall buildings of Haussmann's Paris once did. I can't help but wonder if our generation could one day be labelled the 'children of the century', just like the generation who sauntered aimlessly looking at 1800s Paris. Does our addiction to the ever-stimulating virtual landscape of the Internet make us the flâneur of the twenty-first century?

'For the perfect flâneur,' wrote Baudelaire in 1863, 'For the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy [...] to see the world, to be at the center of the world.' The flâneur was a character created by Baudelaire in his essay 'The Painter of Modern Life' and came to define a group of Parisian intellectuals who would indulge in promenades through the city, relishing in the sights of urban life. They lived for the crowd, the sheer enthusiasm of modernity, and the expensive clothes that were required to see and be seen.

Like the flâneurs, today's web browsers are driven by the appeal of novelty and a desire to forge a space for themselves in periods of leaping, palpable modernity.

Baudelaire innovated by writing about carcases as if they were spiritual visions: his mission was to take the concept of beauty out of

in the Internet Age

its conventional definition and use traditional forms to explore themes that were deemed ugly, if not repulsive and taboo. Similarly, popular websites today often discuss topics dismissed as irrelevant or inconsequential by 'High Culture'. Websites such as *Rookie Magazine* or *Policy Mic* examine popular culture under the lens of critical analysis. Celebrity anecdotes thus become part of the global intellectual discourse, like a Taylor Swift and Nicki Minaj Twitter debate becoming a portal on intersectional feminism.

Flâneurs and browsers both self-mystify, maintaining a complex, hide-and-seek relationship with anonymity. Baudelaire, again: 'The spectator is a prince who everywhere rejoices in his incognito.' Perhaps the joy of meandering, both physically and virtually, allows us to shed the weight of our individuality. The 'Neck Beard', the 'Hipster', or the 'Basic B*tch' are two-dimensional stock characters canonized in our very own Human Comedy for the digital age. However, we do not entirely succeed at becoming anonymous, nor at separating virtual and 'real' selves; our online activities define who we are behind and in front of the screen. Twitter is our placard and Facebook our legacy, an instant glorification of the banality of our everyday, aestheticized via our Instagram page. The Internet is the perfect platform to create myths, although it is not always clear where these begin and realities end.

Or maybe we scroll out of pure boredom? Each of these phenomena developed during periods of modernisation and political stability following tumultuous recent history: flâneurs succeeded three French revolutions, two republics, and several monarchic coups; the Internet arrived after the termination of a century of world wars, economical crises, and nuclear panics. While the Internet is home to many strident political sentiments, most of our browsing is what some would call mundane and quotidian. But how often do the likes, shares, and political theorizing trans-

late into real-world activism?

Despite the essentially passive nature of scrolling, the Internet as a whole has recreated margins of inclusion. While we must not forget the victims of hateful comments online, often targeted at communities that are already stigmatized in 'real life', the limitless cavernousness of the word wide web provides a myriad of spaces for conversation – creating communities and supplying support networks to connect isolated individuals. This is where flâneurs and browsers diverge: the Internet's diverse and welcoming potential is in direct opposition to the narrow model of white masculinity so vividly promoted by the nineteenth century flâneur. While historians remember this cultural phenomenon as emblematic of the period, the individuals involved represented a very small subsection of society, the aristocratic 'man of leisure'.

The act of strolling through Haussmann's Paris and that of scrolling down limitless webpages both felt, in their own times, intensely modern. Indeed both created fresh opportunities for self-presentation and encouraged new ways of perceiving the base or lowbrow. However, while one lived off exclusion, the other opens up endless expansive spaces – unique in its ubiquity.

The Muse is still Alive

SHOWCASE

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Saturn by Freebury Williams

TOM BROADLEY looks at how myth is used to inspire contemporary music.

The relevance of myth to the modern world is hard to define. The names of the gods, monsters, and heroes who populate these ancient stories are familiar to everyone born in the West, with poets and writers remoulding them to suit their own culture for centuries. Yet, in the present day, a deeper connection with Greek myths has somewhat been lost, and seems rarely to extend beyond academic realms, save for the irritatingly frequent Hercules reboots. They are more engrained in our society than may appear, however. Not only does everyday modern culture share an interest in the same themes – violence, death, beauty, and love – but musicians still use these ancient stories to invigorate their art.

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For over a decade, Sufjan Stevens has crafted songs that blend folk, electronica, references foraged from the Bible, American history, and Greek myth. This year he released *Carrie & Lowell*, his sparsest album instrumentation-wise, in which he narrates life in the aftermath of his mother's death. On 'The Only Thing' he is so grief-stricken that he contemplates suicide but, looking into the starry night, halts: 'The only thing that keeps me from driving this car / Half-light, jack-knife into the canyon at night / Signs and wonders: Perseus aligned with the skull / Slain Medusa, Pegasus alight from us all.' Constellation names keep the myths in our collective consciousness, but their stellar beauty also sustains Sufjan. He twists the myth to reflect his situation; Medusa's skull is a reminder of his loss while Pegasus' shining emergence is a symbol of hope springing from the most desolate places. Stevens delves into this mythic imagery once again on 'All of Me Wants All of You'. Addressing his lover, he sings: 'On the sheets I see your horizon / All of me pressed onto

you / But in this light you look like Poseidon / I'm just a ghost you walk right through.' Grief has made him so emotionally weak he feels immaterial. In comparison, his lover appears colossal in their bed, with all the sea god's strength and masculinity, making Stevens even smaller.

Given its interest in traditional storytelling, folk music's use of myth is less surprising. English songwriter Laura Marling uses Greek legend to engage with centuries-old ideas of femininity. On 'I Speak Because I Can' she plays the part of the 'lonely wife' Penelope, near-abandoned spouse of Odysseus, and on 'What He Wrote', she pleads for the forgiveness of Hera, the goddess of motherhood. For Marling, Greek myth is useful because these stories display the roles into which women are still forced today. These categories are undeniably restrictive, but through her retellings we see women burst out of them in all their complexity.

The mysticism on *Short Movie*, Marling's latest album, moves away from Hellenic inspiration and instead draws from Alejandro Jodorowsky's avant-garde film *The Holy Mountain*. The Chilean filmmaker can count Kanye West as another of his disciples. Centre-stage on his *Yeezus* tour was a metallic mountain directly influenced by this film. Mysticism might seem at odds with West's current brand of industrial hip-hop, but 'Wolves', his collaboration with Sia and Chicagoan Vic Mensa, shows the opposite is true. In one verse, Mensa advises: 'Don't fly too high / Your wings might melt.' His cautioning against over-reaching and excessive ambition chimes with West's sky-high artistic objectives. Mensa and West modernise the Icarus myth to suggest that if you put yourself out there the 'wolves', the media, will tear you down, their flashbulbs melting your wings.

On Mensa's track 'Codeine Crazy', he repurposes the myth again. 'Icarus flew too close to the sun / I could be guilty of being too high to die.' It is a narcotic high he talks about here; he says he's untouchable, but his mention of Icarus suggests he is as susceptible to falling as anyone. Later on, however, he raps: 'They want you to think that your wings melt / When you make your dreams real / So black boy don't fly too high.' At heart, the Icarus legend is a cautionary tale and Mensa relates it to the situation of young black men in America. He has the conviction to reach his dreams but the wary 'they' know that white America loves to set black men up to fail.

'Go follow your gem, your white feathered friend / Icarus point to the sun,' Sufjan Stevens sings, picking up on Mensa's favoured myth. His lines on 'John My Beloved', with their subtle synthesis of Christianity and Greek myth, capture the complexity that artists still bring to these old myths. Their beauty is in their flexibility. They tell stories that are so rooted in human experience, that they can be reappropriated and repurposed with ease, flowering with meaning in any period of time.



SHOWCASE

Untitled by Kate Kinley

Night Until Noon

by CELLARS

Interrupted space,
There's not much left of it
Empty Days,
A picture without a frame.

Still in the room,
Night until noon,
Moody and cruel and out of sight,
Swallows the gloom,
And coughs in her stew,
A savoury blend of wasted times.

The cat has caught your tongue,
You plugged it up I've seen you sorry,
Sucking on your thumb,
Face against the floor,
Waiting for a letter to be slid under the door.

Still in the room,
Night until noon,
Moody and cruel and out of sight,
Swallows the gloom,
And coughs in her stew,
A savoury blend of wasted times.



Regurgitation by Sophia Siddiqui

A conversation with CELLARS

ANJELICA BARBE talks to musicians **Gabriel Levy, Dan Levy, Thomas Harris, Tom Sonenfeld, and Simon Flynn** who, together, are **CELLARS**.

Many myths surround the concept of creativity. A common feature of epic poetry in Western literature is the invocation of a Muse – a supreme deity or goddess who provides endless inspiration and transforms the poet into a vessel for their elevated imagination.

It's a common misconception that musicians are simply inspired to write: a dream will bring forth lyrics that they'll scribble on a notepad in the middle of the night, or a break-up will produce an awesome album of emotion-soaked ballads.

But the creative process of composing a song isn't always instantaneous. I talked to CELLARS, an alternative psych-rock quintet with glimmers of shoegaze, to learn about their methods.

Most pop music numbers seem to concern love and relationships. They can be platonic or romantic, affectionate or resentful, but CELLARS tell me that the theme of love doesn't saturate the subject matter of their songs. For them, their tracks can be about anything, and their process places melody in the forefront: drummer Dan tells me 'once the music is written, the lyrics will fall into place depending on the song.'

Their upcoming EP – with a tentative post-New Year release date – focuses on the general theme of loneliness. Lead guitarist Gabe clarifies that the loneliness that they explore isn't limited to sad singledom, but includes ideas of both individual isolation and detachment from friends. The band hope that these ideas will resound both in the language of the lyrics and translate to the melody of music.

Dan describes their song-writing process as holistic, with each member bringing distinctive elements to the rehearsal room. 'Parts will chop and change over time as all our members have input in our lyrics', leading to diverse poetic and

metaphorical elements. Their debut track 'Night Until Noon' includes images of bleak spaces and dark nights, underscored with a sense of loneliness that is both abstract and miserable.

The band tell me the songs stem from Gabe: he acts like an arranger and crafts all elements into his preferred, envisioned sound. The lyrics and melody of 'Night Until Noon' compliment each other to form shimmering psych-rock pieces. Although the band share a pop sensibility when writing, keyboardist Simon's synth adds the psychedelic vibe to CELLARS's tracks. Tom's sloppy style of bass and Dan's tight, concise drum patterns are distinctive parts of the band's sound, but they are refined and crafted through Gabe's vision.

The rumours that surround the band's namesake prove to be entirely false. I ask them to confirm whether their name is a reference to *Donnie Darko*, but Dan explains otherwise. 'We wish we had some sort of crazy, eureka moment origin story to offer, but the sad truth is that Gabe, Thomas, and I had been playing together for months, and just wanted to give whatever we were doing a name. I liked the sound of 'cellars', and everyone else just kinda shrugged it into acceptance. People always assume that it's a reference to *Donnie Darko*, which we have no problem with at all. The whole portal, wormhole thing sort of works for our music in a sense, there's a lot of alien, psychedelic sounds going on.'

The quest for individuality when it comes to the band's music was initially frustrating for Gabe, as songs they created would remind them of songs they'd heard before. After watching a documentary on punk, Gabe took a more DIY approach: 'I bought my own recording equipment, worked from home and put a lot of effort into the production of the songs.' From here, CELLARS could take songs they'd composed before and arrange them differently, allowing the band to refine the demos Gabe produced.

However, their fusion of rock, psychedelic, and

shoegaze isn't something the band actively strives to make unique. They've been told they sound influenced by Mac Demarco, David Bowie, and Pink Floyd, and they take these comparisons as both compliments and constructive criticism. Dan tells me that 'audience members are actually passing judgement without realising it', and says that they'll work with these comments to reach a larger, cooler demographic.

The changing face

STEWART LISTER VICKERS documents the rise and fall of the Rock God.

Long flamboyant hair, perspiration-soaked denim and tight lycra trousers that leave little to the imagination: the Rock Icon is a cultural phenomenon that needs no introduction. Combined with impeccable creative ability, captivating stage moves, and a characterisation of brute masculinity, the Rock God was once an icon adored by millions. Yet, in the modern day, he is strangely diminished.

Where this began is hard to say. Was it Robert Plant of Led Zeppelin, whose open-shirt and bangles pushed the boundaries of sexuality?

Or Bowie's Ziggy Stardust, who burned those boundaries to ashes, tinted in a fiery cocktail fuelled by nail varnish and hairspray? Perhaps it was Roger Daltrey of The Who, whose screaming vocals accompanied the manic antics of drummer Keith Moon. Mick Jagger remains a fierce presence thanks to constant touring and the iconisation of his persona, displayed in modern day homages such as Maroon 5's 'Moves Like Jagger'. It was once claimed that the Gallagher brothers of Oasis formed the last generation of these hell-raiser frontmen, grabbing headlines with tales of their excesses.

Are we now lost in a sea of bands swept by conformity, with no discernable figureheads? A recent album launch of *The Aristocracy of Rock'n'Roll* by Duchess in Camden captivated its audience with frontman Freddie Mauro's powerful gestures, singing on the bar, and thrusting against the drum kit. However, the mood to an outsider could easily have seemed a parody, replicating time-honoured moves from Freddie Mercury's early career. Yet, to fans clinging on to this past genre, he was a catsuit-clad icon. Rock never died; it simply withdrew to the shadows.

The Rock God need not be male, and the role of women in the genre is a compelling area. The

now forgotten Vixen were an immensely popular band, recognisable by their leather and permed radiant blonde locks. The immediate response to their videos and stage presence is surely of eroticisation, which at first is easily dismissed as record-company exploitation. However, this mirrors the male rock gods' self-presentation. The link between music and sexuality is hard to define but universally acknowledged. Without over-philosophising, music touches every aspect of our souls. Thus, crank up the volume, turn up the base, and throw in some lightning-fast guitar solos: you have a primeval auditory aphrodisiac.

What remains today is surely just nostalgia. Led Zeppelin t-shirts spew from Primark shelves. Adam Lambert fronts Queen in delightful homage, but he cannot compare to the original. He is his own brand, merely superimposed onto Brian May and Roger Taylor to cover the void left by Mercury's tragic departure. Perhaps Billy Joe Armstrong and Dave Grohl are among the few true frontmen, while bands such as Kasabian and The Vaccines now promote an image that involves all their members equally.

Perhaps this egalitarian approach provides a new and interesting approach to the idolisation of musicians, allowing drummers and bass players a spotlight previously reserved to vocalists. Pete Wentz, bassist of Fall Out Boy, is almost a singular example of a non-singer frontman; however this is perhaps due to his physical and sexual appeal to the band's target audience, rather than his charismatic personality. It must also be remembered that the sixties icons of The Beatles and The Kinks never intentionally singled out one member above the rest, and this was no detriment to their success in creating obsessive fervour amongst their fans.

Nevertheless, we can analyse the Rock God post-mortem. The phenomenon may be unique to the hard rock of the seventies, the era of working class rebellion and financial strife, when tailored mods were succeeded by denim-clad

of the Rock God

rockers. Perhaps the prosperity of the eighties brought the end of this icon, a fiscal reason perhaps demonstrated when Simon Le Bon took Duran Duran to smooth New Wave stardom: a more refined genre of music with a larger budget for production, which ultimately put the final nail in the coffin of the chaotic, raw rock persona.

The rock god's death must be down to more than mere economic reasons. The early pioneers of the sixties set a precedent for live music, which was then perfected in the seventies, before falling prey to television and pirate audiotapes. A music icon was no longer required to drum up enthusiasm in front of a crowd, but rather perform a technically perfect set on *Top of the Pops*. The Rock God fails to thrive in this. But rather than mourn his passing, surely we are better off to simply enjoy what has been left behind, and thrash about to the rhythm. Now see if you can find a live version of 'Communication Break-down' on YouTube.

The meeting that changed Rap

TARA CARLIN investigates conspiracy theories within the rap industry.

There are some bizarre claims surrounding the genre of rap: conspiracies claim that 2Pac is alive, that someone else had Beyoncé and Jay Z's baby and she was actually wearing a prosthetic baby-bump, and my personal favourite – Kanye West and Nicki Minaj are in the Illuminati. These are easy to dismiss, especially when the evidence provided is merely drawing attention to triangles in Kanye's videos.

However, there are more pernicious myths that remain unresolved. In 2012, an anonymous letter entitled 'The Secret Meeting That Changed Rap Music and Destroyed A Generation' emerged, becoming an Internet sensation. The letter opens with this statement, 'After more than twenty years, I've finally decided to tell the world what I witnessed in 1991, which I believe was one of the biggest turning point [sic] in popular music, and ultimately American society.' It documents a meeting between industry insiders, who had allegedly invested in private prisons and saw the rap industry as a means for profit. 'Gangster rap' would become a marketing tool, for businessmen who had invested in private prisons, promoting criminal culture, and pushing youth into prisons, consequently leading to greater profits. Of course, the letter could merely be a hoax to stir up a cyber-storm, but its narrative reflects a long-lasting truth that is particularly prevalent in the USA. As Sebastien Elkouby stated in 'Commercial Rap: A Pipeline to Prison?', 'The private prison industrial complex is very real and the people and entities behind it will go to surprising lengths to sustain it.'

How shocking is this claim in the grand scheme of things? There have been even more shameful conspiracies that have turned out to be true. One such is the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment, emphasising the long history of systematic and institutional racial discrimination in America. For forty years, between 1932 and 1972, the Public Health Service experimented on 399 black men

in the late stages of syphilis. These men – mostly illiterate sharecroppers from the poorest areas of Alabama – were never informed of the severity of their disease. They were told they were being treated for 'bad blood'; the doctors involved had no intention of curing them. The data for the experiment was to be collected from their autopsies. Jean Heller in *The Washington Star* finally blew the whistle on this in 1972. This story's veracity is not just highly disturbing, but also proves that humanity is capable of absolute evil.

In light of the Tuskegee case, I would hesitate to mock anyone for believing conspiracy theories regarding institutional racism in the U.S. government or black Americans' mistrust of white society. Likewise, with the conspiracy surrounding this letter, there is some truth in the myth. Its authenticity is questionable, but that doesn't negate the fact that the music industry has directly invested in private prisons. General Electric, co-owner of Universal Entertainment, parent of Interscope, is the U.S.'s largest weapons manufacturer and an investor in private prisons.

Music executives profit from their marketing of rappers' depiction of misogyny, violence, and drugs. Artists such as Rhymefest, Wise Intelligent, and Too Short have shared their personal experiences of being silenced by the music industry. Yvonne Bynoe said 'the systematic colonisation of Black music began in 1971 when Columbia Records commissioned the Harvard University Business School to conduct an investigation about how they should better benefit from soul music', showing how white business executives have always profited from black music. Also of note is Keith Clinkscales's rule of *Vibe Magazine*. The magazine heavily contributed to the East Coast/West Coast rivalry that resulted in the deaths of Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G.

Regardless of whether or not there's a plot to lead young rap fans into prison, the marketing behind rap music often promotes criminality, in ways more damaging than previously realized. Conspiracy theories alone cannot be blamed for

the soaring incarceration rates in the U.S., the war on drugs being the main contributor. That said, rap is both a symptom and a cause of the glorification of drugs and crime. In Louis Theroux's *Weird Weekends: 'Gangsta Rap'*, a rapper states, poignantly: 'The character is real ... that's what's so real about my life. If you want me to stop rapping about crack and selling drugs then get drugs off the street, get the guns off the street – I didn't choose this lifestyle, it chose me.'

So is 'gangsta' culture a symptom or a cause of the state of rap music? This is a 'Catch-22' situation. Rap artists clearly aren't puppets whose strings are pulled by profit-hungry CEOs; hip-hop's evolution is more complicated than that. However, there is a pattern in rap music, which could be blamed on behind-the-scenes intervention. It's time to start taking these stories more seriously, because whether the events depicted actually happened or not – they speak fundamental truths. The ruthlessness of business prioritizing profit over ethics is no myth.



SHOWCASE

Deconstructing Pygmalion

NICK MASTRINI discusses the crafting of idealised female characters in film.

The myth of Pygmalion reflects the desire we all hold for our fantasies to become reality. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Pygmalion is a Cypriot sculptor who, disappointed by the women around him, carves the statue of Galatea so realistically that he falls in love with it. He wishes for a bride of Galatea's likeness and his fantasy becomes reality when Aphrodite gives life to the statue. Film serves as an appropriate medium to interpret Ovid's tale; the silver screen mirrors our desires, functioning as a projection of the myths we wish to see transformed into reality. As if enchanted by Aphrodite, in the darkness of a cinema fiction becomes fact, and we fall in love with a constructed image. The experience becomes voyeuristic as each viewer takes the role of Pygmalion, presented with a beautiful image to adore and covet.

Throughout the history of cinema, female actors have been constructed like the statue of Galatea: fashioned flawlessly and without human blemishes to cater to a targeted heterosexual male audience. Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) explores how male obsession can construct this myth of female perfection that is impossible to escape. Jimmy Stewart's Scottie crafts Kim Novak's Madeleine into his idyllic woman until she loses her identity entirely, becoming the manifestation of what Laura Mulvey named the 'male gaze'. Reflecting the audience's wish for their ideals to be personified on screen, Madeleine asks Scottie: 'if I let you change me, will that do it? If I do what you tell me, will you love me?' Therefore the myth of Pygmalion is also the myth of human perfection which cinema, as a male-dominated industry, has perpetuated.

Pygmalion has often been reinterpreted in science fiction, where beautiful but alien female characters serve as simulacra for the desires of a male lover. Fritz Lang's classic *Metropolis* (1927) sees Galatea represented by Maria, whose appearance is transposed onto a sentient robot by her admirer, Freder. He views the beautiful an-

droid Maria as both pragmatic and erotic, which suits his conflicted motivations of romance and utility in an industrial and dystopian world. Recently, in a similar vein to *Metropolis*, Alicia Vikander's Ava in *Ex Machina* (2015) was the Galatea to Oscar Isaac's Pygmalion. Her artificial intelligence appears deceptively human, thus producing the 'uncanny valley', where the real and constructed fuse together inextricably, causing the unease of the viewer.

In Ovid's depiction of Pygmalion, it is the artistry of the sculptor that transforms reality into myth, with his creation appearing too perfect to be humanly conceived. However in the myth's science fiction equivalents, the male gaze is satisfied through technology, which allows for creations that transcend human limitations. In Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013), Joaquin Phoenix's lonely Theodore uses technology as a form of therapy, falling in love with Samantha, an operating system voiced by Scarlett Johansson. The feminine voice is all that is needed to personify what is artificial, allowing Theodore to cherish the uncanny valley, as his fantasy combines a desire for both human intimacy and an otherworldly romance. The digital replaces the physical, with technology taking the role of Aphrodite in the modern world.

However, *Her* differs from the typical interpretation of Pygmalion; Samantha is not simply an image to be gazed at. Rather than being constructed and moulded by Theodore, she grows by educating herself independently from her admirer. This greatly contrasts with the well-known rags-to-riches narrative of *My Fair Lady* (1964), an adaptation of playwright George Bernard Shaw's take on Ovid's myth, in which Henry Higgins transforms Eliza Doolittle into a 'proper' Edwardian duchess to suit his fantasy of an ideal England.

In each film, the male protagonist falls in love with an ever-changing female, but it is in *Her*

where the statue becomes animated and unrestrained, rather than another static projection of a man's ideal companion. *Ex Machina* also reinterprets Pygmalion by deviating from the male dominance shown in the traditional myth. As feminist cinema grows – with the increasingly influential Bechdel test (in which two named female characters must converse with each other about something other than a man) and as the salary inequality debate continues – these female characters counteract the masculine perspective exemplified by Pygmalion. Rather than being passive statues to be gazed at, characters such as Samantha and Ava break free of their mould and choose their own fate. The narrative arc of the Pygmalion myth once provided the archetype of the masculine, scopophilic perspective as serviced by Ovid's original tale. Today, the myth is still crucial, but it is used as a mode of thought to be challenged, as film-makers begin to give life to the female statues of cinema.

EMILY WALDRON looks at the figure of Daedalus in Charlie Kaufmann's debut film.

Daedalus' most famous invention in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is the labyrinth of Crete, commissioned by King Minos to imprison his son, the Minotaur. Ovid describes its ever-increasing complexity, calling it such 'a treacherous maze' that its 'designer could scarcely retrace his steps to the entrance'. *Synecdoche, New York* (2008), Charlie Kaufmann's underrated directorial debut, is inspired by Daedalus' labyrinth. Kaufmann's postmodern film follows the obsession of Caden Cotard as he struggles to complete his play, *Simulacrum*: a play that aims to replicate his own life and those of the people of New York.

The set of Caden's play becomes larger and more realistic as the film evolves, eventually replicating the city of New York itself. Just as Daedalus' labyrinth leads young Athenians to their doom, as Caden's set grows it swallows up the lives of more and more actors working on *Simulacrum*. Meanwhile, the film's fluid timeframe means that the viewer cannot determine exactly how long the actors and production team have been working on the play. An actor called Tom eventually asks Caden when an audience will be shown the play as 'it's been seventeen years' in rehearsal. Both Caden's play and Daedalus' labyrinth thus hint at the close relationship between art and futility. In Daedalus' case, this is echoed in the consequences of his creation; paradoxically, as Daedalus' labyrinth expands it seems more prison-like, becoming the resting place for the Minotaur and his helpless victims. For Caden, the constant growth of the set of *Simulacrum* reflects his inability to translate his vision into a self-contained work of art, thus indicating his artistic failure.

Caden begins *Synecdoche, New York* having separated from his wife Adele and daughter Olive. While Caden works on an epic scale, Adele, also an artist, creates detailed miniatures that become smaller as the film continues. She is successful with her art in ways Caden is not, and his sense of his own artistic failure makes him perilously jealous of Adele, forcing her to escape to Berlin with their daughter. In a similar vein, *Metamorphoses* depicts the tragic story of Daedalus and his apprentice, Perdix,

Daedalus in *Synecdoche, New York*

a talented craftsman who created the first hand-saw and compasses. Daedalus' jealousy of Perdix's success leads Daedalus to throw him 'headlong down / the sacred hill of Minerva'. In both *Synecdoche, New York* and *Metamorphoses*, the artistic self-involvement of Daedalus and Caden lead them to neglect others in their constant search for validation.

They are both constantly on the run: Daedalus kills Perdix and flees his past misdeeds, while Caden searches for Adele and Olive, even though he has jealously spurned them. Ovid and Kaufmann question whether solipsism – the view that the self is all that can be known to exist – is a suitable philosophy for life. Both conclude that solipsism can make one self-centered, leading to damaged familial and social relationships. *Synecdoche, New York* thus purposes to explain the balance that must be maintained between being one's self and the knowledge that our lives are a 'fraction of a fraction of a second', in comparison to the infinity of existence. Caden's creation eventually overcomes him: his focus on *Simulacrum* takes over his life and becomes a reality. Caden drafts in a director, Millicent, to assist with *Simulacrum* when he himself decides to act in it. Millicent directs Caden to die, and just before Caden does, he says: 'I know what to do with this play now'. Dying just before he has had a chance to conclude the play demonstrates that the work no longer needs its own creator to survive: life will continue without him.

Daedalus and Caden both embody the dark side of human creation, demonstrating the self-obsessive world of jealousy it can foster. The philosophy of Caden is embodied in a quotation by the Minister, when he explains that 'no one wants to hear about my misery, because they have their own, and their own is too overwhelming to allow them to listen to or care about mine'. As Caden is unsatisfied with life outside

the theatre, he creates a new world for himself where, this time unlike Daedalus, he doesn't have to live by the rules of others. The very title of his play echoes the postmodern philosophy of Jean Baudrillard who speaks of simulacrum as 'that which never conceals the truth – it is the truth which conceals that there is none.' Caden is afraid of the void behind his own existence, not realising that his creation doesn't bring with it the possibility of new life, but envelops his life and the lives of others instead. He is his own God – until his creation overwhelms him and reality.

SHOWCASE



Wild Life

REBECCA SPEARE-COLE talks to writer and director **Benjamin Leggett** about his short film.

Benjamin Leggett is learning more and more about film-making as a form of crisis management, especially on the set of his latest short film, *Wild Life*. He had actor Daniel Rogers run over someone during his first time driving a car and accidentally left a fake bagged-up dead body, half-buried in the woods for a stray dog walker to stumble across. As a third-year History of Art student, he has already written and directed an abstract short, *The Fall*, a music video, *Crave*, and a virtual tour of the 2014 UCL open day (which had 40,000 hits on YouTube). However, he wanted to knuckle down to a narrative-driven short film, for which his thirteen-year-old sister would be the target test audience – 'It wasn't about every creative choice being informed by the concept of the film. I wanted it to be watchable'.

The film is formally a fable, centering round a local kid, James (Daniel Rogers). After murdering his abusive father, he kidnaps Alice, a witness (Sophie Airdien). Out on the moors, they have a surrealist encounter with 'Davide' (Nans Disoubray) and 'O' (Ellie Jefferson). These mythical, moral guides physically and psychologically direct James towards a moral, middle ground. In order for the fable to be fully realised, Ben's script is thematically symmetrical on many levels, shifting from wild chaos back into moral order.

Alongside producer, Hannah Gillett, Ben shot *Wild Life* over ten days in Dartmoor. He grew up in the barren landscape, which heavily influenced his idea for a sort of West Country Western. This film organically merged with his previous thoughts for another: a narcissistic tale of the romantic interaction between a person's Ego and their Id. Also taking inspiration from Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*, he develops unreal spiritual characters, which act as moral cyphers to the main protagonist. They interact brilliantly with the wilderness, cut off from civilization and the framework of its laws. In an amalgamation of myth and fable, these characters navigate their own system of morality, or lack thereof.

Ben was worried about how to translate Murakami's concept into such a visual medium. He succeeds however, through a brilliant, stylistic humor. Davide pops up from bushes with a superfluous French accent and O, after being mowed down by a car, jumps up unaffected and continues to yomp round the moors, enforcing the philosophy of 'an eye for an eye'.

'I was having a Tarantino phase', he tells me. We discussed our mutual admiration of Tarantino's violence, which turns social programming on its head. We are conflicted when we enjoy it, having been conditioned to think that we shouldn't. Although the violence occurs before the action begins, *Wild Life* still warps our perception of the world's black-and-white binaries of morality. The surrealist style begins to probe at our understanding and attitude towards murder and justice.

I marveled at his cinematographic eye, yet alone, Ben finds it a little too limiting. Although he spent ninety-five per cent of the time manning the camera, the other five per cent was spent face down in a freezing cold Devon river pretending to be a dead body. He gets a kick out of replaying footage when the sound, visual, music, art direction, and narrative all come together. He modestly rejects the idea of continuing with film after a type of existential crisis about artistic nihilism, yet holds onto the hope that art and film can help in an indirect way. With this in mind, the fable was a genre worth exploring and *Wild Life* certainly makes one consider the nature of social and moral constructs.



SHOWCASE "Listen, I beg you" cried the savage ... "Lend me your ears"



SHOWCASE

Forgotten People

In March 2015, FLORA MURPHY and FRANCESCA EBEL travelled to Sloviansk and other government-controlled areas of East Ukraine. In their documentary, *Forgotten People* they get to the heart of those fleeing the fighting.

'With the country in chaos the government is failing to provide adequate support for displaced people. Because of this, the people here are dependent on local volunteers, Western NGOs, and the church. But this simply isn't enough.'



CALVIN LAW considers familial relations in cinema.

Cast your mind back to your bedtime fables and think of the divisions they make between good and evil: the Miller's daughter and Rumplestiltskin; Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Wolf; the countless queens and witches who have ensnared fair maidens. Though by no means a prerequisite, the domineering presence of the villain in these stories more often than not has some degree of patriarchal influence, and this is an influence which has extended to cinematic depictions of parental figures.

It is clear when looking at recent Hollywood villains that the parental villain trope extends over modern cinema. Christoph Waltz's Hans Landa, in *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), takes maniacal delight in torturing the parental instincts of a selfless French farmer. The tension of the film's first sequence is derived from the conflict between Landa's 'Big Bad Wolf' character and the farmer, a reluctant 'Grandmother figure' who invites the 'Wolf' into her home and cordially offers him a drink of milk. Landa threatens not only the farmer's family, but also the Jewish family he is hiding under his floorboards. He 'spares' one of the family so as to assert his masculine domination. The rest of the film could be seen as Tarantino's depiction of the fallout of a fairy tale shattered. The farmer's spared daughter, played by Melanie Laurent, avenges the deaths of her family and gains her own sense of retribution by turning the tables on the baddie, the man who had removed her from the safety of her idyllic pastoral home.

Parental villains of this fable-esque sort have been extensively parodied in films like the *Shrek* series. Fiona's parents, the Fairy Godmother and Rumplestiltskin become the antagonists in these films for either the oppression of their children, the oppression of others for the sake of their children, or the relentless pursuit of a child as a

means to oppression. As for films that play the fable and fairy tale cards straight, Disney's *Snow White* (1937) completely excludes Snow White's biological mother, a redemptive mother figure. Her death during childbirth is omitted from the film, leaving us with just the wicked Queen as the unconventional parental presence in the film. Though *Maleficent* (2014) misfired in its attempt to rejuvenate the fairy tale genre in a different, darker direction, the likes of Angelina Jolie and Charlto Copley gave more depth and nuance to the film's parental figures, unlike other recent fairy tale retellings such as *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012).

For the opposite side of the coin to Hans Landa's obsession with domination and parental-esque control, look no further than Javier Bardem's Raoul Silva in the 007 entry, *Skyfall* (2012). Tortured as a sacrificial lamb for the MI6, it is easy to see him as a figure more sinned against than sinning. Bardem's villain sees that his downfall as an agent was brought on by the actions of the matriarchal figure, Judi Dench's M: 'Mommy was very bad', Silva jeers at one point. What Bardem and screenwriters Neal Purvis, Robert Wade, and John Logan do so well here is avoid casting Silva as a juvenile and refrain from portraying M's past with him as an overly parental one. Instead, they create a dynamic that is deconstructive of the bond between Bond and M, which is similarly parental. With Bond, M is a harsh and efficient figure but always somewhat distant, a myth as enigmatic as her code name. By contrast, she is a controlled wreck when Silva returns to haunt her, breaking her character down from the untouchable icon. It is pure cinematic brilliance as Dench and Bardem portray the swaying of power between them.

There should be nothing wrong in playing fast and loose with Father and Mother Goose in cinematic treatments. Their characterisations should be as fluid as any other, made neither inherently right nor wrong in their actions because of their

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Parental Figures

status as parents. In Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life* (2011), Brad Pitt's Mr O'Brien is alienated from his son because of his strict parenting, but is eventually vindicated for his underlying love. His character's duality makes him all the more fascinating an enigma. Meanwhile the parents at the heart of Robert Redford's underrated Academy Award winning *Ordinary People* (1980) in which Donald Sutherland's understated performance finds its counterpoint in the visceral quality of Mary Tyler Moore's. The pair is distinctly human in their sympathetic, relatable, yet ultimately flawed parenting.

In film then, it is important that parents are not just cipher characters, but fully-fledged characters in their own right with a complexity and further dimension that defies the flat stereotype all too often adopted in modern screen-writing.

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SHOWCASE

Untitled by Thomas Parkhouse

Light

MADDALENA VAN DER VATTI interviews artist Aphra Shemza.

What is a myth? A traditional tale attempting to explain the inexplicable. Historically myths have attempted to unravel the unconscious, the universe, the remote, and the foreign. But as science advances further, myths have the tendency to become frozen tales of the past, unveiled mysteries, and answered questions: the invention of electricity saw light lose some of the mystery inextricably tied to it. We no longer need Prometheus' stolen gift of fire to create light. The spectrum of colours in nature became something we switch on and off.

Electricity made our nights less terrifying and candlelight romance obsolete. In relation to visual art, can the formula of light be played with and turned into a modern myth? If so, could this be achieved through the means of artistic expression?

London-based artist Aphra Shemza's most recent project, which uses light in a series of immersive installations, endeavours to cross the boundaries between science and art. Her work focuses on abstract, geometric, and scientific research, and often involves technology to translate these concepts to an audience. Her artistic interests moved towards light after her parents took her to an exhibition at the Tate Modern of a Brazilian installation artist, Cildo Miereles.

Previously a painter, 'I dropped all my paintbrushes and never opened those boxes again.' She had just started a Foundation Art Course and began to create installations; 'at the time I had been researching Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon and started working with CCTV cameras creating immersive experiences with technology.' Interactivity plays an important role in Shemza's artwork: 'A large part of my practice is creating interactive sculptures. Because of this my artworks cease to be mine when they leave my studio. I don't want my work to be elitist; I want people of all ages, races, and religions to be able to enjoy my work without any prior knowledge of

art. This is also reflected in my aesthetic choices for the pieces, I want people to be attracted to them.' And light is undeniably attractive. 'Yes it is, light makes you want to come closer to the sculptures, it entices you. It also has the ability to alter your mood and the space around you. White light, for instance, can make the viewer feel calm and relaxed, while red can make them feel energetic.'

Shemza's first project with light was a piece that incorporated three basic forms (a pyramid, sphere, and a cube), which allude to astronomer Johannes Kepler's theory of the Platonic Universe as defined in *Mysterium Cosmographicum* (1596). By combining her ideas on abstraction and geometry with light and optical illusion, the viewer is enticed straight into the nucleus of the three-dimensional work, and consequently made to feel part of it. Shemza's artwork incorporates many different kinds of materials, like plastic, wood, and reflective surfaces. These components wouldn't work in the same way if the work was 'stripped' of its light though, would they? 'It's true. I work in series and usually each series has a different aesthetic feel to it, which usually corresponds to the materials I use.'

In 'Composition' series, Shemza uses mirrored Perspex and LEDs, whilst her 'Totem' series uses both wood and light. 'I think that the light holds the artworks together and makes them come to life, just like the viewer's presence does, perhaps there is a parallel between presence and light, being turned on and being turned off, presence and absence. Before I worked with light I took lighting and electricity for granted without paying much attention to it or the person who had installed it. Now that I have begun to work with light, I can see how it can be therapeutic and shape our environment and the way in which we perceive the world.'

In this sense, Shemza considers light to be a modern myth: 'Light cannot be understood fully without its dark counterpart.' Shemza's installations acknowledge how people are attracted to light in a way that escapes any possible explanation: we are drawn towards it, enticed by its power. Aphra Shemza embraces light as a mythical power, whilst creating living modern myths for the viewer.



Well Hung

MARINA SCHOLTZ celebrates the often overlooked 'ideal' sculpture.

Curating and managing a large London gallery is difficult; the pressure is not unlike that facing a band with a critically lauded first album making their second. Everything needs to be 'killer' – there can be no 'filler'. But, there is mediocre art, and there are mediocre songs. Countless albums are composed of 'filler' tracks (see your languishing iTunes account for *that* U2 album) and room upon room in major London galleries are plumped up with the ultimate filler art: the eighteenth and nineteenth century 'ideal' sculpture.

The term 'ideal' sculpture is derived from the Neoclassical wave Britain was surfing at the time: the Italian Renaissance had been and gone, and wealthy commissioning patrons were hungry for round two of highly idealized depictions of mythological characters. If you've ever visited sculpture galleries twenty-two and twenty-three at the V&A you will know exactly what I'm talking about: the two rooms are packed to the brims of their south-facing windows with vaguely familiar looking sculptures. They look familiar because they are – the Italians did it better the first time round. Whilst these statues quietly pervade our art galleries they are never the focal point, which is why they are well-deserving of some consideration.

The myths and fables that are the background to most of these statues are a large part of what makes poking around the sculpture galleries such a wonderful pastime. If you're rusty on your Greek and Roman mythology and/or you haven't read any Ovid, this is the place for you. Every mythically-themed sculpture is supplied with a handy summary; if you've read the accompanying text to Thomas Banks' *Thetis Dipping Achilles into the River Styx* (1790) there is no need to squander your time on Homer. Venus, Cupid, Apollo, Theseus (with his trusty Minotaur), and their other friends can all be found here. Aside from laziness (or an allergy to the heroic cou-

plet), digesting these tales in sculpture form enables us to visualise the stories we all half-know that have fed into nearly every narrative we encounter.

Another great, and rather obvious feature of the V&A's 'Sculpture in Britain 1600–1950' collection of galleries is nudity. Not all the sculptures are 'ideal' sculptures, but most of them are naked. At the most chronologically advanced end of the sculpture hall is *Mankind* by Eric Gill (1927–8). In relation to the other 'ideal' sculptures, the prominent placement of Gill's *Mankind* within the galleries is significant; the sculpture is consciously erotic and causes one to reconsider the previous nudes and wonder if they too are supposed to be sexy. It isn't conjecture to state that generally Britain in the eighteenth century was just a little bit sexually repressed. Given this context it is rather wonderful to behold the sheer popularity of nude sculptures that would have decorated gardens and parlours at the time.

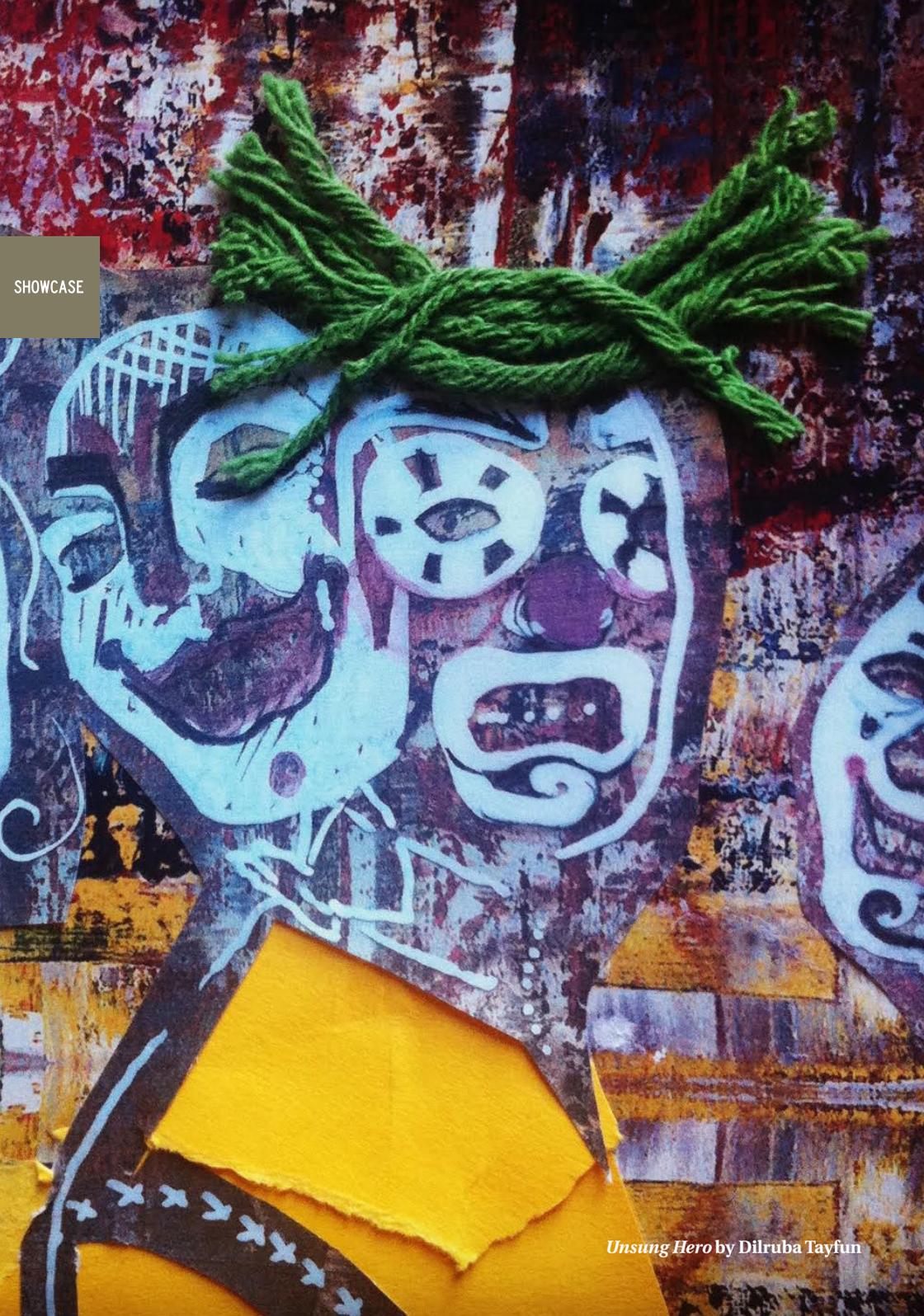
Cupid, Achilles, Narcissus, and Theseus are none of them well endowed; but nor are they wearing any clothes – there is no artful clinging drapery in sight. Nudity becomes a theme around which some element of curation and organisation is possible. Aimé-Jules Dalou's *Peasant Woman Nursing* (1838) is placed next to George Frederick Watts' *Clytie* (1868–78). Watts' sculpture is nearly pornographic and entirely focused on her erotic breasts. Viewing this overtly sexual nude just after *Peasant Woman Nursing's* maternal breasts is thought-provoking enough to assume that the placement of the sculptures in this way is intentional. The contrast reflects the tension within 'ideal' sculpture between nakedness as a state of natural being, and the erotic.

The V&A are not alone in using sculptures as a way of filling up gallery space, and nor is London's use of 'ideal' sculptures to fill space limited to her major galleries either; any given park or square doubtlessly contain examples.

But why is there such an epidemic of 'ideal'

sculptures? Their subject and provenance make them the perfect filler for the cavernous corridors of Britain's neoclassical gallery buildings. There is something refreshing about deliberately seeking out the mediocre; these sculptures are not bad, they're just not good. They do not significantly add anything to the overall curation of galleries or to the space in which they are placed, but, importantly, they do not detract attention from the other works on display or their surroundings. We are inundated with classically themed sculpture and therefore their presence is familiar and reassuring, as is their mediocrity: the viewer is neither challenged nor alienated.

Reassuringly, these sculptures, much like the myths they represent, don't seem to be going anywhere. Since I first visited the V&A sculpture galleries in 2008 there have been no noticeable changes; it is still all 'filler' with no 'killer' in sight – just the way I like it.



SHOWCASE

Unsung Hero by Dilruba Tayfun

An ode to Grayson Perry

POLLY CREED delves into the dynamic world of Grayson Perry.

Julie May Cope was a very ordinary woman. She was born in Essex, in 1953. She married young, had two kids and bought a starter home. Her husband had an affair and they divorced. Soon after, Julie discovered feminism. She protested at Greenham Common, became a mature student and married again – this time to a man she loved. Rob whisked her away on romantic trips to Glyndebourn and India. They shared an up-market Georgian town-house in Colchester and lived happily ever after – until Julie was tragically knocked down by a motorbike at the age of sixty-one.

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She also never existed. Julie Cope is an invention of the transvestite potter and multimedia artist Grayson Perry, and it is to Julie that Perry's recent work, *A House for Essex*, is dedicated. Built in collaboration with FAT Architecture and unveiled last May, *A House for Essex* is a chapel-sized building that presents itself as Rob's Taj Mahal-esque shrine to his late wife. Its exterior boasts a gold roof and walls bedecked with green tiles depicting a naked, pregnant Julie. Inside is

a multi-coloured, fully-functioning home (that you can even rent for the night) with floor-length tapestries, mosaic floors and paintings all dedicated to her life. The glitzy structure seems incongruent, yet strangely appropriate, in the rolling green fields of North Essex.

Grayson Perry does not focus on grand political statements: he unveils the very social fabric of Britain. He is one the shrewdest social commentators of our age, documenting and celebrating the lives of ordinary people and the psyche of modern Britain. Perry takes on subject matters like class or mental health that we are traditionally too squeamish to discuss, and removes stigma through the vehicle of art. From investigating what it means to shop at Waitrose versus Tesco, to how we aesthetically represent mental illness, Perry is unflinching in the way he maps Britain.

A House for Essex is characteristic of Perry's exaltation of the ordinary. It draws inspiration from chapels and pilgrimage sites, but Perry's focus of worship isn't a deity – it's an ordinary Essex girl. *A House for Essex* turns the most misrepresented British stereotype, the Essex girl, into a monumental artwork.

I must disclaim at this point that I am from Essex. Perry's work holds particular resonance for me: in many ways Julie reminds me of my own mum. I am sure I am not alone in recognising Julie in my friends and family. She represents the strong, passionate women who can be found in every town throughout the UK. They have not been given the same platforms as 'great men', but they too have great struggles, drama and romance.

Grayson Perry's understanding of Britain is apparent in his television programmes (and simply in his choice to use modern Britain's favourite pastime as a platform). Perry created the series *In the Best Possible Taste*, documenting his research into the British class system in preparation for a series of six tapestries collectively titled *The Vanity of Small Differences*. Each episode focused on different layers of the British class system, documenting everything from the working men's clubs of Sunderland, to Jamie At Home cookware events ('the Tupperware parties of today'), and drinks parties on the lawns of stately homes. The result was an insightful, but also funny and original depiction of Britain, in all its socially anxious and eccentric glory. Perry uses unconventional mediums, like pottery and tapestry with all their historical and societal resonances to discuss modern issues like celebrity culture and CCTV. This is not work that is destined to stagnate in glossy galleries in Mayfair, but finds its way, psychedelic and arresting, into our sitting rooms and lunchtime conversations. He wields Nike logos like iconography and represents ordinary people like the epic heroes of old.

Grayson Perry truly is a people's artist, who documents the mundane and ordinary, elevating it to the hallowed status of art, and by doing so makes it accessible and relatable to the masses. It empowers us to start open debates about taboo matters such as class, consumerism, mental illness and social stereotypes. Indeed, his work gets to the core of what it means to be British and what it means to be an ordinary woman from Colchester. Grayson Perry, on behalf of Essex girls everywhere, you're pretty reem.

Shakespeare in the Ruff

REBECCA BAINBRIDGE debunks the myth of 'original practices'.

In 2015, Hamlet wears an anorak, Desdemona is in chinos and the Shakespeare purists among us are left aghast. It begs the question: are our modernised aesthetics compromising the integrity of Renaissance stage conventions? Nowhere is this more evident than in the costumes chosen for contemporary stagings of Shakespeare, with Nicholas Hytner's National Theatre Live broadcasts bringing 'Modern dress' successes – such as Simon Russell Beale's jack-booted King Lear and Tom Hiddleston's tight-leather-trouser-wearing Coriolanus – to cinema screens worldwide since 2009. To be-ruff or not to be-ruff: that is the question facing twenty-first century directors.

Since H.K. Ayliff's pioneering production of *Hamlet* in 1925, a London transfer from Barry Jackson's run of innovatory 'Modern-dress' Shakespearean plays at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, the use of contemporary attire has become commonplace on our most esteemed stages. Ninety years on, the decision to dress casts in contemporary clothing while retaining Shakespeare's archaic vernacular (derived from the universally endorsed First Folio of 1623) still renders these modern appropriations controversial. In this battle of the aural with the visual, tradition with innovation, 'Modern-dress' has come to oppose a new renaissance that recreates the performance customs of Shakespeare's company in the original Globe Theatre in 1601.

Spearheading the 'original practices' movement in the late nineties was Mark Rylance, former Artistic Director of the Shakespeare's Globe from 1997 to 2005. Having coined the term, Rylance and his artistic team vouched that they would adhere to these practices for at least one play per season, in order to recapture what modernised productions had diluted or lost. With regards

to costume, the artistic team had very little but guesswork to go on in order to replicate the dress worn on Shakespeare's stage. From Philip Henslowe's Diaries, owner of first The Rose and then The Fortune Theatre during Shakespeare's prolific period as a playwright, modern scholars are able to glean an idea of the apparel worn in *Titus Andronicus* from a surviving sketch.

Yet historians can provide more clues as to the costumes worn in 1601, since they were undoubtedly fashioned in the extravagant styles of the upper classes of that time. Wealthy employers would often bequeath their clothes to their servants, who, unable to wear them due to sumptuary laws that limited each class to materials and colours of clothing befitting their rank, sold them on to the theatres. Although there would be a stock wardrobe for the more symbolic purpose of differentiating between nationalities, historical periods and vocation – the Roman soldier in his breastplate and helmet being distinguished from the friar in his hooded gown – actors largely wore contemporary dress. In his 'General Introduction' to the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Complete Works*, Jonathan Bate remarks that there would have been a 'transgressive thrill' for the lower class audience seeing actors, commoners like themselves, wearing the garb of courtiers. The well-known actor of the day Edward Alleyn is noted to have spared no expense when purchasing his own costumes, spending as much as twenty pounds (up to ten times the amount paid to a playwright for a script) on an embroidered cloak.

Just as Alleyn wished to exude the riches of Elizabethan aristocracy, in recent years we've witnessed many a 'Modern-dress' production wishing to communicate undertones that speak to our own time. In an interview about his role as Hamlet in the RSC's 2008 production, David Tennant describes the reasoning behind the controversial choice of t-shirt (printed with the outline of a large muscular chest and abdominals) worn in the 'To be or not to be' soliloquy: 'It just came of the notion that if you're going to quite a dark place that maybe you look for things that make

you feel safe. So you regress a bit and you look for things that transmit confidence to the world.' It is clear that 'Modern-dress' goes beyond being merely an appeal to a contemporaneous audience looking for basic visual parallels between the world on stage and their own.

From the nappy-like Y-fronts of Simon Russell Beale's Lear in the National's 2014 production to James McAvoy's dishevelled, oil-stained jumper and mechanic's jeans in the Trafalgar Studio's *Macbeth* of 2013, directors continue to disregard the call from others to stay true to original practice. Whether or not we agree with 'Modern-dress' Shakespeare, the fact that we have the ability to clothe Shylock's Portia in a short red dress and heels despite her antiquated diction – as done in the RSC's *Merchant of Venice* earlier this year – is surely a reflection of the continued relevance of these plays to our own society. 'Modern-dress' is, therefore, a celebration of these transcendental similarities. After all, as Ben Jonson wrote of Shakespeare in the Preface to the First Folio: 'He was not of an age but for all time.'

It's no longer all

CORDELIA NAGLE looks at the endurance of Greek tragedy in theatre.

It's alchemy. How are plays written 2000 years ago still intriguing and entertaining contemporary audiences? Greek tragedies are ludicrous fables, implausible myths, so how has theatre managed to translate the preposterous into something relatable? With new adaptations being churned out throughout the year, we're left to wonder what it is about these works that is so fundamentally enduring that we're still fascinated by them.

Doubtless it's the subject matter of the Ancient Greek plays and not the original writing that continues to engage us. The seemingly endless cycle of Greek tragedies constantly being produced on the London stage are not revivals and they all differ from each other hugely. There is no one 'set text' to follow. The plot is the only common factor that binds, say, Ben Power's *Medea* at The National Theatre in 2014 to the version by novelist Rachel Cusk as part of the Almeida Greeks festival this year. Directors and writers have free reign to do what they want with these narratives, as it is not the language that's important. These plays are in translation, and therefore naturally lend themselves to endless adaptation and modification. We've reworked the original Greek plays again and again, making them more culturally and politically relevant to us each time.

Like the best tragedies, they are not stuck in their own time but continually prove to be as relevant to contemporary audiences as they were to their original ones. The Greeks are by no means unique in this, yet they differ from the many other tragedies that form such an important part of our cultural landscape. It would, for example, be criminal to adapt *Hamlet* or *King Lear* in the same way – the language itself is too important to us. In *vsdfsd/sdfdsf*, Wilhem Hortmann points out that Shakespeare 'is more frequently performed in Germany

Greek to me

year than during a whole decade in his native country'. Why is it, then, that the Germans have adopted Shakespeare for their own? It could well be down to the simple issue of translation. Archaic language that now regrettably forms a barrier for many British audiences in understanding our greatest playwright can be unabashedly abandoned in foreign adaptations.

The Greek tragedies are more visceral and alive than ever because of this. This is not to say that we can abandon the cultural origins of these works but simply that we are able to adorn them with our own perspectives in order to bring them alive for twenty-first century audiences. The Almeida Theatre's recent Greek season (with its productions of *Oresteia*, *Bakkhai*, and *Medea*) has proved this. Formal tragic style is not where the focus is; it is instead the provocative narratives that draw in audiences. It's the questions that we are unable to answer, the moral dilemmas that still carry weight and the gruesome absurdities still excessive enough to make us quiver.

Cusk's adaptation of *Medea*, for example, focuses less on the terrible murder of two innocent children by their own mother, instead drawing attention to the marginalisation of a desperate woman trapped in a failed marriage. In Anne Carson's version of *Bakkhai*, we are literally seduced by Ben Whishaw's portrayal of Dionysus – as much by his physical presence as by his language – which explores the fundamental dichotomy between a god who is both celebrated and detested.

Although these two plays deservedly received somewhat mixed reviews, Robert Icke's adaptation of *Oresteia*, on the other hand, is of supreme quality, a true synthesis of Greek high melodrama and modern familial relationships. The production draws the audience in so closely that it almost becomes an immersive play.

In a recent BBC Radio 4 series, classicist Natalie



SHOWCASE

Mythical Landscapes

ALASTAIR CURTIS explores playwright Caryl Churchill's use of place and myth.

At seventy-seven years of age, Caryl Churchill continually reinvents the wheel with work as striking and innovative as that of contemporaries who are decades younger than her. Each play differs wildly in form and content, from her early works right up to her most recent play, *Love and Information* (2012). Appearing in *A Number* (2002) on Broadway, actor and playwright Sam Shepard stumbled when asked to explain Churchill's work: 'I have a feeling this isn't going to work. I can't capsulise it.'

Even so, Churchill's work often revolves around times when the established order of things is under threat. *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976), Churchill's play about the English Civil War, bristles with revolutionary excitement as an oppressed people seize control of their lives from the ruling political class. But the play isn't historical in the same vein as Shakespeare's history plays, whose focus is on the decisions made by powerful men in high places. Instead, Churchill gives voice to the working class folk in England's rural communities, excited for what the future might bring. Included in *Light Shining* is a verbatim rendition of the Putney Debates of 1647 as a new constitution is discussed. Churchill stages the agitative actions of the Levellers and Ranters: revolutionaries who formed communes for the poor and promoted women preachers. As moments when society can be redrawn along new lines and anything seems possible, these Civil War scenes evoke a feeling not so different to that experienced when watching theatre, thus containing dynamism that translates well to the stage.

In their desire to establish a 'New Jerusalem' in England, the revolutionaries want to bring something long thought mythical into fruition. But political infighting and ideological division

mean things don't quite go to plan. The restoration of the monarchy accretes wealth back into the hands of the ruling classes, and the play's last scene – simply titled 'After' – sees the disillusioned revolutionaries welcome Charles II's return through gritted teeth.

In their desire to 'see and say nothing', the revolutionaries preclude the possibility of taking part in future political action. The ending of *Light Shining* looks forward to Churchill's play *This is a Chair* (1990), set in contemporary Britain. The titles of the play's scenes feature current political issues like 'The War in Bosnia' and 'The Northern Ireland Peace Process', despite the action on stage displaying no obvious link to the titles and often being as prosaic as a family sitting down to dinner. Churchill suggests that the modern age is bankrupt of the myths and idealism that previously encouraged people like the Levellers and Ranters to try and renew our political system. In *This is a Chair*, politics happens outside of ordinary people's lives.

Churchill's later plays place myth and reality in disconcerting proximity. Director Max Stafford-Clark, a regular collaborator with Churchill, has suggested that this is her attempt to respond to a political situation 'which she cannot effectively address anymore'. While the first acts of *Far Away* (2000) are naturalistic, the final act features a mythical world where everything on Earth partakes in a war that lacks logic or rationale. The enemy takes a different form from one day to the next: sometimes computer programmers and foxgloves, other times wasps and Latvian dentists. The title of *Far Away* is ironic; the politics it characterises are not as far away as we might like to think. Though it premiered one year earlier than the terrorist attack, the play has been credited for presaging western politics post-9/11. Platitudes are spoken with a devastating levity – it is 'right to be opposed to crocodiles' – that resembles the empty rhetoric of the 'war

on terror'. The play's ambiguous identity politics and atmosphere of ever-shifting allegiances – 'cats have come in on the side of the French' – look forward to the bombing of erstwhile allies like Iraq.

In recent years, what was once consigned to myth has become reality. The eponymous shapeshifting spirit in *The Skriker* (1994) walks out of Lancastrian myth to offer two young women, Josie and Lily, a frightening vision of environmental degradation in the real world. When *The Skriker* premiered it was seen as a warning with the power to inspire action in its audience. However, the play's recent revival at Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre adopted an accusatory tone akin to the 'wordless rage' with which Lily is confronted by her granddaughter at the end of the play when angered at her generation's inadequate response to the looming threat of ecological disaster. In the years since the play's debut, the mythical landscape Churchill portends – where spring will not arrive and 'nothing will grow' – is rapidly becoming a reality.

Churchill's plays prompt many questions, yet her work asks us one in particular: what's to be done? We'll all have to answer her soon.



Untitled by Phyllida Jacobs

The cockscombs are dead!
cried Albert
he crushes his hand to his head
and sighs,

And the milkweeds
he forages
Everywhere, can't control 'em.

Ethel ploughs the ground,
lament.
He is sad most of the time.

Black Sundays at the kitchen table—
What are we to do about the weather?
says Albert,

his prickly chicken legs stick out of his
Night shirt.
Black Sundays when there is nothing

On the telly. Nothing on the telly Ethel!
Albert.
Evenings get colder these days.

The seaside, for a change?
tries Ethel.
her plight is lukewarm like

this tea, Ethel. Lukewarm.
and then
No time to waste ones time dear, seaside would

be bad this time of year. Busy,
he suspects.
Best to stay where one belongs.

One belongs, kitchen table,
Black Sunday,
And no more cockscombs

What a shame, damn shame, Ethel.
again,
Black Sundays and no more cockscombs

Something of a sign of things perhaps
suppose.
Ethel is gone to the window, but there is

no use daydreaming, what a child you are!
You are
such a child on Sundays

In petticoats and frilly socks like when
We were children, Ethel, remember?
once more
But Ethel,
Ethel doesn't hear
Albert

Doesn't hear
Ethel
isn't here

Albert.

Milkweeds

By Georgie Hurst

Persona vs Publication

DANA MOSS considers the cult of the author.

The ultimate aim of a writer is to convince their readers that they don't exist. There is something untouchable yet fascinating about the process of creating a work of literature; we are allowed access into the most intimate recesses of the writer's mind. The author attempts to convince us that their work isn't merely the product of their mind, but something tangible and real. With this in mind, it's not difficult to see these hidden figures as somehow superhuman, mythological: simply not like us.

The identity of our earliest and most revered authors are mostly unknown: we know very little about Homer, the grandfather of the epic, despite his *Odyssey* and *Iliad* having inspired thousands of artists. This lack of knowledge has prompted a new line of critical thinking in discussing the role of the author and their presence in the literary canon. While it's arguable that anonymous or unidentified writers can become mythical due to their invisible status, it is the public emergence of the writer that ultimately allows their personalities, their works, and their lives to become legendary.

Lord Byron is the obvious example here: considered by some to be the first 'celebrity' in England, his works have been overshadowed by his charismatic and enduring mythical personality. One needs not be familiar with *Don Juan* or *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* to be aware of Byron's legacy; it's perhaps a self-conscious choice on Byron's part that his lasting imprint on literature has been the Byronic hero, the larger-than-life persona he creates and deconstructs continually. Not only was Byron fully aware of his own ever-shifting public image, he knew how to manipulate his celebrity to his own advantage. Perhaps, then, the overriding presence of his personality on his works is less a fault on the reader's part and more a purposeful manipulation of Byron's recognisable status.

This self-conscious inclusion of the author's life

and personality in their works is not unique to Byron: a century later, F. Scott Fitzgerald published his magnum opus *The Great Gatsby*. The work is regarded as the ultimate Jazz Age novel, yet Fitzgerald himself and his wife Zelda have become equally synonymous with the period as the quintessential flapper couple. The relationship between Scott and Zelda, together with their connections to other renowned authors such as Hemingway, Ezra Pound, and Gertrude Stein, has inspired a fascination with their personas, so much so they have been elevated from mere mortality to something else entirely.

Similarly, Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast*, published posthumously, acts as a triumph in cementing 'The Lost Generation' as a timeless and mythical group in history. Detailing a variety of seemingly unbelievable events, from teaching Ezra Pound how to box, to the infamous tale of taking Fitzgerald to the Louvre to derive comfort from the statues' anatomical endowment, to flashes of his heavily romanticised marriage to Hadley thirty years after their divorce – we don't need to consider the veracity of Hemingway's anecdotes to be utterly captivated by the literary pictures he paints.

Yet, there is a danger that comes from knowing too much about an author's biography, putting us at risk of projecting their personal life onto their work. Sylvia Plath is a compelling example – well-known for her battles with mental illness and gender roles, it is hard to disengage this knowledge from our reading of her poetry. By focusing on the author do we ignore what is truly present in order to fit their work to our own expectations? Or are we encouraged to allow the distinction between the private and public to blur, until both the author and their work are irrevocably changed by the association? In most cases, allowing the author's public persona to overshadow their work seems to erase their intentions: for writers like Byron, Hemingway, et al, they were consciously present in crafting their own star.

The ascension of the writer from mortality into

mythology seems to be a process supported by their death; once they stop producing, we can remove them from reality, convert them into a figure or icon, and allow them to freely exist for whatever purpose we may interpret. At the same time, the literary landscape has been altered so drastically over the years by technological advances that writers no longer rely on prominence or renown to become personally immortalised – anyone can write, and thus the mystic quality of the author is lost. Perhaps we now simply know too much about our current authors to consider them anything but human.

The Facts behind

NANCY HEATH observes the danger of reading historical fiction as fact.

History has always been a popular backdrop for fiction. The historical novel has been around since Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* in 1814. With different versions of the same historical events being retold by numerous authors however, a discomfiting tension between fact and fiction can arise. Historical sources are checked for biases – should we apply a similar check when reading fiction? Shakespeare consciously wrote his 'history' plays for an Elizabethan, pro-Tudor audience and this perspective clearly influences their factuality. Aside from the basic facts, Shakespeare is slippery with specifics in his depiction of Richard III as a megalomaniac hunchback and Henry IV as a victorious commander. Four hundred years later, Philippa Gregory writes about the same war with a bias towards Richard. She takes the War of the Roses, a period Shakespeare mythologised into a somewhat one-sided Tudor victory, and paints a more balanced picture through the perspective of the most important women of the time. However, Gregory's works are also far from historically accurate as she intertwines magic with the history of England in *The Lady of the Rivers* and *The White Queen*.

Shakespeare's divergence from fact was intended to please his contemporaries and to appeal to his patrons' purses. When Gregory augments historical events, she is also accommodating her contemporary readers, fulfilling the modern desire for a thrilling twist in the narrative, in this case the supernatural and fantastical. Both writers bend historical accuracy away from the truth for the sake of their audiences.

Our idea of history has always been warped by myth. As the adage goes, history is written by the victors, or simply by the most popular voice. We cannot receive knowledge without bias, which is demonstrated through the vastly varied representations of specific historical periods. There is a prevalent stereotype of the murderous, gluttonous Henry VIII steeped in a variety of fictional retellings: however, Hilary Mantel recently delivered a different, more emotional reading

the Fiction

of the famous King in her novels *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*. Reading Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* and reading Mantel's books provide different perspectives of this period. We certainly do not lack historical information about Henry VIII, yet many people are still misinformed due to basing their opinions on singular representations.

Historical figures such as Henry VIII have slipped out of the hands of history and into the laurels of literature. Writers can take untouchable historical events and figures and present them with another story and a different character to interpret, with few moral obligations to truth or prudence.

These different interpretations feed into each other, despite seeming incompatible, with the interplay of myth and history being used most notably by the Modernists. T. S. Eliot uses history as a fluid foundation for his epic *The Waste Land*. When Eliot references the past, both his readers and Eliot himself are aware of its prevalence in fiction. We must accept when fiction references the past, it is referencing the myth the canon has built of history, and not the actual facts.

This intertextual myth of history constantly grows, with each new reference encompassing previous ones. Shakespeare used old sources for many of his plays and his histories also have mythological roots. Even when Mantel strives for a firmly fact-based account of history, she cannot avoid allusions to the literary myth. Shakespeare cites allusions to Arthurian myth in his Tudor histories; when Mantel has Cromwell's son read *Morte D'Arthur* in *Wolf Hall*, readers are urged to recall these past accounts of the Tudor reign.

Readers become emotionally attached to character even though they already know what comes next in the narrative. This opens possibilities for anticipation, dramatic irony, and pathos. Long-dead events of the past are now fleshed out, narratives become alive in the minds of twenty-first century readers. Maybe this form of literature misrepresents; maybe it idolises where it should morally reprimand; but isn't an avoidance of solid facts and rejection of firm boundaries one of the joys of fiction? In historical fiction, authors

are educating their readers about history: both the fact and the myth fiction has created.

Of course readers can still invest in these events and the individual characters as they would in any work of fiction, but a degree of separation needs to be maintained. The myth prevails, but what is being read is a fictional reimagining, not a textbook. Readers must remember the boundaries of historical fiction – wishing your favourite character will stay alive is futile if they were executed half a millennia ago.

There is a line beyond this which literary myth cannot stretch the facts and retain a claim to historical fiction. Some things you cannot petition an author to change or reverse; they are history, immovable.

What's the use of

NIALL ADAMS considers the relevancy of fairy tales.

Fairy tales are our first gateway into the world of literature. From infancy, they become part of our psychology, a cultural framework through which we view life. Yet, in a world where childhood is increasingly dominated by mass media, what role can these stories now play in our emotional development?

Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment* is, perhaps, the single greatest study of the genre approaching the narratives from a psychoanalytical perspective. Hidden behind the whimsical symbols, outlandish narratives, and stock characters are endless layers of meaning. Works from the likes of the Brothers Grimm present children with a pattern of images and symbols from which they can derive their own interpretation.

Yet, for Bettelheim, the fairy tale was a unique form in children's literature and folklore. Rather than featuring the restrictive didacticism of the fable, there is no clear-cut meaning, allowing the young to discover one independently. For the young boy suffering separation anxiety, 'Hansel and Gretel' shows why he should fear losing his parents, but also provides consolation in the protagonists' ability to survive their difficulties. The same tale, however, can lead to entirely new conclusions in a different context. The adolescent girl, straining to break free from an overbearing older brother, sees the tale as one of empowerment; it is Gretel, and not her brother, who ultimately saves their lives from The Witch.

The myth does hold similar features; it too presents the world in allegorical terms with a flexibility of interpretation. However, the myth lacks the consolation of a fairy tale. Presenting obstacles to the protagonists and alerting the child to the dangers of the world, they often end in tragedy and the demise of the flawed hero. Take the myths of Heracles: his hubris and lust surround

him with conflicts and obstacles that cause the death of his wife, children, and himself. The legends of antiquity may hold moral teachings but they never allow a child the hope that they can ultimately overcome adversity.

Fairy tales are clearly unique: the perfect place to grow and learn from our youngest age. But the classic tales, so expertly crafted, are being lost amidst a sanitisation of the form. In 2012, a survey of infants' parents in America found a gradual disregarding of these texts in favour of modern saccharine, superficial, and largely meaningless books. When asked about the genres of literature they share with their children, a quarter of parents responded that they would refuse to read classic tales to their children to avoid scaring them. Singled out as particularly provocative and 'dangerous' were 'Rumpelstiltskin' and 'Red Riding Hood' for their discussion of kidnap and execution.

The tales which retain their currency have continually been purged of any darker undercurrents to accommodate our contemporary view of childhood. Details of the gruesome and gory have been lost, largely due to film studios wishing to present a pure and 'snow-white' version of the tales, void of anything which might frighten or thrill the young. This has led to didactic tales removing any need for interpretation, which was crucial to Bettelheim's analysis. Cinderella's step-sisters, once punished with physical blindness by birds for their cruelty and ignorance, are now condemned from the outset with ugliness and aesthetically branded as villains. The child is no longer encouraged to choose with whom to identify but forced to support an often passive and dull protagonist.

Whilst children's media has erased any moral ambiguity from fairy tales, mature retellings from the latter half of the twentieth century have focused upon reclaiming the darker elements. Angela Carter's lauded *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* looks to the original works and

reframes them for a new feminist readership, whilst revelling in the more macabre features. 'The Snow Child', for example, looks to the Grimms' 1812 *Snow White* and some of their unpublished manuscripts and explores patriarchal roles and father-daughter relationships. Gregory Maguire, author of *The Wicked Years*, has taken classic children's stories and transformed them into adult novels rampant with sex, violence, and politic. Cinema has likewise turned back to the genre: earlier in the decade a stream of releases reinterpreted the tales for a modern mature audience. To varying degrees of success, films such as *Snow White and the Huntsman* and *Maleficent*, have attempted to take the familiar nar-

rative and focused on the untold and forgotten parts of the story.

Why, then, do we deprive children of these elements if, as adults, we revel in the nightmarish and frightening? The fairy tale's greatest asset is its ability to delight and scare, to bewitch and shock. It is this unique mix of elements, found to be absolutely vital for psychological growth in Bettelheim's original study, which the modern fairy tale has lost. Perhaps it's time to rediscover these classics for both the young and old.

Enchantment?

Urbania

The cavemen aimed for the heart,
fawn straying from the forest's edge
struck still – thrill of a kill.

Tucked in the corner of today's paper: 11-year-old
murdered,
reduced to a gasp,
silent cry of a startled boy
mouth opened wide, buzzing with flies,
face chiselled by the cold of the cave, cement
pressed against lips, kiss in a dream.

The savages are here; chaos
flickers in the whites of our eyes
wide and mesmerized by ambulance blue
dancing across a black bag.
Gravity thrusts a body down.

Evolution of the civilized-damned,
progress revolving in the wheels of the trains.
I grow tired of rituals, the stamping of feet in rush hour rites,
tongues babbling woe and prayers trapped by smog.

We'll never be rid of it, red splattering the innocents;
berries burst in the gatherer's hands – a mother's instinct.
A reporter sips tea and admires his punctuation.

Maybe I'll use the blood and paint a hunt on the wall;
antelope, bison, my handprint. Let someone try
and decipher that. History lies through its teeth.
What do you want? Time has her prophecies.

A game, a game, a game of war,
cards piled one on top of another,
a child's game made real
by the sudden jolt of a gun.
I'm holding a gun in my hand.
Who gave the cavemen guns?
Stone age, Bronze age, Iron age;
Scream of the siren.

By Kate Kinley

All the world's a stage by Kate Kinley



The rape of Proserpina

SHOWCASE

Beneath the Earth he Proserpina stole:
By force he seized that which he could not win.
His prize, reluctant bride, did wander through
The pagan devil's orchard, lair of sin.

Then idly did she reach for tempter's fruit;
A pomegranate smooth and red and crowned.
Caressed the treasure to her broken breast,
And open cracked the lovely crimson skin.

From ruby flesh red blood onto her palm
Did spill, from tissue gnarled and white within
The juices flowed like rivers down her arm.
She put the dimpled sweetness to her lips,

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And sucked the luscious seeds full ripe and round.
From Pluto's lair was heard ecstatic roar –
The king of gods had ordained flesh for flesh:
She must spend seven ghastly months therein

Beneath the earth buried against her will,
The brute her master and her unsought king.
The juice trickled slowly down her chin.
'It was an act of Love', said Satan's twin.

By Sophie Meadows

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