A Journal of Undergraduate Research in the Interdisciplinary Humanities

Issue 3, Fall 2022
The Immunity Edition

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**The FrameWorks Program was funded, in part, by the Cougar Initiative to Engage [CITE], a program of the Office of the Provost Paula Myrick Short**

*FrameWorks: A Journal of Undergraduate Research in the Interdisciplinary Humanities* is published by the Honors College of the University of Houston in collaboration with the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences. It is housed within the Creative Work program and is supported by the Office of Undergraduate Research and Major Awards (OURMA). The journal is published annually and contains articles written by undergraduate students (predominantly sophomores and juniors) who completed the FrameWorks program, a yearlong, co-curricular course that facilitates undergraduate resarch in the interdisciplinary humanities through faculty mentorship and support.

Applications for the FrameWorks program open in the spring semester. Rising sophomores and rising juniors are especially encouraged to apply. Students from all colleges are encouraged to apply, regardless of their affiliation with the Honors College.

Applicants must be registered at the University of Houston. If you are interested in the FrameWorks program and in publishing research in the interdisciplinary humanities, additional information about eligibility, expectations, and the benefits of the program is available at www.uh.edu/frameworks. All queries regarding thejournal or the program should be submitted to Dr. Max Rayneard at mjrayneard@uh.edu.

The views expressed by the authors are not necessarily those of the editors, faculty mentors, the Honors College, or the University of Houston.

**FRAMEWORKS**

*A Journal of Undergraduate Research in the Interdisciplinary Humanities*

ISSUE 3, FALL 2022, The Immunity Edition

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# EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

There is a sense of urgency about the essays in this, the third issue of FrameWorks: A Journal of Undergraduate Research in the Interdisciplinary Humanities. It is hardly surprising, given the times we live in and the theme we asked our undergraduate researchers to address: this is the "Immunity Edition."

Our 2021-2022 cohort of FrameWorks Fellows thereby took on a complex task. Consider the journey the idea of "immunity" has been on in the public understanding over the past few years. Before COVID-19 made us pay closer attention, many of us may have understood "immunity" to suggest a state of impermeability or invulnerability. News cycles have since clarified that immunity can wax and wane and that viruses mutate again and again. With even fully vaccinated and boosted individuals susceptible to breakthrough infections, the idea that we can be fully immune now seems naïve. In addition, the legal and moral connotations of "immunity" (etymologically speaking, they predate the biomedical usage) have also received their share of airtime in the political and social tumult of the last few years.

Because the idea of "immunity" is something of a moving target, our Fellows had to approached it with discipline and ingenuity. Each of the articles contained in this issue uses immunity as a critical frame for careful, deliberative reflection. The result is a volume of undergraduate research and writing that speaks to the value of the interdisciplinary humanities: they offer us space and structure to slow down, to gather up our ideas and impressions, to organize our thoughts, and to do our best to understand world and our place in it in all its careening complexity.

For obvious reasons, the pandemic inflects much of the work that is printed here, with several articles addressing its social and cultural implications. Sarah Gawlik reads Oedipus Tyrannos to better understand the epistemological stakes arising from a collective crisis of biological immunity. Saamiya Syed questions the idea that we live in "unprecedented times" by considering the 1793 Yellow Fever epidemic in Philadelphia as a microcosm of the present. Guadalupe Lombera argues that Paula Mendoza's Immigrants are Essential installations – memorials to undocumented essential workers who died during the pandemic – serve as a critique of anti-immigrant rhetoric that seeks to "immune" the United States from "foreign pathogens."

Other FrameWorks Fellows consider immunity in its moral or legal aspects. Esraa Wasel uses Medea's seeming immunity from punishment in Euripides' famous play as the basis for a discussion of moral character as a pretext for sentencing of convicted criminals. Angela Jardina considers the first installment of Francis Ford Coppola's The Godfather trilogy as a reflection on the rhetorical and political power of "family" to justify morally questionable actions. Ada Cinar examines the moral solipsism of rugged individuals in Cormac McCarthy's No Country for Old Men.

Finally, two FrameWorks Fellows use immunity as a metaphor to describe forms of artistic integrity. Akanksha Bhatia argues that Ken Garland's "First Things First" manifesto played an important role in ensuring that the artistry and civic value of design (especially graphic design) was not completely overwhelmed by its commercial function. Elizabeth Spencer takes us through the movements of Shostakovich's 13th Symphony, detailing Shostakovich's and Yevtushenko's critiques of the Soviet Union, at great risk to themselves and their careers.

As in previous years, each of these essays and the volume that contains them speak to the work ethic and endurance of FrameWorks Fellows, their faculty mentors, the Editorial Board, and numerous members of the Honors College staff. This third issue of FrameWorks: A Journal of Undergraduate Research in the Interdisciplinary Humanities is a testament to a collective effort of which, it is my fervent hope, each individual contributor is immensely proud.

Max Rayneard, Editor

# *Immigrants are Essential*: Paola Mendoza's Aesthetic of the Undocumented

By Guadalupe Lombera

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A couple of Pennsylvania Avenue blocks from the White House, the center of U.S. political power, seven bright, larger-than-life portraits adorn the windows of The Roost, a 12,500-square-foot food court. Tourists and locals – some of whom no doubt walk the hallways of nearby Capitol Hills – may catch sight of these smiling faces as they stop for curated coffee or crispy pork belly poutine. They may even scan the QR code accompanying the images to see where it leads them. The same installation can be seen in

Fig 1. Kisha Bari. *"Immigrants Are Essential at 477 Broadway,"* Harper's BAZAAR, 29 Apr. 2021. Photographed by Kisha Bari.

empty storefront windows at 477 Broadway in lower Manhattan, blocks away from the New York Stock Exchange. Created by activist and artist Paola Mendoza, these installations, entitled *Immigrants Are Essential*, constitute a memorial to the lives of undocumented immigrants who died while working in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their names are Mario, Guadalupe, Ofelia, Yimel, Fedelina, Juan, and Moisés.

It is difficult not to be drawn to the beaming face of Mario Hernandez Enríquez, in his black jacket and tie (Fig. 2). A halo and bold rays emanate from his head. His shoulders and torso are outlined in orange against a blue background imbued with geometric patterns that recall complex Mesoamerican designs. A Spanish proverb wraps around the halo: "We have sworn to love each other unto death. And if the dead love, after death, we will love each other more."

Fig 2. Mendoza, Paola. *Immigrants Are Essential.* 22 Apr. 2021, essential-immigrants.com.

Above his portrait and each of the others, Mendoza has emblazoned the title of her installation in large blue letters: *Immigrants are Essential*. As will be shown, the title is a verbal riposte to politically weaponized anti-immigrant rhetoric in the years leading up to the pandemic. However, this article is primarily interested in the iconography of religion, indigeneity, and labor that Mendoza draws together to build a visual response to dehumanizing ideas about the undocumented.

. . .

Anti-immigrant rhetoric is not only a recent phenomenon in the United States. In the nineteenth century, Irish immigrants were seen as leeches draining taxpayer resources (Hirota 2017). After World War I, German immigrants were stereotyped as invading barbarians (Little 2019). During World War II, Japanese Americans were portrayed as rats (Yam 2017). More recently, anti-immigrant sentiment has been directed predominantly at the Southern border, and its rhetoric is more self-consciously reliant on biological metaphors. Extremist right-wing blogs characterize undocumented immigrants as parasites (Musolff 2012). In a 2018 tweet, New Jersey's deputy mayor Rick Blood referred to undocumented immigrants as noxious vermin (Garber 2021).

Such anti-immigrant rhetoric had its most prominent incendiary in former President Donald J. Trump. In a 2019 White House Statement, he claimed that an influx of illegal aliens was "overwhelming our schools, overcrowding our hospitals, draining our welfare system, and causing untold amounts of crime" (The White House 2019). He, too, mapped biological metaphors onto immigration. He argued that the Democratic Party wanted "illegal immigrants, no matter how bad they may be, to pour into and infest our country" (Zimmer 2019). On a visit to the U.S.-Mexican border, he said, "We have a sick country . . . it's sick in the border" (Pager 2021).

The then-president thus extended the biological metaphor beyond immigrants. In his thinking, the United States is an ailing organism, perhaps a human body that is sick with symptoms – corruption, exhaustion, depletion – because it is overrun by pathogenic undocumented immigrants. According to his rhetoric, to be "Great" (or healthy) again, the United States must be purged of and resistant to the cause of its diminishment (or sickness): undocumented immigrants. Paulo Mendoza's insistence that *Immigrants Are Essential* flies in the face of this logic. That they are "essential" qualifies immigrants as necessary and beneficial to the United States; it characterizes them not as foreign or alien to the nation but as part of it. They are not pathogens in Mendoza's framing but vital, as certain organs are to the body. In this regard, Mendoza's chosen locations for her installation are compelling. If we extend the metaphor and map a human organism onto the United States, Washington D.C. – where coequal branches decide and direct how the body moves – is the equivalent of the brain. New York City is the heart, pumping the commercial lifeblood of America.

On Pennsylvania Avenue and Broadway, the installations not only situate immigrant faces at vital centers of the United States, but their bright visibility also converts those locations into contact zones, as theorized by Mary Louise Pratt. Pratt defines contact zones as "social spaces where cul-

tures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (34). While the installations welcome privileged Americans to engage with the stories of undocumented immigrants, the larger-than-life portraits do not shy away from culturally specific markers. Some patrons and passersby might dislike the clash between Mesoamerican geometric patterns and The Roost's luxury food hall aesthetic. They might avoid the faces looking out from shopfronts near the New York Stock Exchange, thinking the portraits are needlessly political.

Other patrons and passersby may be moved by, for example, Mario's smile to scan the QR code, which leads them to an online repository of oral histories by his relatives. In addition to the installation's verbal riposte, these stories offer counternarratives to the stereotypes of anti-immigrant rhetoric. A husband and father, born in Morelos, Mexico, Mario brought his family to the U.S. in the hopes of bettering their lives and giving his daughters an education. His three daughters describe him as charismatic, unstoppable, and always eager to learn new skills. Mario was their hero and best friend. When the first case of COVID-19 in NYC was made public, their daughters warned his father to take care of himself: "Daddy you have to stay home. You and mom are the most at risk. You work with a lot of people." Mario insisted he needed to work. He could not afford to stay home and be unemployed. Mario worked at a laundromat and grocery store and was considered "essential" labor. With gloves on his hands and a mask over his vibrant smile, Mario arrived at work punctually every day. On March 21, 2020, ten days after WHO declared the global COVID-19 pandemic, Mario came home with body aches. He died on April 10, 2020 at St Claire's Hospital in Denville, NJ at age 59 (Tuttle Funeral Home).

Mario's story counters the idea that undocumented immigrants are parasitic social scroungers, pocketing aid from the government during the COVID-19 pandemic. He worked till his death. Mario was not a pathogen that harmed the U.S. body but helped it continue to function.

• • •

Importantly, the essential qualities ascribed to undocumented immigrants by the installation do not reduce them to their "usefulness" within the United States: those portrayed are more than "what they do." Mendoza's work evokes aspects of their identities that are "essential" to them. The loving accounts of their families and communities do this on a personal level. Her visual aesthetic does so culturally. Mendoza does not shy away from the "foreignness" of her subjects. Rather than assimilate to American expectations, the installation incorporates iconography that draws on the religious, indigenous, and labor aesthetics many immigrants from Latin America have in common.

Most immediately striking about Mendoza's installation is its size and public accessibility, recalling the Mexican Muralism Movement that blossomed between the 1930s and 1950s in the wake of the Mexican Revolution. Led by artists such as José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Diego Rivera (Johnson-Ortiz 2021), the movement grew out of a national project to unify post-revolutionary Mexico. The government commissioned artists to educate the country's illiterate population about Mexican history. They painted murals that represented the narratives of indigenous and peasant populations who had been excluded from pre-revolutionary accounts of Mexican national identity.

Perhaps the most famous representative of the movement, Diego Rivera, was commissioned to create his first large-scale mural project at Mexico City's *Secretaría de Educación Pública*[1] [SEP] in the early 1920s (Flattley 2021). He painted 120 murals that line the institution's front two courtyards to this day. Each mural portrays scenes of labor, agriculture, industry, and culture in celebration of Mexico's working poor and indigenous heritage. Open-air and free to the public, the murals invite Mexicans and tourists to get up close and contemplate the intricacy of brushstrokes or to step back and appreciate, as illiterate peasants of the 1920s might have, narratives of Mexico's revolutionary emergence. The Mexican Muralism Movement thus eschewed the elitism of high art and museums, giving everyday Mexicans ready access to art that included dignified portrayals of people like themselves.

A worthy example of Rivera's work is *Leaving the Mine*, an east wall/ west-facing mural in the SEP Court of Labor, which illustrates the crucial work of Mexican mineworkers and their exploitation by foreign interests (Fig. 3). The mural depicts a worker (dressed in white) with his arms spread in a pose reminiscent of the crucified Christ as he is inspected by an overseer (dressed in green) for precious metals he is suspected of smuggling out of the mine. The worker's clothes and sandals are simple compared to the overseer's sturdy boots and green uniform, emphasizing the power differential. Even so, the martyr-like pose of the mineworker elevates him over the overseer and suggests that labor is sacrificial and saintly, making people who were once unacknowledged visible. In Diego Rivera's own words, "For the first time in the history of art, Mexican mural painting made the masses the hero of monumental art" (Whitfield 2020).

Mendoza's installation appeals to this tradition, making large-scale, shining faces of undocumented immigrant workers visible in public spaces. Although temporary, the installations assume prominence in public settings – a dining hall by Capitol Hill and a Broadway storefront. The grand size of the portraits does more than elevate the labor of their subjects; it reinforces their

[1] Secretariat of Public Education

Fig 3. Rivera, Diego. *Leaving the Mine*, 1923–1924, first floor, Court of Labor, east wall/west-facing mural in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City. Photographed by Megan Flattley.

presence as if to say, "You can look away, but we are here." Just as *Leaving the Mine* exalts the work of the browbeaten in a public institution, the *Immigrants Are Essential* portraits reconstitute communal spaces as sites of veneration. They offer the public an opportunity to give due respect and remembrance to people consigned to the margins and whose contributions are often overlooked.

Arguably, the hat of the laborer climbing up the ladder in *Leaving the Mine* resembles a halo (the hat of the laborer being searched has fallen to the ground, perhaps suggesting his criminality in the eyes of the overseer). Traditionally associated with sacred figures such as Madonna, Buddha, Constantine, Zeus, and Jesus, the halo has become a motif for divinity and holiness, as well as royalty and immortality, and suggests worthiness of veneration. *Immigrants are Essentia*l also appeals to this iconography. A round disk with intricate designs and rays emanates from each undocumented immigrant's head. Of all the iconographic variations of halos,[2] the most common are the

[2] These variations are reflected in the variety of terms ascribed to the effect, for example, nimbus, diadem, and Hvareno – the last of these being particular to the Zoroastrian tradition of Persia that precedes Christianity.

simple circular discs and the aureole, which refers to an aura of bright light emanating from the body or head.

In an interview with Harper's Bazaar, Mendoza suggests that she drew inspiration for her aesthetic from Latin American culture (Sanchez 2021), and this is reflected in the religious iconography visually referenced in *Immigrants Are Essential*. It is important to recognize, however, that she is not merely implying that the immigrants be venerated for their spiritual virtue. The iconographic traditions to which she alludes are also inherently political. They reflect the history of con-uest to which Latin America was subject as well as the resilience and revolution by which Latin American peoples laid claim to their cultures and identities.

Perhaps the most prominent example of this phenomenon is the Virgin de Guadalupe, which reflects the syncretism that emerged when the Catholicism of Portuguese and Spanish colonialism encountered indigenous practic es and aesthetics. According to the tradition, in 1531, the image of The Virgin was miraculously imprinted on the *tilma* or cloak of an indigenous peasant, Juan Diego, who she asked to build a shrine in veneration of her. The cloak bearing her image is now enshrined in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City. On it, she is depicted as a contemplative, pregnant, olive-skinned young woman clothed in a pink robe. Her head, shoulders, and arms are covered with a blue mantle that drapes behind her to her feet and is spangled with stars. Her hands are joined in prayer, and her head inclined, looking downward with heavy-lidded eyes (Fig. 4). She stands on a cres-

Fig 4. Image of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the mantle of Juan Diego

cent moon, held aloft by an angel with eagle wings. A gold mandorla – an almond-shaped aureola – with sun-like rays emanates from her entire body.

Mendoza's halos resemble the mandorla of the Virgin of Guadalupe. She thereby frames the undocumented immigrants as a salvific force for good. In "Aureola Super Auream: Crowns and Related Symbols of Special Distinction for Saints in Late Gothic and Renaissance Iconography," Hall and Uhr write that "the aureole is an exceptional award given only to the souls of virgins, martyrs, and doctors at the time of death" (568). Mendoza's installation sacralizes undocumented immigrants for their self-sacrificing works in America during the pandemic: "teaching our kids, cooking our to-go orders and singing for us at our last public gatherings" (Mendoza).

But the Virgin de Guadalupe has specific historical and political significance beyond her association with spiritual and moral goodness. Notwithstanding the miraculous origins ascribed to the image, scholars have argued that it contains evidence of indigenous influence. The eagle wings on the angel, for example, draw on iconography of the Aztecs, the indigenous civilization who controlled northern Mexico prior to the Spanish conquest a decade prior to the tilma's appearance. Jeanette Favrot Peterson argues that the apparition story of the Virgin of Guadalupe was an invention of the Spanish colonial church intended to convert native people to Catholicism. The Aztec imagery, as well as the Virgin's olive skin and straight black hair, would prove a symbol with great significance to Mexicans of Spanish and indigenous descent.

Whether her image was produced in the service of conquest or not, the Virgin de Guadalupe was soon appropriated to revolutionary causes. Her appearance in Mexico was interpreted to mean she "had chosen Mexico as her 'favored city' and Mexicans as the elect" (Peterson 42). This idea was initially up by seventeenth century criollos, Mexican-born Spaniards who resented being treated as second-class citizens by Spanish occupiers born in Europe. The Virgin de Guadalupe's appearance in Mexico, they believed, proved that criollos, and not the Spanish Crown, were the "rightful heirs of the conquest" (43). Hence, in the lead-up to the Mexican War of Independence (1810-1821), Father Miguel Hidalgo, a criollo leader, sought popular support by parading the image of the Virgin de Guadalupe on his march to Mexico City to cast out the colonial authorities (45). Later, indigenous Mexicans would come to see the Virgin as looking favorably on their cause. During the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), rebel leaders Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata used her image to build popular resistance against unequal wealth distribution and the confiscation of indigenous lands by the wealthy (45). Banners of the Virgin of Guadalupe have since been used by Mexicans in social and political movements. Inevitably, she came to hold resonance for Mexican laborers in the United States, too. Cesar Chavez, the leader of the United Farmworkers

[UFW], used banners containing her image to instill ethnic and national pride in the famous 1965 laborer's strike against the California Grape Growers.

Mendoza's allusion to the halo of the Virgin de Guadalupe thus invokes the ethnic, revolutionary, and labor causes with which the figure is associated. However, the danger of appealing to an icon so integral to Mexican nationalism is reinscribing "foreignness" onto the undocumented immigrants depicted. This serves the rhetoric of anti-immigration advocates who want to frame undocumented workers as alien pathogens that sicken the U.S. body. Instead, Mendoza also incorporates a cultural aesthetic that complicates the idea that the Southern Border draws a clear line between "insider" and "outsider." The halos surrounding the heads of the undocumented immigrants in the installation may also refer to the indigenous headdresses that, along with the intricate Mesoamerican patterns found in some of the portraits, recall the iconography of indigeneity used by the Chicano Movement of the 1960s to inspire the underprivileged Americans of Mexican descent to action. Known as "el Movimiento," the U.S. Chicano Movement sought to address the corrupt labor practices that oppressed Mexican Americans, as well as their poor living conditions and lack of access to health and education. Lourdes Alberto writes in "Nations, Nationalisms, and Indígenas: The 'Indian' in the Chicano Revolutionary Imaginary," el Movimiento "invoked a Mexican indigenist aesthetic" as part of a "paradigmatic shift in the meaning of citizenship, belonging, and nation" (108).

Alberto argues that the idea of indigeneity has a history of being strategically used to legitimize revolutionary movements: The 'Indian' has operated as a symbol, racial category, and myth, a kind of palimpsest that has been written and rewritten in an effort to anchor revolutionary imaginaries in the Americas" (113). The Chicano Movement used the idea of Mexican American indigeneity to build a racial and national identity with which to legitimize their cause and resist assimilation. Rooted in the 1920s, Mexican indigenismo – the same political ideology with which the Mexican Muralist Movement looked to unify postrevolutionary Mexico – Chicano indigenismo also selectively incorporated Mesoamerican aesthetics and indigenous history to create a "Chicano national culture" (109).

In their manifesto, El Plan de Aztlán, el Movimiento claimed that Chicano people were descended from the Aztecs and, therefore, the rightful inheritors of their ancestral homeland, Aztlan (University of Michigan). While some question the existence of Aztlan owing to a lack of historical evidence, for Chicanos, the "northern land of Aztlan" refers to the Mexican territories annexed by the U.S. after the Mexican American War (122). Employing the narrative of Aztlan as their place of origin, Chicanos argued "they were residing in their ancestral homeland and thus could not be called out as 'illegal' or 'alien' to

the land," which is how they were typically labeled despite being U.S. citizens (122). This claim to ethnic and national identity allowed Chicanos to "rewrite their status as a conquered people" (115). As indigenous people, Chicanos refused the notion that they were foreigners or outsiders, positioning themselves as inherent to the territories that constitute the United States.

Mendoza's installation alludes to the iconography used by the Chicano Movement to create their national culture. They sought to instill pride to counteract their oppression and associated Chicanos with symbols of physical strength, cunning, and prowess (111). They drew on the pre-Columbian aesthetics of the Aztec culture: headdresses, intricate calendar patterns, pyramids, eagles, snakes, and cacti. Like post-revolutionary Mexico, Chicano indigenismo invoked Aztec deities like Huitzilopochtli, the god of the sun and war. Fearless, determined, warrior-like, el Movimiento created an image of a people ready to battle against injustice.

The power of this iconography is evident in the political posters created for the United Farmworkers (earlier referenced for their display of el Virgin de Guadalupe) from the 1960s to the 1980s. The UFW was closely associated with the Chicano Movement and worked to expose the cruel working conditions and miserable pay to which Mexican and Mexican American farm laborers were subjected. Xavier Viramontes' 1973 silkscreen "Boycott Grapes" (Fig. 5) depicts a stern, dark-skinned Aztec god-like figure squeezing grapes that drip with the blood of farmworkers. The figure's skin color, indigenous facial features, and colorful headdress dispel the idea that farmworkers are foreigners who should be grateful for the opportunity to work in U.S. farmlands. Rather, farmworkers are associated with indigeneity that precedes the establishment of the United States, entitled to more for their foundational role in the Americas and present role in the U.S. economy.

Arguably, the halo and rays emanating from the seven portraits of *Immigrants Are Essential* are reminiscent of the Aztec headdress in Viramontes' silkscreen poster. If so, they allude to the indigeneity claims made by the Chicano Movement, which challenge the idea of the undocumented immigrant's "foreignness" to the U.S. body. But there is also an important difference. The faces of the people depicted in the installation are not stern and confrontational like that of the Aztec warrior. Their faces are welcoming and smiling (potentially confrontational only because of the context in which they are displayed). Rather than invoke fiery, godlike authority, the headdresses in Mendoza's portraits (framed by halos and loving adages) sanctify the presence of undocumented immigrants in terms of their indigeneity. The installations thus visually vindicate the very people anti-immigration advocates seek to delegitimate.

The tone of the *Immigrants Are Essentia*l portraits are unquestionably different from UFW posters which were aimed at building a Chicano nationalism to counter Anglo-American nationalism. El Movimento, therefore,

invoked the spirit of the Aztecs, a people who engaged in wars to expand their empire and please deities like the sun and war god Huitzilopochtli with

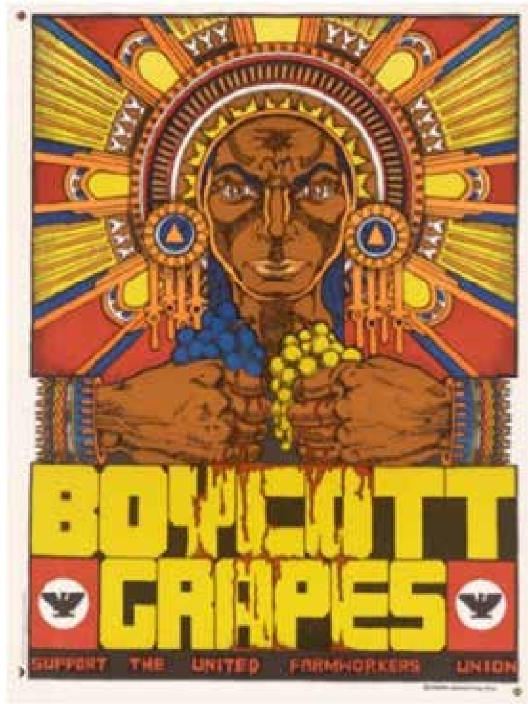


Fig 5. Viramontes, Xavier. "Boycott Grapes," 1973, Gilberto Cárdenas Latino Art Collection.

sacrificial gifts (Clendinnen 54). Mendoza is, therefore, strategic in the iconography she selects. The squared-off rays emanating from Mario's head may allude to a warrior headdress, but they also recall the rays of the sun of the UFW's famous " ¡Viva La Huelga!" poster (Fig. 6) on which they radiate orange against a red background with the famous UFW logo of the Aztec Eagle silhouetted in the foreground. The Aztec Eagle was a fearless bird commonly associated with warriors in the Aztec culture (64). This warrior ethos inspires the rallying cry "¡Viva La Huelga!" (which translates to "Long Live the Strike!") of the farmworkers visible in bold black letters at the bottom of the design.

The absence of the Aztec Eagle in Mendoza's portraits is telling. Excluding the logo distinguishes the cause of undocumented immigrants in the era of COVID-19 from that of farm labor championed by the UFW, but it also allows for a more conciliatory tone. The Aztecs were not dependent merely on the spoils of war. The sun was as important to them as an agricultural society that needed it to sustain their crops. Mendoza's design forgoes the

Fig 6. Anonymous. "Viva la Huelga!"

Aztec Eagle in favor of the sun's rays, associating her subjects – essential and undocumented workers – with traits of Aztec culture that emphasized caring, nurturing, and growing nourishment for the common good.

This is not to suggest that the UFW was a warlike organization. They, too, understood the need to appeal to everyday Americans whose consumption fueled the agricultural industry that abused farmworkers. Some of their posters were aimed less at inspiring farm labor to rise against their oppressors and more at humanizing farmworkers as part of their campaign to build leverage through consumer boycotts. To do so, their designs turned to portraiture, as can be seen in the 1978 *Boycott Lettuce & Grapes* poster (Fig. 7). Here a vibrant sun and Aztec Eagle are backgrounded, surrounded by the rallying "Si Se Puede – It Can Be Done." The labor of farmworkers is depicted among rows of crops that, perhaps analogousto the sun's rays, radiate outward in a play on perspective. The foreground of the poster depicts a group of farmworkers, young and old, some with their children. The bottom of the poster urges consumers to "Boycott lettuce and grapes."

The farmworkers' arduous labor in the unforgiving yet vital sun is undertaken in the service of the nation's food supply. The worn, wrinkled faces of elders, the sun-scorched faces of youngsters, and the women holding their

toddlers all remind spectators that those depicted are not just workers whose value can be reduced to their economic contribution. They have lives outside of work. They have social, emotional, and civic values. They are deserving of respect. The austere, hardened look on the faces of some of the farmwork

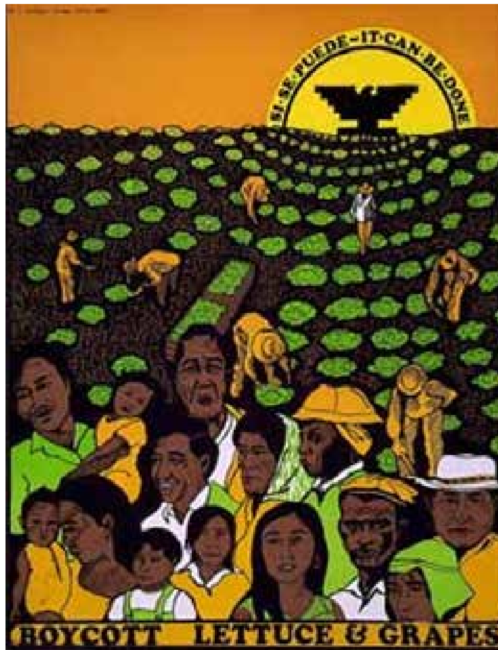


Fig 7. (1978) *Boycott Lettuce & Grapes*. United States, 1978. [Chicago: Women's Graphics Collective]. Photograph retrieved from the Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/93505187/.

ers speaks to the strength of character produced by hardship. They are not wholly defined by their struggles, however. Amidst the stern determination, smiling faces remind onlookers of the vitality with which farmworkers relish life and that they, too, can be happy.

Mendoza's installation also embraces the full humanity of undocumented immigrants in ways that counter their historical representation as impoverished freeloaders whose interests are at odds with those of American citizens. Their faces emit warmth rather than confrontation (in contrast to the fierce Aztec warrior in the *Boycott Grape*s poster). Rather than rallying cries or calls for boycotts, the text on the posters celebrates values for which American citizens, too, might want to be remembered. Mario's face is surrounded by a Spanish proverb that honors his commitment to love in life and beyond. Juan is described as a "noble father, brother, and son," as someone who was "trapped in work, dreaming of building a little house

in Mexico for him and his family." Ofelia is remembered as someone who always fought to "forge a future for herself and her children."

Mendoza's allusion to the aesthetic of El Moviemento is not meant to assert nationalism or signal cultural opposition. The religious, indigenous, and labor traditions she evokes do speak to histories of oppression and exploitation but also of communal resilience and triumph. They are embraced as a source of pride and collective identity, which is profound when undocumented laborers are so often required to hide – when not physically from immigration authorities, then culturally through assimilation. By placing their portraits at centers of American power – by turning The Roost and Broadway into Contact Zones – Mendoza insists on their recognition. However, her aesthetic also makes clear that embracing who they are does not mean undocumented immigrants are foreign to America. They share values with American citizens. They have contributed to the American economy for generations. They sacrifice themselves for the good of American citizens.

Mendoza's installation asks passersby to consider what, in essence, separates undocumented immigrants from American citizens. At heart, she suggests, they are so alike that the logic of anti-immigrant rhetoric becomes self-defeating. Undocumented immigrants are no less human than American citizens. They are not pathogens that sicken the nation. Historically, and within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic especially, they are essential to the health and continued well-being of the U.S. body. Mendoza makes this argument explicitly as part of the online memorial to which the QR code leads passersby: "Sixty-nine percent of undocumented immigrant workers are essential workers on the frontlines keeping us safe, healthy, and cared for during this pandemic. It is clear that there is no recovery without immigrants" (Mendoza). In this regard, anti-immigrant rhetoric argues against the interests of the United States. In conjunction with the anti-immigrant policies it champions, it turns the immune system against the body it supposedly protects.

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The difficulties undergone by immigrants suggest that the U.S. body is suffering from an auto-immune disease that attacks vital organs working to its benefit. The hateful rhetoric of political leaders alone endangers the lives of undocumented immigrants, heightening fear in their communities as its increases the likelihood of violence against them (Byman 2021).

Furthermore, the pandemic has heightened the stakes and exacerbated systemic issues. The seven bright faces memorialized by the I*mmigrants are Essential* installation are a few of the thousands of undocumented immigrant lives taken by the virus. This toll is worsened by the lack of help

extended to undocumented immigrants residing in the United States. Even though undocumented immigrants in the U.S. pay an estimated $11.74 billion in local and state taxes a year, and despite having income taxes deducted from their paychecks and filing income tax returns (Hill 2017), they are ineligible for federal unemployment aid and stimulus checks. In addition, the Trump administration's public charge rule allowed the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services to discriminate against applicants they deemed likely to become dependent on governmental support. This scared many immigrants from seeking the limited aid for which they were eligible, such as SNAP, because it might lessen their chances of one day adjusting their legal status (Amandolare et al. 2020).

The result is economic suffering. The Center for an Urban Future's study of the population served by the Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation during the COVID-19 pandemic found that 95% of the individuals experiencing food insecurity were undocumented immigrants (Amandolare et al. 2020). It is unconscionable, if unsurprising, that Mario, a 59-year-old man who had worked in the U.S. for 30 years, could not afford to stay home as the pandemic surged. The economic underclass to which undocumented immigrants are consigned means they had no choice but to expose themselves to the pandemic.

For Mendoza, the best hope for immigrants is policy change. A pop-up in the online memorial urges users to "Tell congressional leaders: Immigrants need a pathway to citizenship now." The stories of the seven undocumented individuals depicted on the installation posters justify this pathway on humanitarian, moral, and emotional grounds. Some, for example, had left their native countries decades ago and, afraid to seek medical help, died before they could reunite with family they had not seen in years. Such long separations from family are not unusual. A Pew Research Study found that in 2012, approximately 62% of undocumented immigrants had lived in the U.S. for a decade or more (Passel et al. 2014). Given the risk to undocumented people of border crossings, such statistics suggest lives uprooted from loved ones.

The oral histories in the online memorial are provided by mourning relatives in the United States. They speak of the deceased immigrants' longing to return to their native land and detail the compounding effects of economic, legal, emotional, and health stressors. To such family members, the undocumented immigrants are not statistics, economic contributors, or policy arguments. They are unique, loved people who were committed to their families and communities. Visually, too, Mendoza wanted to honor their individuality: "Their favorite singers sometimes appear on the lyrics of the halo, their favorite flowers, their favorite color, the areas that they were from, trying to find specific textures that were from those areas" (Sanchez 2021).

*Immigrants are Essential* foregrounds their particularity because it is important to recognize them as individuals deserving of better treatment. Like Americans, they were optimistic, resilient, and resourceful. They, too, had dreams, valued hard work, and believed in equality. Yet their civic contributions to the wellbeing of the United States – at the cost of their lives – were unacknowledged and unrewarded because they do not hold citizenship. They deserve the same dignity, rights, and aid as anyone – from unemployment benefits to the freedom to travel – which in America are only attainable through legalization.

Mendoza's installation counters the hateful rhetoric that associates immigrants with contagion, infection, and pathogens invading the U.S. body and diminishing it from within. Instead, it reframes them – aesthetically and narratively – as vital to America's interest, as aspiring citizens who help the country even as the country fails to help them. *Immigrants Are Essential*, with its careful allusion to the iconography of indigeneity, religiosity, and labor, honors their full human dignity, hoping to awaken the U.S.'s heart to their stories and to send a signal to its brain that a vital organ is in distress.

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# Character and Punishment in Euripides' *Medea*

By Esraa Wasel

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By the end of Euripides' *Medea*, the Colchian princess for whom the play is named has murdered her two young sons in a revenge scheme against her unfaithful husband, Jason, and escaped in a serpent drawn-carriage sent by the god Helios. She seems immune to punishment. This is not the first of the heinous crimes she has escaped. Those she has murdered include her brother (Prince Apsyrtus), King Pelias, Princess Glauke, and King Creon (Glauke's father).

The conclusion to Euripides' play has long confounded scholars. Their confusion might stem from *Medea's* failure – or refusal – to offer up an ending audiences (scholars included) find more intuitive or satisfying, one in which Medea is punished. An obvious consequence of so terrible a crime as child murder, audiences might feel, is that she must be brought to some kind of justice. As I will argue, reducing the audience's desire for Medea's punishment to a natural consequence of her admittedly awful actions absolves them of the responsibility to engage the Colchian princess in her complex entirety.

The approach of this article will be to analyze *Medea* through the jurisprudential lens of character theory, which tries to understand the extent to which "the moral assessment of an offender's character is a necessary prerequisite of criminal liability and punishment" (Mousourakis 51). Doing so allows us to challenge the audience's desire to punish Medea by asking important questions: If Medea's actions justify her punishment, can the same be said of her moral character? To what extent are her actions reflections of her moral character? And *vice versa*? Most importantly, by what precepts do we assess Medea's character if it is (in whatever ways and to whatever degree) distinguishable from her actions? Especially this last question, which challenges audiences to engage Medea's story in its full sympathetic

force, without attempting to rationalize her infanticide. It also, as I will ultimately argue, suggests the need for skepticism about the idea that moral character can offer an accurate basis by which to justify punishment.

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*Medea* begins with its title character distraught. She has just discovered that her husband, Jason, has abandoned her and their two sons by taking a new wife, Princess Glauke, daughter of Creon, the king of Corinth. In light of his daughter's new marriage, Creon decides to exile Medea and her sons from Corinth in fear of the vengeance she might take against his house. Medea is devastated and angered by the news. She manages to convince Creon to give her one extra day in Corinth to prepare herself and her children for exile. He reluctantly agrees.

On that extra day, Medea crosses paths with Aegeus, the King of Athens. Aegeus agrees to give Medea refuge in Athens in exchange for the promise that Medea will end his childlessness, either by bearing his children or through her skills in magic (It is not clear which), with her refuge secured, Medea enacts her revenge plans. She murders Glauke and Creon by gifting them poisoned robes that burn and melt the skin off their bodies. She stabs her two sons to death with a sword. After a heated exchange with Jason, in which he begs to see and bury his sons, and in which he condemns her, Medea flies away to Athens in a golden chariot, taking the corpses of her sons with her. She escapes not only Jason, but also punishment.

Medea's escape constitutes an unusual ending to a Greek tragedy in which the murder of kin (or any great injustice for that matter) takes place. Rachel Kitzinger notes this irregularity: "Where, then, are the traditional deities who might have appeared in this final scene to comfort Jason and to foretell that Medea, in the end, would pay the price? Their absence from this play is keenly felt given the suffering Medea has inflicted and the outrage she has provoked with her escape" (485). In Aeschylus's *Orestei*a, for example, Furies, or Erinyes, monstrous deities of vengeance and punishment, mentally torture the perpetrator, Orestes, by wreaking havoc on his home, until order is restored. In Medea, Jason calls on these avenging deities when he learns that his first wife has killed their sons, but his prayers go unanswered (lines 1363-1364). Jason also calls on Zeus, and in this case too, his prayers are met with silence (lines 1382-1384). Even if a crime goes unpunished in the course of a tragedy, they often included prophecies of the suffering and ignominy an offender would endure in the future. In Euripides's *Hecub*a, for example, it is foretold that the title character would be punished for her murder of King Polymestor's sons by being transformed into "bitch rock," a landmark for sailors. But Medea promises no such retribution. She is sent a golden carriage by her grandfather Helios and flies off to her Athenian refuge.

Aristotle was first among critics of Greek tragedy who found this conclusion ungainly. In *Poetics*, Medea is used as an example of a tragedy with a failed plot resolution: "The denouement of the plot should arise from the plot itself and not be brough about 'from the machine,' as it is in the Medea" (1454b1). More recently, G.M.A. Grube echoed the intuition that something about the ending of the play seems off. The divine chariot "is to us an incredible device which we cannot readily accept; it probably seemed awkward even to a Greek audience" (164). In his view, the chariot fulfills the narrative purpose of removing Medea from Jason's avenging grasp, a point he argues without suggesting a fitting conclusion or just punishment. Grube's explanation of the chariot escape does not extend beyond its plot necessity.

Other critics have attempted to explain Medea's escape as transcendence. Maurice Cunningham argues that she transforms into a goddess since, "In purely human terms, Medea should not be able to escape Jason's retaliation" (158). Anne Burnett makes sense of the escape by arguing that Medea's humanity is "sloughed off" (22). By their reasoning, Medea's escape only makes sense if she transcends the human realm and the judgements to which mortals are subject.

For now, I want to set aside the issue of how *Medea* should have ended, or what Euripides meant audiences to infer by concluding the play as he did. The seeming "offness" of the ending is interesting in itself. Why is it so counterintuitive that Medea should avoid punishment? Unquestionably, it is indefensible to willfully kill one's own children, but are these actions alone what motivates the audience's desire for retribution? It is also true that Medea is cast as a "bad" character throughout the play. To what extent is the audience's desire for her comeuppance fueled by her character (or characterization)?

It makes sense to turn to character theory, which has roots in criminal law and is concerned with the relative weight given to action and moral character in deciding appropriate punishment. I do so with the aim of understanding *Medea* in more nuanced ways but also to ask questions about the role of "character" in sentencing. Using *Medea* and Greek tragedy more broadly in relation to criminal law is not a novel application. Edith Hall writes that "Greek tragedy has had a close and complicated relationship with criminal law … One reason for the cultural longevity of Euripides' *Medea* is certainly that it has so often been connected with discussions about criminal legislation … as well as the treatment of women before the law" (18). My use of *Medea* to reflect on the role of *character* in criminal law may be new, but my methodology is consistent with a scholarly tradition.

Character theorists cite Hume's writings as foundational to the idea that character serves an important role in determining punishment. In Book 2 of his *Treatise of Human Nature*, he observes that "[A]ctions are by their very nature temporary and perishing" (pt. 3, Sec II). Not only are they fleeting, but they are not necessarily proof that punishment is warranted. Actions may

be accidental or their consequences unintentional. In such an instance, they "proceed not from some cause in the characters and disposition of the person who perform'd them." When an action is inconsistent with character, he continues, "'tis impossible he can, upon its account, become the object of punishment or vengeance."

For Hume, an action (in and of itself) is an insufficient basis by which to determine someone's due. He does, however, give actions some evidentiary authority in Book 3. "[W]hen we praise any actions," he writes, "we regard only the motives that produc'd them and consider the actions as signs or indications of certain principles in the mind and temper. The external performance has no merit. We must look within to find the moral quality" (pt. 2, sec. I). As opposed to actions, Hume clearly affords character (variously implied by "disposition," "certain principles in the mind and temper," and "the moral quality" within a person) constancy. Character, he implies, consistently "motivates" actions. Actions are important in determining a person's just deserts – whether praise or punishment – only insofar as they inform us about the underlying character of the person who performs them.

Echoing Hume in *State Punishment: Political Principles and Community Values*, Nicola Lacey writes that "It is unfair to hold people responsible for actions which are out of character, but only fair to hold them so for actions in which their settled dispositions are centrally expressed" (68). In her thinking, past actions provide evidence of a person's moral quality. Accordingly, repeated actions or certain patterns of behavior can be used to determine a person's character, which Lacey suggests is constant or "settled." It is fair to punish a person for a wrongful action only if it is consistent with her character (as determined by an analysis of past actions / behavioral patterns).

Both Hume's and Lacey's insistence that actions serve as evidence for character are motivated by a fundamental concern with *fairness* (a term Lacey uses). In *Rethinking Criminal Law*, George Fletcher reframes this matter, claiming that the fairness, or "justness" of a punishment "is measured by the *desert* of the offender" (800). In jurisprudence, "desert" refers to the degree to which an offender *deserves* the sentence handed down to them. Fletcher ties desert directly to character: "[T]he desert of the offender is gauged by his character – i.e., the kind of person he is." Accordingly, he concludes with an absolute insistence that "a judgement about character is essential to the just distribution of punishment."

Arguably, the appeal of character as a determinant of just punishment lies in its simplicity, especially given the dualism that is pervasive in moral judgement. Fletcher's definition of character – "the kind of person he is" – and Lacey's idea of "settled disposition" lend themselves to reductive qualification. Are they a "good" person or a "bad" person? Such distinctions allow character theory to claim it can satisfy the intuitive position that it is unfair to punish a good person and a bad person similarly for the same wrongful ac-

tion. If a person of good character commits a wrongful action, it can be minimized as an accident or lapse of judgement for which the perpetrator does not deserve harsh punishment. A wrongful action is committed in line with a bad character so it cannot be similarly explained away. Bad character suggests that the wrongful action was intentional, thus the person committing the action is more responsible and deserves a severe sentence.

Before detailing some key pitfalls of character theory that will inform a more sustained reading of *Medea*, I would like to briefly recast the play in terms we have established thus far. Fletcher's focus on "desert" is particularly pertinent. As I showed earlier, critics and scholars have struggled to explain (or simply objected to) the "off-ness" of *Medea's* conclusion: her miraculous escape from punishment for unspeakable actions. Fletcher's language, and the logic of character theory, allows us to critically frame the audience's discomfort. In its simplest formulation, the play's ending is unsatisfying to many audience members because they feel Medea deserves punishment. Her escape would not be confounding, or not as confounding, if they understood her to be a "good character." She is guilty of egregious wrongdoing that, in their interpretation, aligns with her "bad character." Medea's avoidance of punishment is inconsistent with her desert, and the play's conclusion therefore enacts an injustice.

For all its intuitive appeal, however, Character Theory is not without its detractors. Ekow Yankah, for example, argues that character is an inappropriate basis by which to gauge desert. For him, Character Theory has an "empirical issue," which is to say that it relies on criminal actions as evidence of bad character (1033). The problem, he argues, is that past actions are insufficient "empirical evidence" of character. Character is complicated. A person's actions do not tell us everything we need to know about their character to confidently assign punishment on their basis. Moreover, the constancy of character – Lacey's "settled disposition" – that character theory assumes, is questionable. There is no clear way to measure how much or even what kind of past actions should factor into the present evaluation of a person's character. There are no satisfactory guidelines to decide when or under what circumstances past actions lose relevance.

Another problem for Character Theory, according to Yankah, are assumptions about character that are based not only on past actions, but also on reductive and derogatory stereotypes (1036). While such biases are not legitimated by character theory, it cannot guarantee that implicit biases will not interfere with judgements about a person's character. So, for example, the stereotypes that women are overly emotional or that immigrants are lazy may have a determining effect in character judgements of a particular woman or a particular immigrant (1036).

In summary, according to Yankah, Character Theory falls short on two main fronts. The first is that the relationship between character and action,

ostensibly the best evidence of character, is tenuous and poorly defined. The second is that it has no way to correct for the implicit biases of those tasked with determining the nature of a defendant's character. In addition, as my subsequent reading of *Medea* will argue, character alone does not motivate or mitigate wrongful actions. It is important to consider a person's circumstances when determining their just desert. It is my hope that a more holistic account of *Medea* – one that does not fall victim to the shortcomings Character Theory – will mitigate, at least to some degree, the injustice of the play's conclusion, while muddying what is traditionally understood to be "true" evidence of a person's character.

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Before the events of the play in which she murders her sons, Medea has already committed a series of murders. She kills with ease and even seems to revel in it. For her, murder is not a last resort or a means of self-protection. It is a tool. Medea is open to the possibility of violence to protect herself from humiliation or to simply get what she wants. In other words, murder is not out of character for her. A key instance of this is the reason for her exile from her home. When Jason arrives in Colchis on his ship, the Argo, she falls in love with him and aids him greatly in his quest for the Golden Fleece. In exchange for her help, Jason agrees to marry and the two escape in the Argo. Medea's father, Aeetes, chases after them. To slow him down, Medea chops up her brother, Apsyrtus, and tosses bits of his mangled corpse overboard, piece by piece. Aeetes, heartbroken, stops to gather the pieces of his son's corpse, giving Medea and Jason time to flee. Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood points out that Athenian audiences would have seen these earlier actions as manifestations of her character: "[a] woman who betrayed her father and killed her brother for the sake of a future husband she chose herself is a bad woman" (256).

The play does not go out of its way to challenge this characterization. Her past wrongdoing is aired frequently by Jason, Medea herself, and the nurse. Jason's perspective most clearly aligns with the Character Theory approach. He is explicit in connecting Medea's infanticide to her past actions in the tirade he directs at her on first learning what she has done:

> Vilest woman! Condemned, hated by the gods,
> by me, and every human creature
> [….]
> Now my mind is clear.
> How wrong I was to bring a barbarian home
> to Greece, already a dangerous betrayer
> of family and country. For this the gods have sent
> their Fury to torment me, though it was you

who was cruel enough to kill your trusting brother,
then leave with me aboard the noble Argo.
That's how it started. Then we married.
Then you bore me children. The ones you killed!
All of this because of jealousy.
Barbarians act like this, not Greeks.
Yet I married a barbarian and yoked myself
to hate and destruction. (lines 1297-1298, 1305-1318)

For Jason, Medea's murder of her sons is consistent with the murder of her brother. The former action is evidence of her "badness" that explains her recent wrongdoing. He characterizes her as "already a dangerous betrayer of family and country." Notably, however, Jason also qualifies her disposition in ways that are unacceptable to Character Theory. He associates her behavior with her "barbarian" (or non-Greek) origins, characterizing her in terms of generalizations attributed to foreigners.

Of course, Jason is responding from a place of devastation, and his anger and denigration of his wife is understandable in that way. But Medea's own earlier recounting of her past actions do not necessarily endear her to audiences even before she kills her sons. Speaking to the chorus and, later, to Jason about her past treason and fratricide, the regret she shows is qualified in self-incriminating ways. She tells the chorus,

Before I betrayed my father,
before I butchered my brother at home
then dropped him from the Argo,
piece by piece, like bait,
I made Jason swear to love
and honor me, for after my shameful treason,
I thought only great oaths would keep
him bound to me. (lines 159-166)

Medea's treason is not personally shameful to her. She is not ashamed *of* it, but shamed *by* it in the eyes of Colchians and, she fears, others – potentially even Jason. Hence, she demands oaths that bind him to her, given that she is exiled from her home and is dependent on him. Later, she reminds Jason that she "abandoned her country" and "engineered the murder" of King Pelias, causing "grief and death" in the process. (Pelias' murder was orchestrated by Medea in a failed bid to have Jason assume to the throne of his home country, Iolcus; their involvement in which was the pretext for their banishment to Corinth.) "All this I did for you! / And in return you honored me / with contempt, betrayal, a replacement wife" (lines 489-491). In Medea's thinking, her past actions were wrong only insofar as they left her vulnerable and were then

not enough to compel Jason to keep his side of the bargain. She thus fails to express meaningful remorse for the actions in themselves.

In *Repentance, Punishment, and Mercy*, Jeffrie Murphy explains that remorse is popularly understood to be evidence of good character: "[The] repentant person has better character than the unrepentant person … [and] simply deserves less punishment" (157). This is because people generally view remorse as "a measure of whether the defendant's bad act is consistent with his character or a deviation from it." A failure to show remorse, in other words, means that a person's wrongful acts are taken as true expressions of their underlying character. In such an analysis, Medea is not sorry that she committed treason and murder because such actions are not at odds with her character. Rather, her regret is a result of Jason's betrayal and the vulnerable position in which it leaves her. His taking of a new wife draws her past actions into question only insofar as they did not serve her interests in the long run.

Audience members need not parse the language of Medea's "remorse" to judge her character. Her reputation is established early on. In fact, it is important to note that Medea's "bad character" is not without consequence for her within the world of the play, most notably before she kills her sons. Creon, the father of Glauke, Jason's new wife, makes the decision to exile Medea from Corinth based on his negative view of her character. He tells her he wants her gone because, "I fear you'll harm my daughter / Why? Because your nature, clever and vindictive, / thrives on evil and because you sting with loss" (lines 301-303). Creon chooses to exile Medea because he fears her character based on the actions of which she has proven herself capable. In a sense that will be elaborated soon, Creon's exile of Medea amounts to a potentially devastating punishment – this is *before* she has wronged the Corinthian king or Jason. In effect, Medea is being punished for her bad character in the absence of a wrongdoing, or to preempt an undetermined future wrongdoing. To audiences, Creon's decision would likely seem appropriate, especially when the little mercy he shows her – allowing her an extra day in Corinth – gets him and his daughter killed, and indirectly results in Medea's murder of her sons. Arguably, the play vindicates Creon's punishment and cautions against affording bad characters sympathy.

However, it is also true that the play's framing of Medea's character in terms of her past actions limits the nature of the audience's engagement with her. Consider, for example, how repeated recounting of her past actions make it a challenge for audiences to see her escape at the play's conclusion as anything other than an injustice. Imagine that Medea had been perfectly blameless, or even virtuous, before Jason betrayed her. In such a light, her murder of her sons would have seemed profoundly out of character for her. It would be impossible to explain her actions in terms of her settled disposition, and the audience might feel challenged to consider her actions in a different light.

Character is an insufficient basis to determine the severity of punishment because it tends to conflate the cause of wrongdoing with the defendant's "settled" moral disposition. When we un-derstand wrongdoing solely as a function of character, we fail to take mitigating factors such as circumstance into account. The "badness" of a character may even prompt us to actively preclude circumstances from consideration as bad people are no more worthy of understanding than they are sympathy.

We see this in an observation Sourvinou-Inwood makes with regard to Euripides' play. When Medea (or the Nurse) describes her past, it is to provide context necessary to bring the desperation of her current circumstances into sharper relief. That is, she is a woman in exile, betrayed by her husband, with no home or family to which she can return. However, as Sourvinou-Inwood suggests, the direness of Medea's situation is lost on audiences: "[I]n the world of the play, [her account] attracts the chorus' sympathy … but in the world of the audience, it evokes the acts committed by Medea that characterize her as a 'bad woman' (258). In other words, the audience refuses to see Medea's terrible circumstance as anything other than deserved given the character evidenced by her past actions – this is before she kills Creon, Glauke, and her own sons. After her murderous spree, the audience is even less likely to consider her circumstances as playing a determining role because, to them, the causal relationship between bad character and wrongdoing is confirmed. This circular logic (which the audience has in common with Character Theory) means that Medea's escape can only be understood as an unmitigated injustice.

Given the limitations character imposes on our ability to gauge (to borrow Fletcher's term) a person's just desert, it makes sense to set it aside as the cause of Medea's actions and to pay closer attention to the role her circumstances played. This is not to argue that Medea's punishment should not also be determined relative to the horrific crime she has committed but rather to show what details essential to the determination of just desert are lost when relying solely on character.

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Medea is clearly terrified of betrayal. Her marriage to Jason was fortified (she thought) by the great "binding" oaths she made him take. In the wake of her husband's disloyalty, negotiating her move to Athens with Aegeus, she refuses to his word and makes him swear an oath to protect her (lines 729-730). Her insistence on oaths is telling. She is keenly aware of her own vulnerability. Exiled from her own country, Colchis, she is dependent on the protection of those willing to take her in. Jason's betrayal of his oaths and his marriage to Glauke is not just a matter of heartbreak. Contrary to what George Gellie writes, it is wrong to consider Medea's marriage trouble in the same light as any other modern suburban break-up (16).

That is not to say that Medea is not heartbroken. She feels humiliated. She has aided Jason in his ambition – from helping him attain the Golden Fleece, to murdering Pelias – only to be cast aside when a more useful woman, Princess Glauke, presents herself. She is especially aggrieved because, to her mind, women have no choice but to fulfill such roles. Speaking to the chorus, (made up of Corinthian women) she laments:

> What other creatures are bred so exquisitely
> and purposefully for mistreatment as women are?
> Think of how we buy ourselves husbands,
> power and alliances for them, slavery
> and conquest over us. Bad enough
> to have no choice in servitude –
> but to pay for it and celebrate
> a wedding feast adds salt to the wound.
> Try refusing the arrangement, or later
> petition for divorce – the first is impossible
> while the second is like admitting
> You're a whore. (lines 241-252)

But Medea is also aware that the chorus members are protected and have recourse that she, as an exiled foreigner, does not. "You are Corinthians / with ancestral homes, childhood friends, / while I, stripped of that already, / am now even more exposed by Jason's cruelties" (lines 271-275). This is where the stakes of Medea's betrayal are at their highest. As exiles from their home countries, Jason and Medea were, together, dependent on the patronage of the state of Corinth for protection. Jason's marriage to Glauke now affords him the added security of prominence within the Corinthian court. However, it places Medea at odds with King Creon who, based on his understanding of her character, decides to exile her.

Jason's betrayal does not just rob Medea of a husband. It leaves her homeless, unprotected, and isolated. Edith Hall writes, "the banishment – decree of permanent exile from Corinth – tends to be overlooked by modern interpreters of the ancient play, but in the ancient world to be without a city, or friends in any other city, especially for a woman, was a virtual death sentence" (21). In this light, Jason's second marriage – especially to Glauke – signals more than infidelity to Medea. In her address to the chorus, she makes clear that it is an act of violence akin to murder.

> Jason, yes, my faithless husband,
> tore out the threads I'd stitched to hold
> our life together. So quickly and suddenly

> was it done, I wasn't given the time to console
> myself or build alliances with friends.
> A brutal man who I once loved has smashed me
> in the face so hard I wear the face of death. (lines 234-240)

It makes sense that, to Medea, Jason's betrayal and Creon's decree together amount to a great injustice. Creon punishes her out of a fear based on past actions, but willingly accepts Jason, her co-conspirator, into the fold. Where, she might rightfully ask, is Jason's due desert? But as a foreign woman in Corinth with the threat of exile looming over her, with no male kin or husband to protect her, she is without "official" recourse. In her angry and desperate state, she is prone to making reckless decisions and feels she must take matters into her own hands to exact "justice." She destroys Jason's prospects in the Corinthian court by killing Glauke and Creon, and lays waste to his future bloodline by killing his sons, the result of the marriage he betrayed.

None of this analysis should suggest that Medea is blameless or that Jason is responsible for the death of his sons, as she attempts to cast her actions. It aims to show that a more careful engagement with Medea's circumstances allows us to see her as human rather than a monster, or "Scylla" as Jason calls her. In light of such an analysis, the circular logic of Character Theory no longer holds. Her most recent wrongdoing is not simply more evidence of the bad character inferred from past wrongdoings. She is not only a brother-murderer, sorceress, and barbarian. She is also a betrayed wife, abandoned in exile, scared, in distress, and wronged. Many mitigating details emerge when we suspend character as the lens by which to determine the level of her responsibility, the severity of her wrongdoing, and the desert she is due.

A reading of her circumstances makes clear that Medea is punished when Creon exiles her because, based on his judgement of her character, she represents a threat to his daughter. What should be clear is that Medea is not ascribed her "badness" merely on the basis of her earlier actions. If that was the case, Jason, her partner in past crimes, would not have been welcomed into the Corinthian Court. Few of us today would claim that Medea is more predisposed to immoral acts than Jason because she is a woman or because she is foreign. But to Creon, and a Greek audience largely made up of men, Medea's womanhood and barbarianism are grounds for added suspicion.

As Ekow Yankah argues, Character Theory cannot guarantee that implicit biases will be excluded from character judgements. Such biases incorporate reductive stereotypes of race, nationality, and sex in determining character, even though such aspects of a person cannot justifiably be claimed to make them less moral, and therefore more deserving of severe punishment for wrongdoings. How we understand and interpret character is simply too arbitrary to serve as a reliable basis by which to determine punishment.

Arguably, Medea is a victim of just such arbitrary distinctions. Jason, who is welcomed into the Corinthian court, is complicit in and the beneficiary of actions for which she is judged to be a bad character deserving of exile. This imbalance is key to understanding Medea's actions and recasts the play's conclusion. Consider a version of *Medea* in which she simply slunk off into the wilds to die, leaving Jason in his prominent position in Corinth, their sons at his side. That ending would also enact an injustice because Jason would not be punished.

This is not to suggest that Medea's vengeful actions are justifiable or proportionate. Nor should it be taken to mean that her miraculous escape to Athens is just. However, it does reframe the conclusion of the play which, precisely because it is so unsatisfying, prompts the question, "What should have happened?" What would a satisfying ending look like? Audience members in Ancient Greece, might feel justice would be better served had Jason caught and killed Medea. The pretext of their satisfaction, however, would be that Jason is the "good" victim of "bad" Medea's womanly, barbarian wrongdoings. Euripides' conclusion is shocking precisely because it flies in the face of such reductive characterization. It is as confounding and unresolved as Medea's and Jason's devastating entanglement. It prompts us to examine how the habits by which we judge a character's immorality relate to our desire to punish them and to ask the more difficult questions true justice demands.

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# Dreadful Knowledge: *Oedipus Tyrannos*, The Plague of Athens, and COVID-19

By Sarah Gawlik

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Oedipus is not special. Killing one's father and marrying one's mother is not uncommon in Greek myth. In fact, the entire cycle of Greek myth is founded upon patricide. Ouranos was killed by his son Kronos, who in turn was killed by his own son Zeus, establishing the Greek Pantheon of gods and goddesses as we know it. Moreover, the early pantheon has its roots in incest. The family tree is twisted from its very beginnings: Ouranos fathered the Titans with Gaia, his own mother; later, Zeus would marry Hera, who is technically his own sister. Despite the precedented nature of patricide and incest, they are overwhelmingly the focus of critical readings of *Oedipus Tyrranos*, perhaps inspired by Freud's intervention.

I would like to draw attention to *Oedipus Tyrranos* for a different reason: the plague in Thebes that serves as the backdrop for much of its action and that reflects the historical Plague of Athens rampant at the time of its first staging. As I will show, the physiological and epistemological strain undergone by characters in *Oedipus Tyrannos* also have profound resonances in the era of COVID-19. My approach is distinct, however, from that of Bryan Doerries and Theater of War's 2020 Zoom staging of *Oedipus The Kin*g starring notable actors Oscar Isaac and Frances McDormand, among others. Undoubtedly, Theater of War has brought ancient Greek theater into conversation with contemporary social and political challenges, opening dialogue and holding space to explore complexities. As will become clear, this goal is very reminiscent of the role played by theater in Athens. But for Doerries, "*Oedipus the King* is a timeless story about leadership, accountability, and the challenges faced by citizens and elected officials during pandemics and plagues." I do not deny that the play is a powerful allegory with lessons for those in positions of political power. Certainly, Oedipus' character and arc sustain such application, but I am primarily

interested in the ways the play engages with the larger community, especially at a time of widespread suffering. Instead of analyzing Oedipus' story for the questions it raises about the leadership of the powerful few, I will evaluate it for the epistemological questions it asks the ordinary many.

In my reading, *Oedipus Tyrannos* is a play about a community suffering under plague and famine. Unbeknownst to them, the plague is a punishment from the gods for the religious pollution caused by King Oedipus' killing of his father, the previous king, Laius, and marriage to his mother, Jocasta. Ironically, in their misery, the citizens of Thebes have no option but to appeal to Oedipus as their leader for help. This sets him on the path that reveals his horrific past actions and true identity.

Notably, the play does not stage the actions themselves, but rather the complicated processes by which hidden, obscured, and misunderstood past actions are revealed and become known. Oedipus cycles through initial eagerness to serve his people, through a defensive rejection of the assertion that he is the cause of the plague, to the sickening realization and acceptance of it as fact. Other characters likewise struggle with the truth. Those who know it, like Tiresias and later Jocasta, attempt to shield others from the burden of knowing. None of the characters, however, can deny the truth by the end of the play, and all are forced to face it without the protection of a shield of ignorance. *Oedipus Tyrannos* thus presents crises of immunity on two levels. The citizens of Thebes lack physical immunity from the grievous plague, while many of its characters display epistemological immunity, resisting knowledge essential to the righting of religious wrongs.

The themes of immunity from plague and knowledge exist not only within the play itself but extend into historical Athens and our contemporary world. Each of these three "interpretive layers" allow us to explore the epistemological struggle of a community suffering under pestilence, while also enhancing our understanding of the others.

Sophocles' play does not open with Oedipus' triumphant ascent to the throne, having solved the Sphinx's riddle. These events precede the action of the play. Instead, *Oedipus Tyrannos* begins with a community lamenting their loss. A grievous plague has descended upon the city of Thebes, corrupting the land and disrupting the livelihoods of the citizens. They send a priest to voice their collective appeal to their king, Oedipus, for a solution. The priest focuses on the suffering city to detail the horrors and pestilence that have descended upon the homes of the citizens he represents:

> Thebes is tossed on a murdering sea and cannot lift her head from the death surge. A rust consumes the buds and fruits of the earth; the herds are sick; children die unborn, the labor is vain. The god of plague and pyre raids like detestable lightning through the city, and

> all the house of Kadmos is laid waste, all emptied, and all darkened:
> Death alone battens upon the misery of Thebes. (Sophocles 4)

The description highlights the collective nature of the suffering – that of the ordinary many – indicating that no one has been spared from the effects of the plague. The people are referred to in terms of the city. *Thebes* is pulled under the waves of death; *Thebes* is pitted against personified death. So overwhelming is the plague, that individuals have converged into a single entity that suffers uniformly. The repetition in "*all* the house of Kadmos is laid waste, *all* emptied, and *all* darkened" reinforces this sense of communal suffering. There is no distinction of experience; they are all miserable and tormented. The listing of hardships further compounds the indiscriminate nature of the plague. The harvest is rotted, the animals are ill, and the babies are dying at birth. People, animals, and plants alike are all afflicted. No one and nothing is afforded immunity. These images set the tone of the play and suggest that its concerns extend beyond the character and arc of Oedipus himself.

In fact, a fifth-century Athenian audience would be keenly aware of these broader resonances, given the calamitous plague they were undergoing. The Greek historian Thucydides provides a firsthand account, having watched Athens suffer and even enduring the sickness himself. He recounts agonizing symptoms that enflamed every limb of the body:

> People in perfect health suddenly began to have burning feelings in the head; their eyes became red and inflamed; inside their mouths there was bleeding from the throat and tongue, and the breath became unnatural and unpleasant. The next symptoms were sneezing and hoarseness of the voice, and before long the pain settled on the chest and was accompanied by coughing. Next the stomach was affected with stomach-aches and with vomitings of every kind of bile that has been given a name by the medical profession, all this being accompanied by great pain and difficulty. (Thucydides 94)

While Thucydides' tone does not suggest over-embellishment, his words depict suffering that afflicts the full body. The plague struck suddenly and swiftly, affecting not only those with underlying conditions but also "people in perfect health." Anyone could be struck. One imagines the anxiety that gripped Athens, no doubt amplified by the uncertainty surrounding the plague given their limited understanding of the spread of infectious diseases.

Despite our more advanced epidemiological understanding, this same bewilderment echoed in the early outbreak of COVID-19. A mysterious disease ravaged the whole body with fevers, coughs, and aches. Experts

were confused about the disease's transmission and mutation as it seemingly afflicted anyone. Panic spread as individuals watched their communities succumb to the illness. The plagues of all three worlds – Sophocles', Athens', and our own – were strange, indiscriminate, and all-consuming.

Another pattern repeated in all three plague-ridden worlds is the destruction of social and civil bonds. Thucydides describes a corpse-laden Athens and the disintegration of funerary practices:

> The bodies of the dying were heaped one on top of the other, and half-dead creatures could be seen staggering about in the streets or flocking around fountains in their desire for water. The temples in which they took up their quarters were full of the dead bodies of people who had died inside them…All the funeral ceremonies which used to be observed were now disorganized, and they buried the dead as best they could. Many people, lacking the necessary means of burial because so many deaths had already occurred in their households, adopted the most shameless methods. They would arrive first at a funeral pyre that had been made by others, put their own dead upon it and set it alight; or, finding another pyre burning, they would throw the corpse that they were carrying on top of the other one and go away. (Thucydides 96)

Thucydides' Athens is eerie and disturbing as the dead seem to outnumber the living. Those who had not yet succumbed to the plague were "half-dead creatures" left "staggering" throughout the city. The scope of the plague was so vast that the streets were lined with bodies that could not be buried fast enough. Even temples, a sacred cornerstone of ancient Greek culture, were laden with bloated corpses of strangers as religious and funerary traditions, among the most sacred customs upheld by the ancient Greeks, were abandoned. Athenians were reduced to burning bodies of loved ones unceremoniously or to stealing the pyres of others when they could not afford them. The desertion of these funerary practices during the plague suggests the weakening and dissolution of social, religious, and legal customs: the pillars on which Athenian society built itself collapsed during this plague.

Likewise, in *Oedipus Tyrannos*, Thebes experiences a collapse of civil and social structure. When the chorus appears, it laments the city's collective agony. Typically, in Greek tragedy, the chorus' first song, or *parados*, highlights plot points and thematic devices that will be engaged throughout the play. The chorus builds on ideas established by the now departed priest:

> Now our afflictions have no end, now all our stricken host lies down and no man fights off death with his own mind; the noble plowland bears no grain, and groaning mothers cannot bear – see, how our

> lives like birds take wing, like sparks that fly when a fire soars, to the shore of the god of evening. The plague burns on, it is pitiless, though pallid children laden with death lie unwept in the stony ways, and old gray women by every path flock to the strand about the altars there to strike their breasts and cry worship of Phoibos in wailing prayers: be kind, God's golden child! (Sophocles 11-12)

In Thebes, both life-giving land and mothers suffer as crops and children alike wilt before their time. Men succumb to illness, numerous children lie dead in the streets, and old women resort to lamentation. The plague is described as "pitiless," suggesting the arbitrariness with which it strikes: the illness does not afford anyone mercy. The choral passage does more than simply convey information or vividly describe suffering. It also functions as a traditional Greek lament, which was a tool utilized by groups lacking power, usually ancient women, in order to express not only grief, but also a need for change or action. The comparison between birds and lives is a common rhetorical feature of lamentation in Greek tragedies and epics. It is used recurringly to invoke a picture of doomed youth and beauty that recurs. Life is beautiful and limitless in freedom, yet fragile and easily struck down.

While the lament conveyed the desperation and sorrow of Thebes' fictitious citizenry, it also spoke to the desperation of Athenians during their plague. *Oedipus Tyrannos* expressed the collective suffering Athenians when they, if Thucydides bewilderment is to be taken as evidence, struggled: "Words indeed fail one when one tries to give a general picture of this disease; and as for the suffering of individuals, they seemed almost beyond the capacity of human nature to endure" (95). Where words fail, the theater stepped in. The plays of fifth-century Athens, performed at festivals that were central to the culture of the city, reflected the social and political challenges of their time. They provided a mechanism to confront sentiments and truths that might otherwise be too difficult to address. The performances ritually connected Athenian audiences to the dynamics on the stage, most explicitly through the device of the chorus. In Greek tragedy, the chorus served as an intermediary, bridging the gap between the action on stage and the audience. The chorus interacted with the characters on behalf of the audience within scenes. In fact, theater was so central to Athenian culture that many of its men would have participated in a chorus at some point in their lives. In other words, Athenian audiences readily identified themselves with the chorus. It was not a background ensemble but a focal point of any Greek tragedy. Therefore, audiences would have heard the first choral piece – performed by young Athenian men in military training – as an Athenian lamentation, as much a Theban one. Those Theban men dying of illness were also dying in Athens. The Theban streets filled with unmourned children also ran through Athens.

Just as the ancient Athenians were able to see their own collective suffering in the experiences of Thebans, so does *Oedipus Tyrannos* provide contemporary readers an opportunity to see themselves through its lens. Doing so affords an important psychological and epistemological opportunity. The play offered Athenians a mythological setting sufficiently removed from their own to allow for the emotional distance necessary to explore their own feelings of pity and horror. *Oedipus Tyrannos* asked them look at their own distress with new eyes and to counter the tendency to double down on established ideas in times of distress, holding them as immune truths. In the play, illness and plague serve as a catalyst for the pursuit of knowledge and the process of realization.

This need not be true only for Oedipus or Athenian audiences who prided themselves on their intellectualism. It also has resonance in contemporary America. Scenes from *Oedipus Tyrannos* appear to play themselves out in our world. COVID-19 has spread rapidly and killed more than a million Americans (Johns Hopkins University & Medicine). It has uprooted our social, economic, and political lives. The United States has suffered collectively; it has desperately sought knowledge to remedy the illness; some of us have been skeptical of obvious truths; some have resorted to personally abusive rhetoric aimed at "truthtellers." So, while we may believe our advanced prowess will keep us safe, we need to rethink what we know, to pursue facts, to confront personal truths, and to endure the consequences of what we find out.

The tension between "knowing" and "not knowing" is central to *Oedipus Tyrannos*. At heart, the play is about asking questions. Oedipus sends his brother-in-law, Creon, to the oracle to ask what will lift the plague. Creon returns with a seer who reports that the plague will remain until the murderer of King Laius has been found and punished. The famous irony of the play is that the truth that will set the city free will also devastate the man charged with seeking it, Oedipus. The end of the plague, in other words, requires that Oedipus confronts truths he would much rather not have known. The dilemma is evident in the key scene between Oedipus and the seer, Tiresias. The king, heeding his people's desperate calls, is eager and dutiful in his pursuit of an answer to the question of Laius' murder. Tiresias, however, is burdened by the truth and determined not to inflict suffering onto Oedipus. The juxtaposition of naivete and knowingness fuels the tension of the scene:

> OEDIPUS: Can you use birdflight or any art of divination to purify yourself, and Thebes, and me from this contagion? We are in your hands. There is no fairer duty than that of helping others in distress.
> TEIRESIAS: How dreadful knowledge of the truth can be when there's no help in the truth! I knew this well, but made myself forget. I should not have come.

> OEDIPUS: What is troubling you? Why are your eyes so cold?
> TEIRESIAS: Let me go home. Bear your own fate, and I'll bear mine. It is better so: trust what I say.
> OEDIPUS: What you say is ungracious and unhelpful to your native country. Do not refuse to speak (17).

At this stage of the play, Oedipus acts as an the ideal leader. His concern for his people fuels his dedicated pursuit of the knowledge necessary to solve the problem. He presses Tiresias for the truth, motivated by altruism: "There is no fairer duty than that of helping others in distress." By contrast, Tiresias is worn and exhausted by the knowledge he carries. It so troubles him, that he put the knowledge out of his mind – only to be reminded when Oedipus asks after it. He is determined to spare Oedipus from the burden of knowing the truth and is willing to suffer alone: "No; I will never tell you what I know. Now it is my misery; then, it would be yours" (18). For Tiresias, knowledge of the truth (and this truth in particular) is a source of suffering. He understands Oedipus' ignorance as affording him immunity to knowledge that, otherwise, would ruin him.

When Tiresias *does* reveal the truth to Oedipus – his murder of his father and marriage to his mother is the source of the religious pollution – the king is unable to accept it. As his immunity is compromised, he resists the truth with angry, charged rhetoric, deflecting responsibility through personal attacks. No longer the wise, dutiful, civic-minded pursuer of truth, Oedipus spirals:

> Wealth, power, craft of statesmanship! Kingly position, everywhere admired! What savage envy is stored up against these, if Creon, whom I trusted, Creon my friend, for this great office which the city once put in my hands unsought – if for this power Creon desires in secret to destroy me! He has brought this decrepit fortune-teller, this collector of dirty pennies, this prophet-fraud – Why he is no more clairvoyant than I am! (21).

Crucially, the only characters present in this scene are Oedipus, Tiresias, and the chorus leader. Oedipus is not making sweeping political claims or attempting to maintain his reputation. He is suffering a profoundly intimate crisis of identity. He is unable to reconcile the devastating truth to himself. Instead, he actively resists it, forging a new "immunity" out of blame and vitriol. First, he insists the information is false, denying it vehemently. Then, he creates a counter-narrative in which a "lie" has been concocted by his enemies out of envy over his status and power. He accuses Creon of attempting to claim the throne that he rightfully won despite being an outsider to the city. Finally, he discredits the source of information, Tiresias. This is especially

futile as Tiresias is a reputable seer known to be favored by the gods. In his desperation, however, Oedipus lashes out with personal attacks, claiming that Tiresias is senile, a charlatan, and motivated by greed.

This scene resonates powerfully with certain dynamics in our current pandemic, in which volatile language and scorn has often been directed at venerable sources of knowledge. Consider, for example, Dr. Anthony Fauci, a man of unimpeachable qualification who served six presidential administrations with no regard for their party affiliation. As the director of the National Institute for Allergies and Infectious Diseases, he was appointed to the Trump administration's White House Coronavirus Task Force. His insights were sought after from the first inklings that COVID-19 would become a pandemic. Yet, when those who asked after his expertise found his advice inconvenient, he was subjected to extreme backlash and public slander. Dr. Fauci might be considered a modern-day Tiresias. The idea is especially compelling when you consider that Tiresias was a prophet of Apollo, the Greek god of medicine (among many other things).

Just as the prophet carried the knowledge of Thebes' pollution with him, Dr. Fauci foresaw the dangers of our plague. As early as 2017, he warned the Trump administration that America would likely face a "surprise infectious disease outbreak" (Sadeghi). As the pandemic took hold in 2019 and 2020, the then-administration was accused of downplaying the threat and incompetence. Dr. Fauci's terrifying science-based projections, as well as his suggested mitigation strategies (everything from lockdowns to masking), soon drew their ire. He was accused of alarmism and of wanting to infringe on basic freedoms. The rhetoric soon took hold in public discourse and escalated to include slanderous attacks on his character. He was branded everything from a "fraud" to a "war criminal," was subject to threats of violence, and his family endured abusive phone calls (Stolberg). Just like Tiresias, Dr. Fauci became the subject of counter-narrative conspiracy theories, including accusations that he was involved in the creation of the virus (a "fact" that was being covered up) and that he personally profited off the pandemic (Korecki and Owermohle).

While the responsibility for the initial backlash against Dr. Fauci lies with former-president Trump (who looked to discredit facts inconvenient to his political interests), the more interesting analogue for Oedipus are those members of the American public who perpetuated and escalated the antagonism. The political stakes for the president were clear. Recalling the intimacy of the conversation in Sophocles' play, however, the stakes seem more acutely psychological than explicitly political. What was in it for those who, in the privacy of their homes, railed against our modern-day Tiresias? Oedipus did not want to consider his personal culpability for the plague as punishment for his killing his father and marrying his mother. What was so personally threatening about scientific knowledge that some members of the public would choose to defame and vilify the source?

Tiresias is not the only character in *Oedipus Tyrannos* who is burdened by the weight of their knowledge. Later in the play, Jocasta realizes she is both Oedipus' wife and mother. She, too, wants to shield Oedipus from the truth, attempting to dissuade him from interrogating the herdsman who carried the infant Oedipus away:

> IOCASTE: Why think of him? Forget this herdsman. Forget it all. This talk is a waste of time.
> OEDIPUS: How can you say that, when the clues to my true birth are in my hands?
> IOCASTE: For God's love, let us have no more questioning! Is your life nothing
> to you? My own pain is enough for me to bear.
> OEDIPUS: You need not worry. Suppose my mother a slave, and born of slaves: no baseness can touch you.
> IOCASTE: Listen to me, I beg you: do not do this thing!
> OEDIPUS: I will not listen; the truth must be made known. (56-57).

Like Tiresias, Jocasta is intent on shielding Oedipus from a truth she knows will destroy him. She begs him to forget about this matter, believing Oedipus pursuit of knowledge to be "fatal" (57) if not physically, then emotionally and spiritually. She knows the devastation of the truth because she herself suffers the hardship of knowing she married her own son. When Oedipus' ignores her advice and sends for the herdsman, her singular exclamation conveys the extent to which she knows Oedipus will suffer: "miserable!" (57). These are the last words Oedipus and the audience hear from her. She leaves the stage and takes her own life.

Jocasta would rather keep Oedipus ignorant for fear of his devastation. Yet, in order for the plague to be lifted, the truth must be confronted. Oedipus' appeal to the herdsman can therefore be seen as an act of courage. He resolutely pursues the truth, even if doing so will confirm the worst of his suspicions. Jocasta's resistance to this pursuit is resonant with the tendency that has afflicted the United States during the era of COVID-19: testing-avoidance. By medical consensus, widespread and consistent testing is one of the best diagnostic measures available to monitor, record, and respond to COVID-19. Early in the pandemic, testing infrastructure was lacking. However, as Michael Osterholm, the director of the University of Minnesota's Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy, explains, "[T]he problem […] morphed from inadequate testing capacity to inadequate numbers of people agreeing to be tested" (Rubin 2015). Even as the pandemic surged, Americans were hesitant. In October of 2020, infections surged in 30 states, and yet only 21 of those states maintained or increased the rate of testing (Chiwaya, et al.).

Part of the resistance to testing may be attributed to broader skepticism about COVID-19. But such disbelief is not a necessary pretext for avoidance. Believing in the pandemic makes the implications of a positive test so much more real. Given the deadliness of the disease, testing positive might confront us with our own mortality in ways we would prefer not to face. Testing positive means we could infect others, suggesting collective culpability we might resist and requiring the inconvenience of quarantine and isolation. Our professional and social worlds would be disrupted. In this light, getting tested is no small matter. It is a terrifying confrontation with psychologically devastating ideas.

If, earlier, Oedipus resisted the truth, he now pursues it despite the terrible things he might find out. Jocasta's is the voice of fear in this scenario, desperate to dissuade Oedipus from confirming the truth. Although she has limited lines in the play, Jocasta is a fascinating character. She is not malicious in intent. She discovers the incestuous nature of her marriage on her own and is terrified of the consequences of the knowledge for Oedipus and herself. She seeks to avoid the disruption of the status quo the truth would affect. Her emotional state is resonant with that of those who resist knowing their COVID-19 status. Fearing the severity of the pandemic, they ignore symptoms and the possibility of exposure and avoid getting tested.

The consequences of the truth are devastating for Oedipus. Finally knowing all the facts and finding Jocasta's body, he gouges out his own eyes and begs to be exiled. But in finding out the truth and suffering greatly, he fulfills the requirements for the lifting of the plague communicated to Creon by the oracle: that the murderer of Laius be identified and punished. This is how the epistemological stakes of *Oedipus Tyrannos* are resolved. A full reckoning with the truth, no matter how painful that may be, was necessary for the plague of Thebes to lift.

As an ancient Athenian audience might have seen their own plagued lives reflected on stage, so too may a contemporary American audience recognize themselves in Oedipus and COVID-19 in the Theban plague. Tragedy has long been a tool to explore complex issues and emotions that are difficult to verbalize. In addition, *Oedipus Tyrannos* provides important insights about epistemological conflicts in a society plagued by disease.

I began this essay with the observation that the world seems fascinated by Oedipus for reasons that are somewhat unremarkable within the context of Ancient Greek mythology. In conclusion, I posit that we are drawn to him because he is ordinary in many key ways. It is not only his ascension to the throne, riddle-solving genius, his patricide, or his incest that we find fascinating. We also envision our own struggles in Oedipus. Like him, we too struggle with the truth. The real power behind the story of Oedipus is that he is not special.

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# "Bring Out Your Dead!": Philadelphia's 1793 Yellow Fever Epidemic

By Saamiya Syed

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In the United States of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the novel Coronavirus was not the only enemy. As it began to spread and daily claim the lives of hundreds of Americans, state and federal government responses were disjointed and inconsistent. Conflicting face mask policies and lock-down measures fueled public distrust in their leadership. Despite a common, indiscriminate, and potentially fatal threat, the American people and their institutions failed to unite. Instead, the pandemic seemed to deepen existing social and racial divisions, and to intensify an already polarized climate to the point that the scientific and medical establishments became politicized in public discourse. As a result, Americans could not even agree on the nature or extent of the threat they faced as it ravaged the nation.

In this article, I will examine a historical public health crisis – the Philadelphia Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793 – as a way to contextualize the divisive effects of the current pandemic. I want to suggest that certain social dynamics that emerged during the city's outbreak might be seen as precedents. for those the United States experienced more recently. There are clear differences – medicine, for example, has progressed substantially since then – but there are critical points of comparison that suggest the nation's dysfunctional response to the pandemic has cultural foundations that go back to its early years. This can be seen in the way the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793 heightened Philadelphia's social and racial divisions and how medical stakeholders became embroiled in the conflict.

Arthur Thomas Robinson's 1993 dissertation, *The Third Horseman of the Apocalypse: A Multi-Disciplinary Social History of the 1793 Yellow Fever Epidemic in Philadelphia* uses a behavioral pattern model that, I would argue, suggests the propriety of a comparison between the 1793 Epidemic and COVID-19.

Drawing on the work of medical historian Daniel Fox, Robinson's model looked to better understand public, medical, and governmental responses to the 1793 outbreak through 7 distinct foci. In many cases, the behaviors he identified are echoed by the COVID-19 outbreak. Philadelphians (1) underestimated or denied the severity of the epidemic; followed by (2) acceptance and shows of public fearlessness. As the disease spread, many Philadelphians (3) fled from high-infection zones and looked for scapegoats. Infected people were (4) isolated and quarantined. As the scale of institutional failure became clear, (5) voluntary coalitions and associations were established to compensate this as the (6) medical establishment failed to adapt and experienced profound personnel shortages. In the aftermath of the outbreak, (7) changes were made to improve future responses.

Robinson's model will loosely guide the way this article relates the history of the 1793 Yellow Fever Epidemic. However, like the still-evolving COVID-19 pandemic, the story of the 1793 Yellow Fever outbreak is complex, drawing together different social, cultural, political, and medical phenomena. My hope is that this article, in bringing these narrative strands into conversation, will suggest that our "unprecedented times" may not be that unprecedented after all.

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America was a teenager in 1793. Philadelphia, which was the young nation's temporary capital during the Revolutionary War, served this function again between 1790 and 1800 while Washington DC was being built (Sivitz and Smith). It was a booming metropolis and an intellectual and cultural hub that increasingly attracted migrants drawn by economic opportunity. Hundreds of ships docked annually in the Port of Philadelphia to unload goods and immigrants from around the world.

As the city grew, the problems associated with urban life increased, especially unsanitary living conditions that correspond with overcrowding. As early as 1744, Dr. Alexander Hamilton (the Maryland physician not to be confused with the revolutionary politician), wrote that "the majority of the houses were mean and low, and much decayed; the streets in general not paved, very dirty and obstructed with rubbish and lumber." Even so, he noted, there was much promise that Philadelphia would flourish in the coming years into the "chief city in America" (Hamilton 20). According to Sivitz and Smith's survey of structure density by city block between 1789 and 1791, Philadelphia's population was at its most concentrated along the Delaware River. The closely-stacked houses and trash littered streets of these neighborhoods provided fertile grounds for disease outbreak; although, as we shall come to see, population density was not the primary reason for the disease's prevalence in these areas.

The expanding population represented a challenge to the health care establishment, but Philadelphia, with some established infrastructure and rapidly evolving treatment and education facilities, was perhaps the best equipped to handle a crisis. Benjamin Franklin had established the first public hospital in the U.S. in Philadelphia in 1751. The city's physicians were esteemed members of society, whose supposed learning afforded them great influence, especially after the establishment of the American Philosophical Society in 1768 and the College of Physicians of Philadelphia in 1787. The latter of these two was formed specifically to study and investigate causes of and remedies for incidences of disease in the United States (Kornfield 190). These medical societies created intellectual communities that aimed to establish uniform protocols and practices for public health crises. By the end of the 1780s, Philadelphia was the epicenter of growing optimism about medical advancement in America. Dr. Benjamin Rush, the city's most highly-regarded physician and medical educator, reflected the confidence of the era after the American revolution, writing that "human misery of every kind [was] evidently on the decline" (190).

Rush's optimism was typical of the urban doctors of the northern states of that era, as they had been relatively spared by major disease outbreaks. Rush's colleague, William Currie, for example, attempted to prove to Southern colleagues that remitting fevers and illnesses were uncommon in the North, relative to Southern States. He did concede, however, that the rigorous lifestyle of farmers awarded a "vigour of body and resolution of mind," while the mechanics and city workers were "condemned to vegetate in cellars and closer apartments, breathe infection, and their minds become contracted" (Currie 1792). Though he loved the city and attributed declining mortality rates in poorer districts to the efforts of medical societies, Currie had to admit that Philadelphia had shortcomings, such as its narrow streets, slaughterhouses, and tan-yards.

Despite such difficult conditions, Philadelphia continued to draw people in. The population surge shifted the demographics of the city. Economic opportunity and the increasing prominence of abolitionist organizations (such as the Free African Society founded in 1787) suggested to many former and escaped enslaved people that Philadelphia would provide them better living standards. The number of Black people in Philadelphia tripled in between 1790 and 1800, from 2150 to 6436, even as the general population grew by only a third (approximately) in the same timeframe – from 44,096 to 67,811, according to the federal census (Sivitz and Smith).

Then, in mid-August of 1793, cases of Yellow Fever began to appear in Philadelphia. Though the city experienced the seasonal fevers in late summers through the fall, this outbreak was marked by severe cases with such unusual symptoms as jaundice and black vomit (Maienschein). The fever first

spread in clusters near the waterfront, where recent arrivals included ships containing slaves and immigrants fleeing slave revolts on the island of Saint-Domingue. (The island now divided between Haiti and the Dominican Republic).[1] Philadelphia's physicians had little to no knowledge of the disease. There had been a few sporadic outbreaks between 1741 and 1762 (Finger), more than 30 years prior, so very few had encountered it before. Initially, they wrote off the symptoms as the usual fall fevers, but as cases multiplied, they grew increasingly perplexed. Why was the fever spreading so quickly? More importantly, what was the mode of infection?

The epidemic quickly turned into a devastating crisis. Few citizens of Philadelphia were unaffected as the disease periodically ravaged the city between 1793 to 1799. Each new wave brought terror to citizens. In 1793 alone, over 5000 Philadelphians died – approximately one tenth of the city's population. The disease pushed more than half of the population out of the city for fear of being infected (Kornfield 189).

But such an overview does not tell the whole story. Even the early cases laid bare the divergent interests of various stakeholders, resulting in conflicted rather than a united response. The esteemed Dr. Rush was the first to recognize the symptoms based on his experiences as a student during the 1762 epidemic in Philadelphia – he was 17 years old at the time. He identified it as "bilious remitting yellow fever" (Maienschein) – "bilious" because one of the symptoms was an excess of infected bile; "remitting," because there was a lull in symptoms between moderate and severe phases of the disease; and "yellow" because of the characteristic hue of jaundiced patients. Rush's diagnosis and talk of a possible outbreak made many people uneasy, and some started to leave the city.

But Rush's voice was not the only one. Many physicians disagreed with Rush's diagnosis of Yellow Fever altogether or disputed that an epidemic would result on the basis of a few cases. Newspapers were largely muted in their response, providing only basic cleaning recommendations. The Mayor of Philadelphia, Matthew Clarkson, minimized the threat because he worried that widespread fear would stifle the economy. The city's guidance for citizens consisted of folk remedies such as chewing garlic or wearing tarred ropes (Maienschein). Clarkson's approach is understandable in one sense. Declaring an epidemic too early would cause unnecessary alarm. But not taking the threat seriously and failing to alert the public was also dangerous. Uninformed about the severity of the situation and without clear guidance, the public remained mostly in the dark as fatal cases skyrocketed.

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[1] The yellow fever outbreak was most likely due to the ships arriving with these refugees. The fever was a regular occurrence in Haiti due to the mosquitoes, and it was likely that these ships arriving at Philadelphia also imported Aedes aegypti mosquitoes.

Eventually, however, the severity of the outbreak became impossible to deny. Pennsylvania Governor Thomas Mifflin declared the presence of a contagious fever in Philadelphia. Benjamin Rush, along with other physicians, published lists of recommended prevention methods. People and goods arriving by ship in the Port of Philadelphia were subject to quarantine measures, and members of the public began to avoid contact with one another.

Once political leadership acknowledged the epidemic, the city's economy and social scene froze. Philadelphia came to a standstill, and everything from intimate familial relations to mourning rites were affected. Rush notes the effects in a letter to his wife: "parents desert their children as soon as they are infected, and in every room you enter you see no person but a solitary black man or woman near the sick" (Pruitt). Infected people with no relatives taken to Bush Hill, a mansion that was turned into a quarantine hospital where patients were made comfortable during their last days. Proper burials became scarce as, by October, up to 100 people died a day ("Yellow Fever"). The deaths from the fever constituted nearly 10% of the city's total population within a three-month interval (Shryock 10). The logistical problem of removing numerous and possibly contagious corpses was solved by the essential labor of mostly Black volunteers. They pulled carts around the city and called on Philadelphians to "Bring out your dead!" According to historian J.H. Powell, the bodies of the dead seemed not to belong to anyone as they were carted away for burial as part of the "sad routine" (181). Soon, mass burial sites were filled to capacity and closed.

For all the pride Philadelphia took in its medical establishment, they had very little idea how to address the outbreak. What we now know is that Yellow Fever is a Flavivirus transmitted through Aedes aegypti mosquito bites. In moderate cases, the virus accumulates in the lymph nodes and, in mild cases it presents as aches, fever, nausea, and dizziness, before resolving. In severe cases, the symptoms resolve only briefly before returning in a new, more dangerous form. In such instances, the virus progresses to the liver, inducing jaundice and internal hemorrhaging (Finger). The patient experiences delirium as they bleed out of their ears and nose and retch bloody gastric contents or "black vomit." In the terminal phase of the disease, they become comatose as their organs fail.

Epidemiological evidence suggests that the disease originated in Africa and was brought to the United States through the Atlantic slave trade, but this would not be understood until nearly 100 years after the epidemic in Philadelphia. The outbreak was most likely brought to the city with sick passengers and Aedes aegypti mosquitoes in ships from Saint-Domingue, where Yellow Fever was a regular occurrence. Immunity is acquired when patients survive the infection, so Philadelphia's population, which had little to no exposure to the disease (the last outbreak had occurred more than 30 years ago), provided

perfect conditions for the virus to spread rapidly and destructively. It is also the reason Haitian and African immigrants who had already survived the disease became *essential* to the city's epidemic response.

In 1793, however, physicians did not know the mode of transmission and had a poor understanding of immunity. This is reflected in the various prevention and treatment regimens they prescribed which, because of their differences, became sources of professional bitterness and public confusion. Benjamin Rush's general stance was that good moral standing and personal temperance were highly effective in preventing illness. He argued that sobriety and abstinence from rich foods were the best means of protecting one's health (Golinski 153). While his equation of physical health and morality were relatively uncontroversial at the time, the same cannot be said about his therapeutic practices and his understanding of Yellow Fever's origins.

Rush remained a revered physician and educator, but his treatments were unconventional and painful over and above the symptoms his patients were already suffering. They were often made to purge with mercury and were subjected to extreme bloodletting – up to four-fifths of the body's blood. His reasoning, published in "A Defence of Blood Letting, As a Remedy for Certain Diseases" (1815) was that the practice left the patient in a state of "relaxation." His treatments drew much scrutiny after the epidemic and he was accused of murdering more patients than he cured, leading to a lawsuit questioning his credibility as a physician.

Even more controversial was his assertion that Yellow Fever was not contagious. He did not believe that infections were passed directly from person to person. Rush pointed to the climatic conditions as key to the fever's spread, basing this stance on the observation that outbreaks generally began in the summer and declined with seasonal changes and cold winter rains (Golinski 153). He suggested that a pile of rotting coffee in Ball's Wharf was the likely source of the epidemic, and that the crowded and unhygienic conditions on Philadelphia's waterfront contributed to its spread. He pointed to trash and stagnant water as a possible mode of transmission. His last observation has some merit, given that mosquitos breed in standing water.

Rush's anti-contagionist views put him in opposition with most of his colleagues at the College of Physicians, and William Currie soon emerged as their strongest voice. Currie suspected the disease was imported, and traced it back to refugees from Saint-Domingue who allegedly exhibited symptoms. He observed that initial patients all had sea travel from the West Indies in common and reasoned that the source of the contagion was therefore foreign. His supposition led to strict quarantine methods and the isolation of infected people. He specified that the principal means of transmission was contagion, through "confinement for any length of time in the bedchamber of the sick . . . [or] receiving the breath or the scent of the several excretions of the sick"

especially when there was improper ventilation. He argued that “immediate contact with the patient, his body, or bedclothes, or those of nurses or other attendants” had to be avoided for protection (Currie 9).

According to Jan Golinski, Rush had a strong distaste for such quarantine measures, and thought they represented a “reversion to the Dark Ages” (154). They were as incompatible with Philadelphia’s medical and humanitarian progress as they were ineffective. He was unwavering in his anti-contagionist stance and insistent on environmental causes, eventually distancing himself from the medical societies that he once proudly associated with after they rejected his views. The debate between contagionists and anti-contagionists flourished, confusing the public with conflicting theories and advice.

Conflicts were not limited to the battle between contagionist and anti-contagionist physicians. However, they do provide evidence of and contributed heavily to the terrifying uncertainty that descended on Philadelphia, contributing to heightened levels of antagonism. Unfortunately, Black people - especially the formerly enslaved and Haitian immigrants who volunteered to care for the sick and to bury the dead - bore the brunt.

The volunteer corps was enlisted at the suggestion of Rush (a vocal abolitionist) after he observed that Black people seemed more likely to be immune to the fever based on his limited understanding of acquired immunity. He asked Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, leaders of the Free African Society, to recruit Black people to serve as nurses and cart volunteers. Realizing an opportunity to build goodwill towards their Abolitionist cause, they willingly obliged. However, as Black volunteers emerged as frontline workers, some white citizens propagated theories of ethno-racial immunity to Yellow Fever and sowed suspicion on their motives.

Mathew Carey, an Irish-Catholic writer of the time, was a prominent exponent of such discourse. In his "A Short Account of the Malignant Fever," he noted that Africans and French Philadelphians were remarkably exempt from the effects of the disease and posited that they were intrinsically immune. He was, of course, mistaken, as immunity was gained through surviving the infection. In fact, many volunteers *did* fall victim to the fever, but were widely overlooked to uphold the fallacious theory. Carey questioned the motives of volunteers, and implied they undertook the work to extort money from lonely, ill white Americans. He claimed Black workers “were even detected in plundering the houses of the sick (77).

Such claims were dangerous and heightened racial tensions that were already inflamed by the passage of the 1793 Fugitive Slave Act.[2] Appreciation

[2] The Fugitive Slave Act allowed for the capture and return of runaway slaves to their owners in Northern states.

for the frontline workers began to turn into hatred and enmity, and Jones and Allen feared they were losing the opportunity to leverage the Black community's volunteerism into white support for the Abolitionist cause. They published *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People, During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia,* to detail the work of the volunteers and to counter claims like those Carey made.

The volunteers were providing an essential service. Demands for patient care had far exceeded the city's public services capabilities, and as the local government collapsed, Black volunteers stepped up to provide invaluable assistance. The assumption of racial immunity minimized the risk many volunteers were assuming, while accusations of extortion fostered white hostility towards essential volunteers and nurses. Jones and Allen detailed accounts of this hostility: "a white man threatened to shoot us is we passed by his house with a corpse: we buried him three days after" (20).

It was profoundly unjust that volunteers should face the threat of violence as they retrieved bodies and transported or cared for the sick in white neighborhoods. Nurses were often the only companions available to the sick whose families had been wiped out or had fled the city, deserting them. Jones and Allen's *Narrative of the Proceedings* detailed the generosity and altruism of Black nurses and volunteers. In the end, they argued, it was the Black community who came together to serve the city even as many of its wealthy white citizens fled.

Unquestionably, the uncertainty, trauma, and life-and-death stakes of the 1793 Philadelphia Yellow Fever Epidemic came together to heighten tensions in the city, even if the racism the Black volunteers faced does not seem unusual nor surprising. It reflects a history larger than the epidemic. The difference of opinion between contagionists and non-contagionists is easier to dissect in hindsight. Simply, it is evidence of limited biomedical knowledge. Neither Rush nor Currie were wholly right or wrong. Currie's assertion that the disease came to Philadelphia via the sea was well-founded. And while he may have been incorrect about direct person-to-person transmission, Yellow Fever is contagious with mosquitos as their vector. Rush's insistence on climatic changes was not entirely off-base either, as the arrival of seasonal cold eliminated the mosquitos, offering the city some – if temporary – relief.

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It is interesting to imagine how the lessons of the COVID-19 Pandemic will help us prepare for or mitigate against future disease outbreaks. For example, subsequent generations might have learned from the skepticism towards urban living of Philadelphians like Ebenezer Hazard in the wake of 1793. Historian J.H. Powell quotes him as suggesting that America reject "fashions of the Old World in building great cities." He argued against the

"prevailing taste for enlarging Philadelphia, and crowding so many human beings together on so small a part of earth" (276). Of course, that lesson was largely ignored and the likelihood of pandemics has steadily grown over the past century due to increased global travel, urbanization, and industrialization (Madhav et al. 315).

But maybe, looking at COVID-19, leaders will understand the danger of dismissing or minimizing a potential outbreak for the sake of economic stability, and will be prepared to take decisive action early. Maybe governmental and health care institutions will recognize that contradictory messaging creates panic and uncertainty and will provide clear necessary information and detailed guidance. Maybe COVID-19 will teach future governments to provide sufficient resources for medical health professionals and to treat them with respect. Maybe this is the disease outbreak that finally teaches privileged people to properly value and reward the services provided by essential workers. Maybe the United States will understand that they cannot defeat an outbreak unless they unite in common purpose.

Or maybe everything will be "unprecedented" all over again.

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# The Family Business: Heroism and Criminality in *The Godfather*

By Angela Jardina

Kurtz: Are you an assassin?
Willard: No, I'm a soldier.
*Apocalypse Now* (1976)

I first watched Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972) as a 13-year-old. The film, the first of what would become a three-film series (*The Godfather, Part II*, and *The Godfather, Part III* were released in 1974 and 1990 respectively), had been out of theaters for 43 years by then. Still, it remains a staple at our house; my father loves the film and, having watched it with him at least once a year since that first viewing, so do I. Our mutual love was the primary impetus behind my research which, ironically, has revealed how differently we experience the film. The more I knew about the context of the film's making, the more I understood it as a contemplation of its era – the same era in which my father was deployed to the War in Vietnam.

*The Godfather* was released three years before the fall of Saigon brought the conflict between North and South Vietnam to an end, although "officially" U.S. involvement ended in January of 1973. During the approximately eight years of American participation – U.S. Marines first landed in Vietnam in March of 1965 – the conflict divided the American public in complicated and evolving ways. William Lunch's "The American Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam" characterizes this evolution in terms of the trust the American people had in the political elite (29). Whereas early in the conflict, most Americans implicitly trusted that policy decisions were made on legitimate bases and in the national interest, their faith also came from a place of "innocence" (29). Broadly, they lacked knowledge

about the specifics of the situation in Southeast Asia. However, as stories and images of atrocities in Vietnam entered the American consciousness, questions emerged and support waned.[1] Supporters of American involvement blamed the media for lowering American morale with startling and now-famous images such as that of crying, napalm-burnt children, and another of the execution by a pistol shot to the head of a Viet Cong prisoner (Claire). Protestors increasingly questioned the legitimacy of U.S. involvement and cried out against American complicity in such atrocities. By the late 1960s they often directed their anger at returning military personnel. My father was spared much of this treatment in Texas, but talks about the struggles of his friends that returned to California.

As I understand *The Godfather*, it explores questions arising out of this dynamic. Its central protagonist, Michael Corleone, is a military veteran of the Second World War. He first appears on screen in uniform – conspicuously so for audiences in 1972, when uniforms were political lightning rods. He is, in other words, a representative of American foreign policy (albeit in a war that is, by common consensus, just). He is part of an organization, the military, that kills people in the national interest. But he was born into the Corleone crime family. As a soldier and a law school graduate, Michael wants to maintain a distance. The film depicts how he is drawn into the "Family Business," and unexpectedly becomes the Don when his hot-headed brother, Sonny, the first in line, is killed, and the second in line, Fredo, proves incapable. The film thematically blurs the relationship between the "legitimate" violence in the service of nation (as a soldier) and the "illegitimate" violence in the service of a crime family (as an assassin).

As Pauline Kael argues in her film review, organized crime in *The Godfather* is "an obscene symbolic extension of free enterprise and government policy, an extension of the worst in America – its feudal ruthlessness. Organized crime is not a rejection of Americanism, it's what we fear Americanism to be. It's our nightmare of the American system." In my article, I want to suggest that the film's commentary extends to America's foreign war efforts. Coppola would go on to direct perhaps the most famous film about the War in Vietnam, *Apocalypse Now* (1976), a film that Marsha Kinder argues addresses "the powerful impact the war had on American consciousness" (13). In my analysis, Coppola's work in this regard had already begun in *The Godfather*.

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[1] Lunch cites polls that illustrate waning support and growing opposition. In 1969 that 80% of Americans believed entering the conflict in Vietnam had been a mistake. Still, in a separate 1969 poll, only 36% of Americans supported immediate withdrawal (24). By 1972, however, "popular opinion had taken a clear position in opposition to administration policy on further aid to [Vietnam] and this opposition did not later change" (29). Americans opposed U.S. involvement on the grounds of expense, mounting American casualties, excessive violence, and loss of faith that any worthwhile objectives could be achieved (Lutz).

My analysis hinges on the idea of family and the ways in which it is cynically used. The power of the idea lies in the unqualified loyalty and intimate connections it typically invokes, as well as the extreme sacrifices many of us would make for those we count as close family – for example, our fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, sisters, brothers. Something typically thought of as a wrongdoing – such as killing another human being – might be afforded a measure of moral immunity if it is in defense of close family. The moral complication I will consider arises when the idea of family is deployed in the service of interests that are not strictly familial such as business, power, and nationalism.

For example, in his 1967 address to the National Legislative Conference in San Antonio, Texas, Lyndon B. Johnson argued for American involvement in the Vietnam conflict using explicitly familial terms: "I would rather stand in Vietnam, in our time, and by meeting this danger now, face up to it, and thereby reduce the danger for our children and for our grandchildren" (Johnson). President Johnson's rhetoric clearly conflates the national interest with familial interest: a defense the nation is akin to, a defense of those we hold most dear – the most vulnerable of our family members. By 1967, "popular uneasiness certainly began to set in" (Lunch 22) and so Johnson's address (which he gave in September) appealed to the idea of family in an effort to reinvoke the spirit of near-consensus by which Americans supported U.S. involvement in WWII.

Johnson's appeal to "our children and our grandchildren" as justification of foreign policy indicates the rhetorical power of the "family" and the "constructed-ness" of national belonging, Benedict Anderson's Imagined Communities helps us understand this. For him, "nationalism" – the sense of belonging that people have to their nation – is a cultural artifact. That is to say that it is "created" and "imagined" in a particular style that can "be understood by aligning it, not with the self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, [and] out of which it came into being" (Anderson 12). According to Andre Munro, Anderson understands nationalism as having "replaced traditional kinship ties as the foundation of the state" (Munro). Johnson therefore uses his platform to "construct" American nationalism in the image of the family. In his language, defense of the family justifies American foreign policy, a rhetorical strategy that obviates a host of questionable motives. Few are likely to claim that they would willingly kill for someone in defense of a complete stranger somewhere across the country. There would be too many moral questions. The language of family, which is implicit in the collective possessive pronoun ("our children"), recasts all Americans as kin.

Against the backdrop of nationalist rhetoric that used "family" to justify American involvement, The Godfather portrayal of the Corleone's "Family Business" takes on new significance. In my interpretation, *The Godfather* con-

fronts audiences with the idea that familial loyalty can be used to justify moral wrongdoing. Given the power of the idea of family, it asks audiences to consider who or what should rightfully count as family. This will be evidenced in my article through an analysis of four key scenes in the films: The Wedding, The Hospital, The Assassin, and The Garden.

**The Wedding**

The film opens in Don Vito Corleone's office on the day of his daughter's wedding. Its first iconic lines are delivered by a minor character, Amerigo Bonasera: "I believe in America" (00:00:51). America, however, has not repaid his faith. He tells the Don, the head of a Sicilian crime family in Long Island, New York, that the legal system has failed to punish the two "non-Italian men" who assaulted his daughter. He must therefore appeal to unofficial channels, pleading with Don Vito Corleone to enact his kind of justice. The film opens with a moral quandary: should the Don order murder in retribution for a wrong done to Amerigo Bonasera's daughter. For the Don, the answer hinges on a simple question: Is Bonasera family enough?

Don Corleone initially denies Bonasera's request, stating that Bonasera never invites him over for coffee, that he doesn't treat him like a friend, and that "[he doesn't] even think to call [him] godfather" (00:04:59). Don Corleone follows by telling Bonasera, "If you'd have come to me in friendship, then the scum that ruined your daughter would be suffering this very day" (00:05:49-00:05:54). Desperate, Bonasera offers to pay any amount of money. Again, Vito declines. Not until Bonasera bends down, kisses his hand and calls him godfather does Vito Corleone agrees to exact revenge on his behalf.

The manner of Don Corleone's insistence that Bonasera prove his loyalty as part of the transaction – Vito's refusal of money should not be taken to suggest that Bonasera is not in his debt – blurs the lines between family and business in the film's first scene. Who counts as family is also open to interpretation: Vito insists on being called godfather, a familial term that does not necessarily imply a blood relation.

Bonasera's desperation is also telling of the film's historical setting: WWII-era America. Bonasera's treatment by law enforcement suggests the anti-Italian sentiment many immigrants experienced. Vincent Canby, who reviewed *The Godfather* in the year of its release, remarks on the circumstances that prompted the Italian community to turn to alternative support structures than were provided by the government: "Everyone not a Sicilian or now a Corleone is a potential threat" and so they band together (Canby).

For Canby, "There is a sense of love and honor . . . no matter how bizarre" in their isolation. I agree that the film is sympathetic towards the plight of Italian Americans of the era, but in my interpretation it also makes a larger point. As the camera zooms out and viewers are able to take in the rest of the room, it becomes clear that Don Vito Corleone is the only person wearing

a red carnation on his lapel. The room is dimly lit and the other men in the room wear tuxedos with white carnations in their lapels, creating a largely monochromatic color palate against which the red carnation stands out. The significance of the red carnation is its association with Sicilian Nationalism (Elio Vittorini's 1948 novel, *The Red Carnation*, which criticized Italian fascism, was foundational to this association in Sicilian culture). With this little nod, Coppola suggests an association between the "Family Business" and the "National Family." The Corleone family might be interpreted as a microcosmic representation of a nation; possibly even, to recall Pauline Kael's review, America.

Outside Don Vito's dark office, his daughter's sunlit wedding is in full swing. His youngest son, the film's main character, Michael, arrives late, dressed in his military uniform. He is established as an outsider to his own immediate family. In his conversation with his non-Italian girlfriend Kay, he shows distaste for his family's illicit and violent business dealings: "that's my family, Kay, that's not me" (00:20:50). Michael draws a clear line between himself (a military soldier in the service of the United States of America) and his family (criminals, assassins, who serve the interests of a criminal organization). For audiences in 1972, however, the moral distinction might have seemed less convincing.

**The Hospital**

With the celebrations over and a few of the wedding day requests fulfilled, the Corleone Family Business is back in full swing. One fateful day, Don Corleone meets with the heads of Long Island's other crime families. He disappoints them by refusing to participate in the growing drug business. The tension escalates until Tom Hagen anticipates a "war" between the five families (00:53:54). Soon, the head of the Tattaglia crime family puts out a hit on Don Vito, who is subsequently shot and taken to hospital in critical condition.

When Michael arrives at the hospital, it seems completely deserted. There are no patients, no nurses, no doctors (1:01:46). It is an ominous scene. Searching for his father's room, Michel walks into an empty office in which an abandoned record player skips, repeatedly singing the word "tonight." The opening of the scene suggests that time is at a standstill, and that Michael (now dressed in a simple civilian suit) occupies a liminal space of potentially great importance (1:02:26).

Michael senses that something is wrong and fears for his father's life. As the scene progresses, he asserts himself more and more, tellingly in contravention of established rules. It begins subtly when he refuses a nurse's request that he leave. He then insists that the nurse help him disconnect Vito's tubes so that he can be moved to a safer room away from potential hits, even as she declares it to be "out of the question" (01:03:53). The film depicts Michael's willingness to flout institutional authority in defense of his father's life. The

hospital marks the beginning of Michael's transition, and his eventual rise to the position of Don is foreshadowed with the help of Enzo the baker, a minor character who brings a bouquet of carnations. Whereas in the opening scene of the film Don Vito wore a red carnation and his sons and henchmen wore white carnations, the carnations Enzo carries are pink, suggesting the vulnerability of Vito Corleone and the increased control Michael Corleone asserts.

With Vito transferred to a safer room, Michael holds his father's face intimately between his hands and proclaims his loyalty: "I'm with you now; I'm with you." This pivotal step in Michael's transition sets off the film's iconic score (1:06:16). Michael then rejoins Enzo outside, where they pretend to be armed bodyguards to ward off Tattaglia's hitmen (1:07:39). The ruse works and the would-be assassins drive on to avoid a battle. Afterwards, a terrified Enzo tries to light a cigarette to calm his nerves, but his hands shake too uncontrollably (1:08:13). Michael takes the lighter from Enzo and lights his cigarette for him with ease, the film dedicating a shot to his steady hand, as well as Michael's realization of his own steadiness (1:08:16). It is as if Michael's experience in the field of combat has prepared him for the high intensity of the criminal underworld.

After the hitmen drive off, the police who were called much earlier, finally arrive. Michael is furious and accuses the police captain, McCluskey, of corrupt association with other crime families (1:09:13). McCluskey punches Michael in the jaw. Michael finds himself, as Bonasera did, faced with the disregard and corruption of the establishment that is supposed protect him and his family. For Michael the clear distinction between legitimacy and illegitimacy blurs further.

### The Assassin

After the altercation, Michael is sent home where he tells the family what, and as the scene opens, Sonny, Tom Hagen, and henchmen Tessio and Clemenza, are discussing their counterattack on the Tattaglia family. Michael is silent, even as the camera makes him the focal point of the scene (1:11:10). Sonny and Tom move around as they argue, uncertain about the best plan of action. Michael sits still in the center of the room, confident and collected, just as his father was before a frantic Bonasera in the film's opening scene. Again, Michael is the steady hand: his war-time experience makes him a natural.

When Michael finally speaks, the room falls silent and a light (resembling a spotlight) falls on his face. The background blurs and the camera moves in on him. He says they must respond instantly to save Pop's life, demonstrating that, though they intend to go on the offense, he is motivated by the desire to protect family (1:12:58). Then, in a moment that completes his transition from military hero to criminal, Michael volunteers to murder Sollozo (a drug dealer associated with the Tattaglia family) and Captain McCluskey.

While everyone in the room eventually accepts Michael's proposal, there is an attempt to draw a distinction between military service and criminality. Sonny, Michael's older brother, suggests that killing on a battlefield is somehow "softer" than a criminal hitjob: "This isn't like the army, where you shoot 'em a mile away" (1:14:38). A little later, Clemenza stops as he walks Michael through the details of the plan to kill Sollozo and McClusky to say, "You know Mike, we was all proud of you being a [war] hero and all. Your father too" (1:17:04). Clemenza here offers Michael one last chance to consider his motives for transitioning by reminding him the re-spect military service affords him in civil society. Clemenza suggests that Michael should not feel the need to prove himself any further by killing Sollozo and McClusky. Don Vito Corleone is already proud. But Michael is no longer convinced that legitimacy is a way to maintain the moral high ground, or even that this moral high ground is worth maintaining. In the end, the honors con-ferred on "good" people did not matter because legitimate systems (the military, the law) did not serve a principle that was more important to him, the defense of his own family. Therefore, Clemenza's comment does not prompt a reconsideration and Michael, a man trained to kill by the government resolves to kill a member of a rival crime family and a corrupt cop.

**In the Garden**

After the successful (if chaotic) hit, Michael is forced to hide out in Sicily. There, he learns that Sonny has been killed as the feud between the Tattaglias and the Corleones escalates. He returns home and is reunited with Kay. They are married and have a son together as Michael draws closer to Don Vito and as the new heir apparent to the "Family Business" assumes his late brother's responsibilities.

What soon becomes clear is that these duties blur the lines between "Family" and "Business" in complicated ways even though the sentimental intimacy implied by the former cannot be easily reconciled with the cold calculation of the latter. This tension is most clearly demonstrated in the "Garden" scene, one in which the ailing Vito Corleone, the current Don, in effect passes the torch to Michael Corleone.

In their conversation, Don Vito cannot seem to keep worlds of his immediate family separate from his business concerns. Every other sentence seems to switch between spheres. In fact, in the span of the three-minute conversation (2:26:51 to 2:30:00), Don Vito's focus shifts seven times, seemingly at random, as exemplified by his change of topic when discussing a rival crime boss: "Barzini will move against you. First, he'll set up a meeting with someone you absolutely trust, guaranteeing your safety, and at that meeting, you'll be assassinated. I like to drink wine more than I used to. Your wife and children, are you happy with them?" It is tempting to ascribe this tendency to

Don Vito's advanced age. But such an analysis depends on a mentally gathered version of the Don for whom there is a clear distinction between family and business spheres. As was apparent from the first scene, the Don has blurred this line throughout.

The conflation between family and business adds poignancy to Don Vito's death scene. In an extended, softly lit scene, the Don and his grandson play among the tomato plants. Vito is very sweet to the boy, and comes across as a kindly, loving, playful grandfather. He plays the part of a monster, cutting teeth into an orange peel and wearing it in his mouth like dentures. He is engaging in real familial tenderness. At one point, his grandson chases Don Vito with a water pistol, and Don Vito suffers a heart attack and dies (2:31:15). The irony is powerful. The crime boss whose rivals could not kill him despite multiple attempts dies while playing the part of a bad guy and mimicking violence with his own grandchild. In this final scene of Don Vito's life, it is an act of familial love that kills him, where all the malicious intent of his "business" rivals could not. Business and family have become so conflated that even in their seemingly purest forms, they produce the same outcome.

## Conclusion

Taking over from Vito, Don Michael Corleone rains down retribution on rival families with merciless efficiency. Scenes of these assassinations are cut into with Michael's remarks at the baptism his sister's son. In the final scene, he lies to his wife Kay about his activities, denying he had anything to do with the murders. These final scenes show how far Michael has fallen. He is a loving son, brother, husband, and father. But he is also a ruthless criminal, willing to go to extreme lengths to maintain power.

The audience has followed Michael on a journey from a state of "innocence" (to recall William Lunch's use of the term). He trusted the "legitimate" power structures and judged his family for their "illegitimate" activities. Eventually, however, he questions the motivations of the systems he served, and recognizes them as morally corrupt in themselves. Michael evolves into the role of godfather, initially motivated by the instinct to protect his family. However, even if family is the initial motivation, it is also the pretest for "Business" – an escalating and murderous spree aimed at entrenching the Corleones as the most powerful crime "family" in Long Island.

Against the backdrop of American involvement in Vietnam – and the rhetoric of family used to sell it to the American public – the film asks compelling questions about the ways the idea of family can be used to justify moral transgressions. This is not to suggest that *The Godfathe*r is an anti-war film. However, it is interesting to consider it as an exploration of the "heart of darkness" that precedes *Apocalypse Now*, which would more directly address the war in Vietnam. Though *The Godfathe*r was released

four years earlier, the depth of the film's central question struck a chord with my father (a Vietnam veteran) and American audiences more broadly: in light of the moral immunity afforded those who defend it, who or what should count as family?

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# Silent Screams and How to Hear Them: Censorship, Artistic Integrity, and *Shostakovich's 13th Symphony*

By Elizabeth Spencer

In the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, composers struggled to create music deemed acceptable by the censorious new regime. By the 1930s, the creative parameters were sufficiently established for the genre of Soviet Realism to emerge. It would remain the official musical style of the Soviet Union until the reforms of the late 1980s. Working within and against such boundaries, Dmitri Shostakovich used music to understand the world around him. That he maintained his artistic integrity in the face of repressive strictures make his one of the most revered names among Russian composers. While much of his musical portfolio was deemed by official ears to comply with Soviet Realism, a few of his more personal works fell afoul of state censors. Notable among these was a five-movement[1] masterpiece, the result of an extensive collaboration with the radical Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko, that is known to contemporary audiences as *Shostakovich's 13th Symphony*. Each movement interweaves a Yevtushenko poem with Shostakovich's musical orchestration and addresses social injustices the Soviet government would prefer to deny, but from which the artists refused to look away. They include poverty, gender inequality, and the religious discrimination by which the Soviet state attempted to erase the memory of a WWII-era massacre of Jewish people that did not fit its propagandist narrative.

The lyrics and orchestration of *Shostakovich's 13th Symphon*y combine to invoke injustice with an urgency that continues to ring true. Together,

[1] A movement is defined in music as being a self-contained part of a composition. Akin to how chapters are in a novel.

Shostakovich and Yevtushenko evince a revolutionary ethos by insisting that Soviet audiences acknowledge the devastation their government would prefer they disregard for the sake of its illusory utopian vision. Can you listen to the vividly rendered screams of a child, the artists ask their listeners, and not hold those who let it happen to account? Can you bear witness to oppression and not grit your teeth against it? Are you immune to human suffering?

It is understandable, in this light, that the Soviet Union allowed only two performances of *Shostakovich's 13th Symphony* when it premiered in Moscow on December 18, 1962. And it is this confrontational ethos that is the subject of my essay. In it, I will contextualize each of the five movements and analyze their lyrics and orchestration. In so doing, I aim to show that Shostakovich and Yevtushenko are exemplars of artistic integrity with no less relevance today than in the USSR. Despite assuming personal and professional risk to do so, they insisted that their creative vision serve a more humane world.

### I. Babiy Yar

The first movement of *Shostakovich's 13th Symphony* (henceforth I will use the more common English spelling, "Babi Yar") begins with a disconcerting funeral march scored for winds, horns, and the lower string section (comprised of cellos and basses). Intermittently, a church bell tolls, produced by striking the timpani and percussion chimes in unison. The march makes way for a chorus of lower-register male vocalists, who mournfully intone one of the first movement's most compelling poetic lines: "There is no memorial above Babi Yar."

These words would have announced the symphony's confrontational nature to its first Soviet audience. To them, Babi Yar – the name of a ravine where Nazis massacred thousands of Jewish innocents during the Second World War – was considered a somewhat taboo phrase; so much so that many would have been afraid to speak it even in private.

More context is necessary to properly understand the fear that surrounds the use of the phrase. In September of 1941, Kiev,[2] the capital of the Soviet Republic of Ukraine, was Nazi-occupied. Days before the massacre, the entire Jewish population of the city "and its vicinity" received a notice demanding that they "appear on Monday, September 29, 1941 by 8 a.m. at the corner of Melnikova and Dokhterivskaya streets (next to the cemetery). Bring documents, money, and valuables, and also warm clothing, bed linen, etc" (Yad Vasham). The notice threatened that Jewish people who failed to follow the order would be shot.

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[2] The Ukranian capital's name is spelled this way to imply the Russian-language pronunciation of the Soviet era. An alternative spelling, "Kyiv" intones the Ukrainian-language pronunciation that is preferred by Ukrainians in the wake of independence in 1991.

Many, in fear of their lives, complied. They gathered as they were told and were herded towards and lined up next to the large Babi Yar ravine. There, they were swiftly and mercilessly shot, their bodies thrown into the cold depths below. According to direct reports sent to Berlin by leaders of the *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing units) 33,771 Jewish people were slaughtered in the last two days of September 1941 (Arad, et al. 1). The massacre was "one of the largest mass killings at a single location in WWII" (U.S. Holocaust Museum).

In late 1943, the Soviet Union regained control of the city. As time passed, however, it became clear that they had no interest in remembering the lost souls at Babi Yar, and that the Jewish victims of the massacre would not be memorialized. "In fact, the Soviet government had intended to fill in the ravine . . . and [build] a sports stadium on top of it" (Bergman 479); a project that, thankfully, never came to fruition.

The reasons for this disregard were ideological. The ruling Communist Party was strictly secular in outlook and, to varying degrees at different times in the Soviet era, pushed against established religion. Some party ideologues insisted that religious identity had no place in the Soviet Union. They envisioned an idealized Soviet as an exemplary citizen, a true socialist, an unwavering supporter of the United Soviet Socialist Republics (a confederation of 15 national republics, one of which was Ukraine). According to such party ideologues, identifiers such as religion or ethnicity, or any form of anti-Soviet nationalism, were incompatible with this singular devotion.

As a result, while post-War propaganda mourned the millions of Soviets who had died in the Nazi occupation and in defense of the USSR, the massacre at Babi Yar was not memorialized even though it occurred on Soviet soil. To ideologues, those who were pushed into the ravine did not die as Soviets, but as Jews. In addition, because many Soviet citizens understood that their wellbeing and safety depended on showing absolute loyalty to the party, Jewish people and allies of the Jewish community learned to keep their beliefs silent for fear of attracting scrutiny.

Yevgeny Yevtushenko wrote a poem entitled "Babi Yar" independent of Shostakovich. Shostakovich read the poem a year later and, by many accounts (Wilson 355) began immediately to set it to music, intending for it to be a standalone choral piece. He also reached out to the poet. In a 2006 interview conducted by Lewis Owens at Tulsa University, Yevtushenko recounted:

> Someone called my wife, and full of indignation she threw the phone down and exclaimed that some hooligans are calling and named themselves Shostakovich. Immediately after a second call, she became pale and gave me the phone whispering, 'It seems to be it is him.' I then talked with Shostakovich, who was an idol of my childhood.[3]

Yevtushenko's awe of Shostakovich is an indication of the reverence in which the composer was held in the Soviet Union. The poet later describes how he first heard Shostakovich's music as a 9-years-old. Working at a grenade factory in 1942, production was halted and all the working boys were ushered outside into the snow to listen to Shostakovich's *Leningrad Symphony* which was being broadcast across the USSR. The composer's success within the strictures of Soviet Realism was undeniable. The piece was a favorite of Stalin's who believed it to be truly patriotic in its homage to Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg), a city then under Nazi siege. As will be discussed later, this early prominence underscores the risk Shostakovich was taking in asserting his artistic integrity.

As the composer and poet spoke, ideas for four other movements emerged (Wilson 356). Shostakovich commissioned Yevtushenko to write text for each of them and set about expanding his standalone choral piece into to an entire symphony. Bringing poetry and music into conversation in a manner intended to confront audiences with the callousness and failures of the state was both aesthetically and politically risky. They were collaborating when Soviet symphonic settings were mostly instrumental. If they *did* include lyrics, they typically sang the patriotic praises of the USSR's achievements.

In Yevtushenko's original lyrics (he would change them after the first two performances), his speaker observes the absence of a memorial at Babi Yar and is prompted to empathetically consider the implications of both the site and its disregard for Jewish people: "I'm frightened, / I feel as old today / as the Jewish race itself." This empathetic gesture continues throughout, as the speaker "feels" the experience of various representatives of Judaism, from those who fled Egypt, to Jesus Christ, to the speaker's Jewish contemporaries:

> I feel myself a Jew
> Here I tread across old Egypt
> Here I die, nailed to the cross
> And even now I bear the scars of it (lines 5-9).

Adopting this perspective, Yevtushenko's speaker comes to experience the horrors at Babi Yar in their collective and individual dimensions:

> I become a gigantic, soundless scream
> Above the thousands buried here.
> I am every old man shot dead here.
> I am every child shot dead here (lines 53-56).

[3] Transcribed and lightly edited by the author.

The poem explicitly deplores the anti-Semitism of Soviet regime – those who "pompously called themselves / the Union of the Russian People!" – for its callous disregard. The speaker insists at the poem's conclusion that, though he has no Jewish blood, "Nothing in [him] shall ever forget," which to him means that "all antisemites / must hate [him] now as a Jew." Yevtushenko's speaker distinguishes his humane perspective from that of callous Soviet ideologues, by incorporating it into an identity claim that distinguishes him from their regime: his ability to feel and resist the suffering of Jewish people is the "reason / [he is] a "true Russian." [4]

Unquestionably, Shostakovich used his profile – he was one of the only living Russian composer who was internationally recognized – as a platform for Yevtushenko's radical poetry. The composer would have been well aware that Yevtushenko's words would likely bring scrutiny to his symphony and himself. The poet was a known western idealist, having been expelled from the Gorky Institute of Literature in Moscow for "individualism" (Fainsod 433). It was unsurprising, then, that the Soviet censors would not allow more than two performances of the symphony (and that only on an "unofficial" basis).

The nature of the Soviet regime's objections is evident in the changes Yevtushenko was compelled to make to the poem (Wilson 361). He published a second, longer, and "politically correct" version of "Babi Yar" in 1963. The changes made to the lyrics of the symphony were limited to eight lines, all of which are reflected in the block quotes above [lines 5-9; lines 53-56]. Instead of feeling himself a Jew, Yevtushenko's speaker now says,

> Here I stand at the fountainhead
> that gives me faith in brotherhood
> Here Russians lie, and Ukrainians
> Together with Jews in the same ground (line 5-9)

The religious imagery of Exodus and the New Testament is removed, and Babi Yar is reimagined not just as a site of a Jewish massacre, but also as the origin, or "fountainhead" of the new speaker's Soviet nationalism, implied by his "faith in brotherhood." The ravine is no longer just the burial place of Jewish victims, but also of Russian and Ukrainian nationals. The implication is that the brotherhood, the Soviet collective, subsumes these other claims to identity.

Instead of hearing the "gigantic soundless screams" and experiencing the deaths of every old man, and every child (lines 53-56), of the original lyrics, Yevtushenko's new speaker says that Babi Yar calls to mind:

[4] My italics.

> […] Russia's heroic dead
> In blocking the way to fascism.
> To the smallest dew-drop, she is close to me
> In her being and her fate. (lines 53-56)

The new version thus prioritizes the Soviet resistance to Nazis over the suffering of those massacred and thrown into the ravine. In this instance, the word "Russia" is used not to invoke the "true" humanity claimed by Yevtushenko's earlier speaker. Rather it is associated with the victory of the USSR over Nazism. In this context, "Russia" (gendered female) is used interchangeably with "Soviet." The new speaker does not distinguish himself from the Soviet Union's callous disregard, but aligns himself to "her being and her fate" in every detail – "to the smallest dewdrop."

Tellingly, though these changes were required before *Shostakovich's 13th Symphony* was performed again, as it was in 1962, the composer was clear about the version he preferred, which aligned with his artistic vision. In his personal manuscript of the symphony, Yevtushenko's original words remained untouched.

### II. Yumor (Humor)

The sneering brass fanfare at the downbeat of the second movement signals a shift in the tone of Shostakovich's orchestra and Yevtushenko's rhetoric. Snare drums and a triumphal trumpet melody combine in a quick march that invokes military parades. To Soviet audiences this would likely serve as a reminder of annual Victory Day Parades, a well-established post-WWII celebration of Soviet military strength. The march steers into the opening four lines of Yevtushenko's second poem, which personifies "Humor" as an irrepressible rebel:

> Tsars, kings, and emperors,
> rulers of all the world.
> Have commanded parades
> But couldn't command humor. (lines 1-4)

Yevtushenko's "Humor" is an alluring character – a figurative representation of the spirit of rebellion – who seems immune to efforts of those who would seek to control him, including the former Russian monarchy, as represented by the "tsar."

But more than simply difficult to control, Humor is also actively disruptive. The parade begins to deteriorate as the lyrics detail the various failed attempts to control humor. Dissonant chords and brazen articulations overthrow the steady controlled march, which falls further apart with each failed effort to control him. Yevtushenko details Humor's imperviousness:

> They've wanted to buy humor,
> but he just wouldn't be bought!
> They've wanted to kill humor,
> But humor gave them the finger.
> Fighting him's a tough job.
> They've never stopped executing him. (lines 13-16)

Whatever the situation, even if he seems momentarily to be defeated or to submit, Humor frees himself. He not only escapes efforts to impose restrictions, he flips those who seek to do so the bird. He is an admirable, valiant, entertaining spirit figure. In the course of the second movement, the controlled register of the military parade gives way to the irrepressible spirit of Humor. Humor, in others words, enacts change on the mechanisms of power and regimentation that want to keep him – and Soviet people – in lockstep. He is irresistible, and his repeated escapes transforms the military march into a garish parody of itself.

Humor is, of course, not an actual, flesh and blood character, but the personified spirit of rebellion. No single arrest or execution can destroy this irrepressible part of the human spirit. The movement's satirical toppling of established musical structure offers Soviet audience insight into the power of the rebellious spirit they, too, share.

**III. V Magazine (In the Store)**

The third movement begins with a quiet, determined melodic line traced in the lower strings section. It has a monophonic texture suggestive of a single instrument performing alone, much as the united melodic chants of Gregorian choirs suggest a single voice. This is the musical context for Yevtushenko's paean to the stoicism of Soviet women forced to wait for simple bread rations:

> They wait quietly,
> Their families' guardian angels
> …These are the women of Russia.
> …They have endured everything,
> They will continue to endure everything. (lines 13-22)

The women's hardships have strengthened them, and their resolve and virtue have elevated them to the level of angels. The slow melody of the opening reflects their quiet determination. Yevtushenko depicts them as the backbone of their communities, which is musically underscored by the lowest sounding instruments in the orchestra – the foundation from which the music builds forth.

In this light, their treatment is an indictment of Soviet society. The last chorus of the movement admonishes the society that imposes hardships upon them:

It is shameful to short-change them!
It is sinful to short-weight them!
As I shove dumplings into my pocket,
I steely and quietly observe
their pious hands
Weary from carrying their shopping bags.

This final stanza brings Yevtushenko's critique into focus. It is not bread rations that weigh down their shopping bags, but their oppression. It is Russian society that has short-changed and short-weighed them. Yevtushenko's speaker observes them "steely" and "quietly." He does not turn away from their suffering, but faces them respectfully. Tellingly, Shostakovich closes the movement with a cadence typical of a religious hymn that ends with a sung "Amen." This is not typical of a symphonic movement, but is used to invoke a quiet, reverential, prayerful tone.

**IV. Strakhi (Fears)**

The lyrics of the fourth movement are from the only poem Yevtushenko had not yet published prior to the first performance of the symphony (Fay 278). Shostakovich commissioned the work, asking for a depiction of the Great Terror of the Stalin Regime. Also known as the Great Purge, it was a campaign of targeted assassination and murder led by Stalin in 1937 in order to wipe out resistance to his assumption of political power in the tumultuous wake of Vladimir Lenin's death (Brittanica). Yevtushenko describes The Purge as characterized by "[t]he secret fear of an anonymous denunciation / the secret fear of a knock at the door" (lines 15-16). So pervasive was the terror of the totalitarian regime that it instilled deep, destabilizing anxiety:

The fear of being untrue to one's country,
The fear of dishonestly debasing ideas,
… the fear of parroting someone else's words,
The fear of humiliating others with distrust,
And of trusting oneself overmuch. (lines 31- 37)

Shostakovich's instrumentation underscores Yevtushenko's description of Soviet citizens in a state of irreconcilability, unable to trust each other or themselves. The movement begins with a deep and foreboding tuba solo that is an example of the chromaticism which became a staple of his composition. Chromaticism refers to notes that are foreign to the established harmonic settings. In this instance, the harmonic settings of the movement are built on a dissonant foundation, just as the unity of the USSR is built on the terror of its citizens.

There is a sense of rebelliousness in Shostakovich use of chromaticism. It is suggestive of an underlying resistance to the agenda of the Soviet Realist genre, which seeks to evoke an image of the USSR as a harmonious, triumphant nation. Shostakovich's music suggests the psychologi-cal unease experienced by Soviet citizen. Given that Shostakovich commissioned the poem that provide the lyrics for the movement from Yevtushenko, it is clear that this struggle was also personal to him.

**V. Karyera (Career)**

The final movement of *Shostakovich's 13th Symphony* begins with a beautiful, optimistic flute duet that pulls listeners out of the heavy chromaticism and somber tones that precede. This is achieved through the higher registers of the instrumentation and diatonic melodies. "Diatonic" re-fers to a musical arrangement that sounds "natural" (rather than dissonant) to audiences because the pitches written in the score are native to the established musical key.

However, the duet is only a brief respite, almost as if it represents a pleasant illusion. The reality cannot be held at bay, but needs an instrument with deeper resonances to be broken. Hence, the strings enter, at first in concert with the flute passage, before overwhelming them with sharp and heavy tones. Each instrument, Shostakovich's orchestration suggests, has its particular genius, as does each musician, chorus member, poet, composer, and Soviet citizen.

qsssssssssssYevtushenko's lyrics celebrate the world-changing accomplishments of such greats as Galileo, Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Pasteur, and Newton. He refers to these men as "careerists," a potentially derisive term in a collectivist society in which faithful service to the state were idealized. A good Soviet was satisfied with a lifelong career in the civil service, while people who pursued per-sonal ambitions were selfish "careerists." But Yevtushenko reclaims the term "careerist" to suggest the dedication and integrity required to do work that has the power to change the world. Yevtushenko's careerists assume great risks to be able to complete their life's purposes, and often sacrifice respect, relationships, and livelihoods to do so. Yevtushenko's lyrics elevate Galileo, a man whose insights went against the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

> For his discovery about our planet
> Galileo faced the risk alone,
> and he was a great man.
> Now that is what I understand by a careerist. (lines 14-17)

Yevtushenko clearly sees the fire and dedication of careerists like Galil-

eo aspirational. His is the kind of passionate integrity necessary to be immune from systems of oppression. In Yevtushenko's understanding personal drive is not necessarily at odds with the collective good, and may be necessary to advance the cause of humanity. His words and Shostakovich's composition suggest that they aspire to be "careerists" in the mold of Galileo.

The final movement of their symphony leaves listeners to question whether they, too, share that fire? The chorus sings the praises of careerists, and mocks those who abuse them as forgotten to history. They are underscored by strings that rise into a complex, invigorating fugal pattern with different sections of the orchestra reiterating the main melody. Their rousing beauty grows not out of their uniformity, but difference. The fugal pattern fades to a calm pastoral soundscape, dissolving, finally, into the chime of a bell that recalls the funeral march of "Babi Yar.' The symphony's conclusion thus ties together the preceding movements, asking listeners to reflect on world it has invoked, and where they stand amidst its callous disregard, oppression, hunger, suffering, sorrow, strength, resilience, and hope.

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*The 13th Symphony* is evidence of Shostakovich and Yevtushenko' courage in the face of the limitations the Soviet Union imposed on artists. After the first two performances in Moscow, the symphony trickled out of existence, labelled as "not recommended for performance" by Soviet officials (Wilson 362). It wasn't until the 1970s that Soviet audiences heard it again. Clearly, their collaboration between the composer and poet was a great risk. It is a testament to their love of humanity, their hope for a better world, their artistic integrity – all seemingly immune from the Soviet Union's repressive measures – that they felt it was worth taking.

Unfortunately, the world still needs work like theirs. When I began this project a year ago in the Fall of 2021, the world looked very different. Vladimir Putin had not yet ordered the invasion of Ukraine. The Babi Yar Memorial in Kyiv had not yet been destroyed in an attempted Russian bombing of a nearby telecommunications tower. It is haunting to consider history's repetitive patterns. Each movement of *Shostakovich's 13th Symphony* resonates as much today as it did when they were crafted in response to an oppressive regime that prioritized ideology over humanity.

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# Ken Garland's "First Things First" Manifesto

By Akanksha Bhatia

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Britain in the 1960s embraced a transformation shaped by a post-War sense of renewal, freedom, hope, and economic prosperity. The decade saw the increased social significance of teens, who expressed themselves in ways unseen prior to the war. New music and art scenes looked to set trends with which to profit from this emerging markets. The excitement of the era invigorated the world of design with new sensibilities that embraced the aesthetic worth of design projects, while pushing against the idea that they should only serve commercial purposes. At the forefront of this shift was "First Things First," an influential manifesto published in 1964 by Ken Garland (Fig. 1), a

Fig 1. First Things First, 1964, Ken Garland.

leading graphic designer. In it, Garland speaks about the duty designers have to their society and warns his colleague against being complicit with emerging consumerism.

His warnings speak to a tension inherent to medium of design. Design separates itself from "fine art" as creating work whose aesthetic and form must function in collaboration with a purpose outside of themselves: a chair can be beautiful and unusually shaped, but must bear the weight and shape of a person to fulfill its primary function, which is to be comfortably sat upon. Garland believed that graphic design, in particular, had become so commercialized that aesthetic and formal innovation were close to being abandoned in the interest of selling goods to consumers. His manifesto seeks to ensure that design is not overwhelmed by commercial applications. It seeks to highlight design's greater purpose, and to immune it from being completely overrun by mercantilism. In doing so, the manifesto asked designers to revise the way they thought about the work they were doing, and to consider the potential for design in the future.

Garland revealed his "First Things First" manifesto in 1963 in a public speech at a meeting of the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. He invited "graphic designers, photographers, and students" of design to sign it in protest of a society that "presented [advertising] to us as the most lucrative, effective, and desirable means of using our talents." Designers, too, were victims of consumerist culture, having been:

> bombarded with journals dedicated to this belief, applauding the work of those who have flogged their skill and imagination to sell: cat food, stomach powders, detergent, hair restorer, striped toothpaste, aftershave lotion, before shave lotion, slimming diets, fattening diets, deodorants, fizzy water, cigarettes, roll ons, pull ons, and slip ons.

Garland's list of mundane products suggests the extent to which the artistic brilliance of designers, their skills and imagination, had been reduced. Designers are being applauded, in other words, for wasting their talents.

However, Garland, does not criticize consumer culture in order to deny its influence. Nor does he disdain the employment it provides designers who earn their living through it. He understands that it is "not feasible" to abolish consumer advertising. He is not trying to dissuade people from buying things they want. However, he worried that designers, in their embrace of this culture, were simply perpetuating the "high-pitched scream of consumer selling." The manifesto sought to counter this "sheer noise" by building an alliance of graphic designers committed to elevating the artistry of their work.

"First Things First" struck a chord at the meeting of the Institute of Contemporary Arts. Many well-established designers, artists, and photographers signed it, dedicating themselves to "more useful and lasting forms of

communication" than mere commercialism. In 1964, within a few months of the meeting, 400 copies were published, one of which fell into the hands of Anthony Wedgewood Benn, who published it in its entirety in his *Guardian* newspaper column. Benn, also a Member of Parliament representing Labour, broadened the scope of the manifesto's critique, arguing that the "responsibility for the waste of talent which [the signees] have denounced is one we must all share" (Poynor). Garland was soon invited to present his manifesto's case to the British public on Tonight, a BBC Television current affairs program. "First Things First" was reprinted in many notable design magazines, even finding translation into French and German.

The manifesto's rapid spread was no coincidence. Emerging at the cusp of major ideological shifts in Britain – and the western world more broadly reflected the cultural and political tensions of the post-war era. In the 1950s, - industry diversified, no longer bound to the production of wartime equipment. Britons were no longer held to a homogenized culture in the service of a common wartime cause, and avenues of entertainment and fulfillment expanded in their variety. The post-war economic boom "radically affected the conceptualization and fitting" of domestic life (Laing 21). In summary, Britain's transition out of their wartime economy facilitated the rise of a consumer class who could afford luxuries.

The economic boom was accompanied by a rise in political and social liberalism. In 1945, the Labour Party withdrew from the wartime coalition led by Winston Churchill and contested the general election. After three consecutive Conservative Prime Ministers, the Labour Party won comfortably and held the office of Prime Minister until 1970. Malcom Bradbury, a writer and scholar who rose to prominence in the era, believed this new liberalism was inevitable following the defeat of fascism and totalitarian ideologies. He saw it as a "historical recovery" that "took much of its intellectual energy both from the radical politics and […] reforming progressivism" (Bradbury). Labour's victory ushered in the reconstruction of a "culture of democratic principles, progressive institutions, freedoms, and rights, a spirit of pluralism." Britain's post-war society welcomed change and encouraged the free expression of political, cultural, and individual ideals.

This cultural context was fertile ground for design, which "[took] off as a confident, professionalized activity" (Poynor). The growth of an affluent consumer class opened more opportunities for designers in advertising, promotion, and packaging. Freed up from the demands for propaganda and the austerity of wartime, design experienced a renaissance as consumers looked to express themselves through their purchases. Teenagers especially reveled in the new order. Young men, safe from the threat of military conscription, looked to fashion that celebrated their individualism. Young women expressed progressive optimism in daring miniskirts. The hippie movement,

too, inspired vibrant and playful clothes. It opened up a wider platform for artists and designers to create. The work produced took on greater prominence as liberalism ushered in a new era "culture, beauty, leisure, and even frivolity" (Laing 22).

"First Things First" did not deny the opportunity this moment presented to designers; the purpose was not to "take any of the fun out of life." However, it warned against reducing design to "trivial purposes, which contribute little or nothing to our national prosperity." The manifesto dedicated its signers a "reversal of priorities" to "other things more worth using [their] skills and experience on."

The subsequent list stands in contrast to the mundane products detailed earlier:

> There are signs for streets and buildings, books and periodicals, catalogues, instructional manuals, industrial photography, educational aids, films, television features, scientific and industrial publications and all the other media through which we promote our trade, our education, our culture and our greater awareness of the world.

"First Things First" resituated design as having "worthwhile purposes" rather than merely serving "gimmick merchants, status salesmen, and hidden persuaders." It reconceives of design as having real-world utility.

Importantly, "First Things First" does not understand design as existing separately from its environment. Designers should not think of themselves as imparting their aesthetic and utilitarian innovations from a detached place. They should bring "awareness of the world." Garland took great interest in the era's creativity and rise in political consciousness, encouraging designers to look to it for inspiration. For example, he admired the work of political movements that used their platform to voice useful information on important issues through innovate methods. Garland even advocated that "protests are the place designers should be looking" (Wainwright). For him, designers should learn from the great impact non-designers (such as the protestors) can have, even without the technical forethought of a designer's mind. Design is a form of an exchange – a conversation with society – that moves with it. It is not static, singular in purpose, subject to unchanging ideas, and designers should not allow it to become so.

Garland's own work was informed by the design-principles of "First Things First." He countered the "high-pitched scream" and "sheer noise" of consumerism with aesthetically simple and purpose-driven design. In 1969, for example, he was commissioned by Galt Toys to design their catalogues, print materials, and posters but was also involved in designing the toys for the company, thereby transcending the brief typically given to a "graphic de-

signer." His puzzle game, Connect (Fig. 2), was inspired by the need for toys that were educational as well as exciting. He took the time to get to know his users, testing his puzzle game idea with a friend's child, and listening to their feedback (Rawsthorn). The result was a game that consisted of 140 cards, each containing a combination of black, red, and blue lines (Fig. 3). Players took turns laying down cards in order to "connect" fully with the line combination from the preceding card. Players held at least 10 cards in hand, picking up a new one after each turn. If a player could not connect any of the cards in hand to cards already laid out, they were still required to pick up a new card. When the pile of 140 was exhausted, the first player to lay down and properly connect all of their cards was declared the winner. Garland's design made

Fig 2. Connect, Galt Toys, 1969, Ken Garland

Fig 3. First Things First, 1964, Ken Garland.

connecting lines and colors exciting and allowed for countless configurations. The game was popular to progressive parents interested in educational play and became a bestseller in 1969 (Rawsthorn).

The modularity of Connect was evidence of Garland's resistance to consumerism. There was no single solution to the puzzle. It could not be solved. Consumers were therefore able to reengage the same product repeatedly, without needing to rush out and buy a new game once the old one was "finished." Connect was popular and profitable, but Garland did not let consumer culture control its design.

Other games designed by Garland for Galt Toys also evidence his commitment to modularity. Their packaging, which he also designed, further attests to his belief that design can be more than a mediator between a product and consumer. It can engage the consumer directly. Fizzog (Fig. 4) consisted of 24 half-faces that players were asked to match in terms of colors and mood. The concept is clear from the packaging by the cheeky smile on face in the center of the "O." Another game, Octons (Fig. 5), contained a number of colored transparent octagons that could be connected with each other and built

Fig 4. Fizzog, Galt Toys, 1970, Garland.

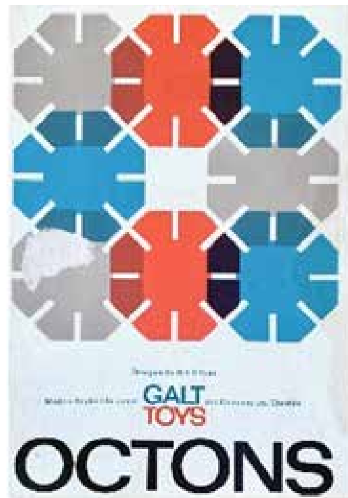


Fig 5. Octons, Galt Toys, 1973, Garland.

into various forms, an idea readily apparent by the overlay of octagons on the packaging. Garland aimed for intuitive design that was part of the experience of the product, fitting a purpose beyond its advertisement. His designs were bold and emphatic, as he believed that brands should "be manipulated according to the context and purpose," not just to keep them fresh and exciting to push sales (Wainright).

The modularity of Garland's games was also reflected in other designs of "First Things First" signers. Ken Briggs's famous typographic designs for the National Theatre (Fig. 6) offers a key example of a "cohesive brand style" that uses simple sans-serif fonts and bold colors allowing for future customization (Lamont). Briggs's work served as the "basis for future designs" (Lamont). Briggs's design thus did more than advertise a season or a particular play, it created a brand language for The National Theater itself.

Fig 6. Booking Leaflets for the National Theater, 1966-67, Ken Briggs.

This rebranding reflected the renaissance theatre in Britain was experiencing in the 1960s. In a press release announcing 1967/68 season, Kenneth Tynan, the National Theatre's literary manager, celebrated the public patronage of recent years, now that theatre was not subject to disdain of Conservatives – he aligns them with Puritans who regarded acting as a "form of clothed prostitution" (Tynan). Public funding meant that the National Theatre could rebuild literally and figuratively – a task that required the "re-education of actors, directors, playwrights, and audiences alike" about the value of theatre (Tynan). Too frequently associated with "private profit," according to Tynan, it was important to clarify that "We are not selling a product; we are providing

a service." This ethos clearly resonates with the one expressed by the "First Things First" Manifesto.

This ethos is further evidenced by Brigg's program designs (Fig. 7, 8). On one hand, they maintain the cohesive brand style of the National Theatre through the limited color palate, simplicity of design, and consistent

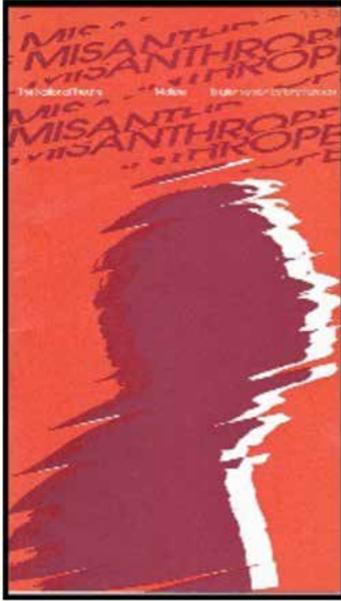


Fig 7. Misanthrope, The National Theater, 1973, Ken Briggs.

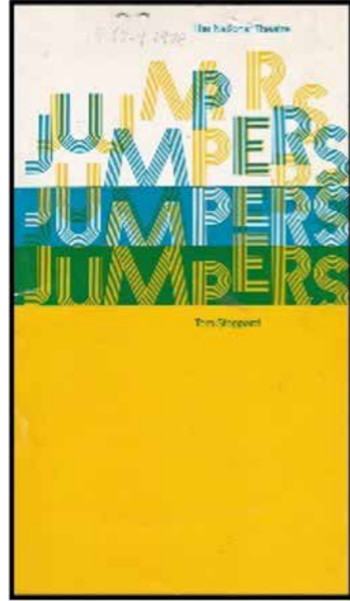


Fig 8. Jumpers, The National Theater, 1972, Ken Briggs.

typography. On the other hand, they provide a service beyond the merely informational. Briggs's design was customizable, which let the general brand language remain but was transferrable to each program. The designs reflect on the production; they are artworks themselves to be taken home by audience members as a reminder of the play. To do so, the programs were thoughtfully sized to fit inside the jacket pockets of men and the purses of women. Ken Briggs's programs transcended their commercial value, elevating a mass-produced informational pamphlet into an aesthetic object worth keeping.

. . .

"First Thing First" was committed to a design aesthetic that was responsive to context and environments. Inevitably, the manifesto would need to adjust to reflect the changing times. With Ken Garland's blessing (and later his signature), a second version of the manifesto, rewritten by *Adbusters Magazine* and

Ken Poynor – was released in 2000. According to *Eye Magazin*e, it was published simultaneously in North America (*Adbusters, AIGA Journal* and émigré) Britain (*Eye Magazine* and *Blueprint*), The Netherlands (*Items*) and Germany (*Form*). Similar in structure to the original manifesto – from lists of consumer products to more worthy causes) "First Things First 2000" was no less urgent and possibly more pointed in its critique. Signed by "graphic designers, art directors and visual communicators," it held that designers who devote their efforts primarily to advertising, marketing, and brand development are supporting, and implicitly endorsing, mental environment so saturated with commercial messages that it is changing the way citizen consumers speak, think, feel, respond, and interact. To some extent, we are all helping draft a reductive and immeasurably harmful code of conduct (FTF 2000).

"First Things First 2000" also proposed a "reversal of priorities," redirecting the skills and experience of designers from the "manufacturing of desire for things that are inessential at best," to more worthy pursuits: "Many cultural interventions, social marketing campaigns, books, magazines, exhibitions, educational tools, television programs, films, charitable causes, and information design projects."

"First Things First 2000" was criticized, notably by graphic designer Michael Bierut in "Ten Footnotes to a Manifesto," for lacking substance, overstating the cultural power of designers, and for writing off commercial work in a way that Garland did not originally propose. "First Things First 2000" does not include Garland's qualification that it is "not feasible" to abandon commercial work and therefore sets up an irresolvable opposition between it and pursuits deemed more worthy. Bierut challenges this clear distinction between social-minded and commercially-oriented graphic design. He ends "Ten Footnotes" by quoting text Garland wrote four years after the publication of "First Things First" in which he suggests that designers should identify "with our real clients, the public. They may not be the ones who pay us, not the ones who give us our diplomas and degrees. But if they are to be the final recipients of our work, they're the ones who matter." Bierut adds that "They deserve at the very least the simple, civic-minded gift of a well-designed dog biscuit package" (60). As Garland's own designs show, commercial work can be civically minded. Bierut is right to point out that the original "First Things First" did not seek to discount commercial work, but to challenge designers to be more intentional with regard to their social impact.

Another of Bierut's critiques is that most of the 33 signers of the "First Things First 2000" manifesto "have specialized in [designing] extraordinarily beautiful things for the cultural elite." Amongst these signers, "the prolific and populist Milton Glaser . . . sticks out like a sore thumb" (55). His work exemplifies the principles of design upheld by the original manifesto and speaks to the civic-mindedness Bierut highlights. Glaser's most popular work is the iconic "I [heart] NY logo which, according to the Museum of the City of

New York has "woven [itself] into the fabric of the city's identity," capturing the qualities of the city that make it a "chic, cool, exciting metropolis" (mcny).

Glaser originally designed the logo (Fig. 9) in 1977, a time in which NYC was struggling on the verge of bankruptcy and with high levels of crime. The logo was commissioned by the New York State Department of Commerce to "promote tourism and shine a more positive light on the city and the state as a whole." The design is simple: a carefully chosen, capital

Fig 9. I [heart] NY, 1977, Glaser

ized, black typeface, with the word "love" replaced by a red heart. It was one of the "first instances" a symbol replaced a word, a "design element [that] has [since] been imitated across industries and designs" (Design Rush). Compared to this cutting-edge aesthetic choice, the logo's slab serif font, "American Typewriter," invoked a mood of nostalgia at a time in which cleaner, sans serif fonts were fashionable. Glaser stacked "I [heart]" over "NY" and limited the color palate, which made for a logo that was "easily transferrable across mediums [...] and platforms"– from hats and t-shirts to brochures and billboards (Design Rush). The logo soon spread throughout the city and remains iconic to this day.

Glaser thus fulfills the key "First Things First" principle that designers should commit themselves to the "more useful and more lasting forms of communication." The logo does more than "sell" the city and state. Its greater substance was especially apparent after the September 11 attacks when it became a symbol of hope and strength. Glaser modified his design (Fig. 10), stacking the words "MORE THAN EVER" below the original logo, and adding a black smudge to the heart to symbolize the World Trade Center.

Fig 10. Redesigned, 2001, Milton Glaser

The changes showed how design can respond to the environment, and offered such a powerful message that it appeared on front pages of newspapers and was used by fundraiser organizations in support of those affected by the attacks. In a world of "gimmick merchants, status salesman, and hidden persuaders", Glaser put design before commodity and his skills and experience in the service of a more worthwhile purpose (Garland).

Ken Garland's "First Things First" informed designers for generations. It asked designers to remember the value of their skills to society more broadly rather than giving them over entirely to the fast-paced world of commercial advertisement. It argues that designers should hold their art to a high standard and maintain a qualified immunity from mere consumerism. Rather than just serving the profits of clients, they should also respond to their environment and keep the experience of the end user in mind. Ken Garland's own work, as well as that of signers like Briggs and Glaser (FTF2000) show what design can do when it is beautiful, effective, and intentional.

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# A Country of Lone Men: Cormac McCarthy's Morally Immune Rugged Individuals

By Ada Cinar

Just how dangerous is he?
Compared to what, the bubonic plague?
(McCarthy 141)

Cormac McCarthy's ninth novel, *No Country for Old Men* has captivated American readers since its release in 2005. In it, Anton Chigurh, a killer with no distinguishable features and no identifiable race or creed hunts down a cowboy, Llewellyn Moss, and is tracked by Sherriff Ed Tom Bell. Originally written as a screenplay (and readapted for the big screen less than two years after its initial book release) it unsettled readers and critics alike. It was an instant critical and commercial hit and has served as the object of intense scholarly work since.

McCarthy's works have been interpreted as commentaries on the American – and more specifically, Western – tradition of rugged individualism. *No Country for Old Men* is no exception, with critics implicating Chigurh, Moss, and Bell in it. For example, in "Democracy, Justice, and Tragedy in McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men,*" Benjamin Mangrum suggests that the neoliberal setting of the novel (Texas, 1980) enculturates individualism within which the characters operate and / or fail to survive. Saxton and Cole argue in "*No Country for Old Men*: A Search for Masculinity in Later Life" that Sherriff Bell's refusal of professional and personal help ultimately result in his failure to stop Chigurh at the cost of citizens' lives. Raymond Malewitz sees individualistic rebellion in Chigurh's use of everyday objects as killing tools in "Anything Can Be an Instrument: Misuse and Rugged Consumerism in McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men*."

Though these critics discuss rugged individualism, their analyses frame it as a trait of characters who operate within the world of the novel. This article ties it to archetypes represented by the main characters – the cowboy, the killer, and the sheriff. This approach allows for an allegorical reading of the novel as concerned with the extent to which rugged individualism runs through America's lifeblood. *No Country for Old Men* is a cautionary tale about the ideology's moral and social implications.

As I will show, the three main characters see themselves as moral islands. Their moral reasoning is a closed loop: they do not take into account the impact of their actions on others. By and large, in their thinking, the moral correctness of their own actions extend only so far as those actions serve their own interests. This worldview is sustained because they also hold themselves immune from the moral judgement of others.

*No Country for Old Men* shows how the moral immunity held to by rugged individualists is at odds with the collective reality in which they live. The cowboy, the killer, and the sheriff each justify collectively indefensible actions through rugged individualist lenses, achieving different results. The cowboy ends up dead while the sheriff is able to walk away from the situation unharmed, but both have their town in Terrell County gutted by the killer's violence. The slaughter of innocents presents a profound failure of the individualist ethos. Whether or not their actions serve their own interests, they are unable to stop their actions from affecting those beyond themselves and are also unable to remain unaffected by others. In this reading, *No Country for Old Men* serves as an allegory about the pitfalls of ascribing to the moral immunity of rugged individualism.

## The Cowboy

One night, while out hunting, small-town welder Lleweyn Moss stumbles across a drug deal gone bad: abandoned vehicles with keys still in the ignition, dogs and humans shot dead, weapons scattered in the desert sand, and, most notably, a trail of bloody footsteps leading away from the scene. At the end of the trail, he finds another corpse clutching a briefcase containing $2.4 million dollars. Instead of fleeing or calling the police, Moss turns to his sense of rugged individualism: he will handle this. He takes the briefcase and runs. As he later tells his wife, "I'm fixin to go do somethin dumbern hell but I'm goin anways" (McCarthy 24).

To understand how Moss's actions speak to his archetypal character, it is necessary to understand how this individualism makes him more broadly representative. For the purposes of this argument, the ideology of "individualism" is formally defined as Harry Triandis does, quoted by Elizabeth C. Hirschman. Accordingly, individualism is "a social pattern that consists of loosely linked individuals who view themselves as independent of collectives . . . and emphasize rational analyses of the advantages and disadvantages of

associating with others," (Hirschman 9). Individualism has long been understood as pervasive in America. The drafters of the constitution, for example, felt the populace needed governing in part because of a general tendency to place themselves first which left them "unthinking" with regard to the good of the collective whole (Grabb, et al. 1999). Alexis de Tocqueville, observing Americans in 1831 on the 9-month tour that served as the basis for his famous *Democracy in America,* also worries about the individualism he observes. Americans believe they "owe nothing to any man . . . they acquire the habit of always considering themselves standing alone, and are apt to imagine that their whole destiny is in their own hands . . . [D]emocracy . . . throws him back forever upon himself alone, and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart" (620).

The rise of American industrial centers in the 19th century set the stage for capitalist individualism which promoted the idea that every man was working for himself in competition with others. But niche forms of individualism were taking shape elsewhere, too. Individualism had diverse champions and took different forms between, for example, emerging oil barons on the East Coast and cowboys on the Western Frontier (Grabb et al. 1999). McCarthy's critique in *No Country* is primarily concerned with the mode of individualism that emerged from the American West, where lawlessness and isolation instilled a fierce independence for which anthropologist Francis L. K. Hsu coined the phrase "rugged individualism." To Hsu, rugged individualists operate as lone moral agents. If capitalist individualists believe that their personal success accrues benefits to society more broadly, the rugged individualist refuses to consider the greater good, and cares only about their own success or wellbeing. To Hsu, rugged individualists are "driven to treat all other human beings as things to be manipulated, coerced, or eliminated, if they happen to get in the way" (Hirschman 10).

The America that is the setting for *No Country for Old Men* was targeted by Ronald Reagan's campaign which appealed to the autonomy so many found aspirational. Campaign promises to shrink government by cutting social welfare programs were premised on the idea that Americans should be self-reliant, and that government assistance served only to hold them back from realizing their potential. Assistance from the government was publicly stigmatized as a moral failure, an indication of weakness or laziness on the part of citizens who fell for a "trap" of dependency (Reagan 1987). The campaign espoused the idea that its citizens should strive for self-reliance at all costs, as government "intervention and intrusion" in Americans' lives was the root of the socioeconomic problems they faced (Reagan 1982). It was styled on the idea that government should be immune from the moral responsibility to provide assistance to its citizens, an ethos that came to define social relations of the subsequent era. Self-reliance became the highest virtue, even when it was directly at odds with social responsibility.

Rugged individualism denies the needs and sometimes even the humanity of others and the develops a kind of tunnel vision. Even before he takes the money, McCarthy's cowboy, Moss, holds himself exempt from responsibility for others. Investigating the scene, he opens the doors of a shot-out Ford Bronco to find a near-dead man inside. The man speaks little English, but asks Moss for agua, and begs Moss to help him, warning that "lobos" and "leones" – wolves and lions – will be drawn to the smell of his flesh if he is left there (14, 15). Instead of helping, Moss self-interestedly searches the man's pockets for ammunition and responds dryly: "I ain't got no water . . . there ain't no lobos." He closes the door and leaves him to die.

Moss, the rugged individualist, takes the man's words at face value, dismissing them as factually incorrect: "there ain't no lobos" in Texas. He does not even consider what the man might mean with his warning. This callous disregard for the man's perspective is evident in his appalling lack of sympathy for his thirst. Moss sees the man in purely transactional terms. The man offered him nothing of value, so he felt no duty to help him, or even to acknowledge his suffering. He clearly considers himself morally immune from the consequences of his own disregard: he effectively condemns the man to death.

After stealing the briefcase, Moss finds himself hunted by the Mexican mafia, law enforcement, and, worst of all, the serial killer Anton Chigurh. Moss spends thousands of dollars on motel rooms, taxis, weaponry, and airfare so his wife, Carla Jean, can flee the state. None of it is to any avail. Unbeknownst to him, the cash-filled briefcase contains a tracker – "The middle of the packet had been filled in with dollar bills with the centers cut out and the transponder unit nested there" – allowing Chigurh to follow Moss's trail and wait to execute him at his own leisure (108).

Throughout, Moss continues to serve his own needs at the expense of others while failing to acknowledge his own complicity. He understands that his choice to take the briefcase has resulted in his life-or-death situation, but the only negative consequences he truly considers are to himself. But as McCarthy makes clear, Moss is morally culpable for the lives of the innocents caught in the crosshairs of Chigurh's relentless pursuit. The list of collateral damage that follows on from Moss's theft of the suitcase is extensive: the motel clerk who had the misfortune of working the night Chigurh shot up the place (136), the fifteen-year-old hitchhiker Chigurh murdered after Moss gave him a ride (248), and the random pedestrians and pharmacy patrons killed after Moss's death when Chigurh's getaway car explodes (163).

Most tragic is the death of Carla Jean, Moss's wife. He promises her that he will not compromise her safety, but in his inability to think beyond the immediate danger *to himself,* he leads Chigurh straight to her. When Moss is hurt in a shoot-out with a Mexican cartel and hospitalized in Piedra Negras, Chigurh calls and offers him a deal: "You bring me the money and I'll let her walk. Otherwise she's accountable. Same as you" (184). Nowhere does

Chigurh suggest that Moss can escape accountability. To Chigurh, the relentless killer, Moss's death is inevitable. There is no escape. But Moss, with his self-interested tunnel-vision, refuses the deal. He is unwilling to give over the money, even if it places his wife at risk. Ever the individualist, he believes he can single-handedly bring himself and Carla Jean to safety. He contacts her immediately to arrange her escape. McCarthy does not afford Moss a proper death scene in the novel. Readers are informed that he is dead in a passing comment – "it's a long story" – from Bell to a neighboring town sheriff (247). It is a pointedly undignified death for a man who held his own life and interests above those of others, and a devastating indictment of his belief that he was in control of his own destiny.

Carla Jean is killed by Chigurh a few scenes later in her own residence, having made no further contact with her husband. Chigurh informs her that he gave Moss an opportunity to give up the briefcase in exchange for her safety and that his offer was refused (247, 260). Carla Jean reasons that Chigurh "don't have to" kill her (259). He has the briefcase and Moss is dead. Why not let her live? But Chigurh insists that he must do as he promised, and that she must die as a consequence of her husband's choices. She is now fated to die, even if she would choose to live. To prove it, he offers Carla Jean a final chance to live if she correctly calls a coin toss. She calls tails. Chigurh flips the coin, reveals heads, and shoots her dead. Carla Jean's death-by-coin-toss is a powerful metaphor for the incapacity of individuals to control their own destiny. Her fate serves as a repudiation of Moss's brand of rugged individualism. She may have chosen incorrectly, but the stakes of the coin toss were forced upon her as a direct consequence of his self-interest and pathological self-reliance. His complicity in her death proves a central tenet of his doctrine false; that he is morally immune from judgement for the effects his actions have on others.

In "Democracy, Justice, and Tragedy in Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men,*" Benjamin Mangrum draws connections between Nietzschean concepts and the novel's nihilism and argues that unchecked freedom of the kind Moss believes in can be disastrous for society. Placing moral authority wholly within the individual, as Moss does, is akin to "unchain[ing] the earth from its sun" and "straying through an infinite nothing" (110). To attempt to enact such freedom, Mangrum suggests, is an exercise in futility because no individualist within any society is truly free due to the "inherent limits of their world" (108). They are bound by the consequences of their actions to themselves and others. The individualist may try to ignore such consequences – as Moss did by running – but they are more likely to compound than disappear.

The rugged individualist is *not* immune. In fact, the actions justified by "freedom from accountability" accrue such terrible consequences that the principle stops making sense. Moss may believe he is immune and free but, as Mangrum points out (111), he fails to ask a pivotal question: What good

does the freedom do? Or, as Chigurh, the killer, puts it, "If the rule you used brought you here, what use was the rule?" (McCarthy 175).

### The Killer

When readers of *No Country for Old Men* first meet Anton Chigurh, he is sitting in a deputy's office somewhere in Texas, handcuffed and silent. Within a few sentences, Chigurh has used the cuffs to strangle a deputy to death, disguised himself in the deceased cop's uniform, and driven off in his patrol car (7). By the time Terrell County Sheriff Ed Tom Bell gets a call about an abandoned cop car on the side of the interstate, Chigurh has already killed another man, taken his car, and fled. The police are none the wiser. "What do we have on the perpetrator?" assistant deputy asks Bell. "We don't," he replies (43).

For all they don't know, it is clear to Terrell County law enforcement officers that a major threat is on the loose. A concerted effort to contain and capture Chigurh begins – one that fails over and over again in the course of the novel. A big reason is the sheer grit Chigurh displays. He walks through mafia shootouts as though taking a leisurely stroll (119-122), recovers from hospitalization-worthy shotgun injuries in days (161), and casually walks off a vehicle collision that leaves him with a head injury and, as an onlooker describes it, "a bone stickin out under the skin of his arm he didn't pay no more attention to it than nothin" (292). Chigurh seems unaffected by things that should stop him. If not physically immune, he has enough mental strength to resist fear and pain that might otherwise interfere with his mission. His relentlessness alone affords him near mythic qualities. He kills without compunction, sometimes for reasons as arbitrary as an incorrectly-called coin toss. He is not subject to ordinary human limitations. He seems more force than man – "the invincible Mr. Chigurh" (140).

But the killer's success is not only of his own making – he benefits from the profound state of infrastructural decay in rural Texas in 1980, just as the crack cocaine epidemic is taking hold. The law enforcement that is charged with stopping Chigurh is demoralized and ill-equipped despite the War on Drugs, initially waged by the Nixon administration and popularly re-energized by the successful candidacy of Ronald Reagan. Both administrations echoed rugged individualist notions that, in effect, create conditions for the killer's success rather than his apprehension.

Launched in 1971, Nixon's War on Drugs looked to combat drug abuse by increasing federal law enforcement operations against it. He was disinterested in the idea that the growing epidemic was suggestive of broader "societal ills." Three months prior, the Report of the White House Conference for Children and Youth, acknowledged that drug abuse might be a symptom of the "individual inability to cope with […] personal environment[s]," but insisted that the youth's "increased alienation" was because "society has permitted the perpetuation of the Indochina War, of institutional and personal racism,

of the pollution of our environment, and of the urban crises" (Report 31). But in Nixon's thinking it was more expedient to characterize drug users as pitiable moral failures, who drove up crime rates and caused untold deaths through actions "shrouded in secrecy" (Nixon 1971). Secret or not, the details hardly mattered. He admitted his government lacked reliable information on the scope of the problem. The solution was not for government to uplift communities or help addicts, but to criminalize and punish individuals who bought and sold drugs (Nixon 1971). The bulk of funding poured into the War on Drugs went to law enforcement rather than large scale rehabilitation and education initiatives. Ten years later, a disavowal of collective responsibility was central to President Ronald Reagan's neo-liberal policy proposals. Americans should be left in charge of their own individual fates. Hence, Reagan famously proclaimed in his Inauguration Address that "government is not the solution to [America's] problems; government is the problem" (Reagan 1981). The flipside of the insistence on personal responsibility, however, was a denial of systemic culpability for social problems such as poverty or addiction.

As Moss's discovery of a $2.4 million drug deal gone bad suggests, Terrell County is on the front lines of the War on Drugs. What Chigurh represents within this context is key to understanding the novel's broader critique of rugged individualism. To the Cowboy who refuses to concede his own vulnerability and moral responsibility, he is the relentless killer who exacts consequence of a bad personal decision. To the lawman who believes in and enforces policies that refuse to concede systemic culpability, the killer represents a collective affliction that he is unable to understand never mind contain.

Chigurh represents the inevitable, unavoidable consequences from which neither morally bankrupt individuals nor civil infrastructures are immune. Just as the causes of the drug epidemic cannot be pinned down one person, place, or time, so Chigurh resists to capture. He is a reckoning that affects individuals and society at the same time. Almost simultaneously, he slays Mexican gangsters in Dryden, Texas (57), rummages through elderly people's houses to look for information in Odessa (59), and forces a gas station attendant to choose between heads and tails (204). His movements defy patterns; his motives defy reason. Chigurh can be anywhere, anytime, killing people on the basis of "principles that transcend money or drugs or anything" (McCarthy 153).

Sheriff Bell and his exasperated law enforcement infrastructure – ostensibly America's soldiers in the War on Drugs – are ill-equipped to address it in all its complexity. It is their state of bewilderment and paralysis that afford the killer the perfect conditions to thrive. A society that will not take collective responsibility, cannot unify against a common enemy. That's how the killer slips through cracks time and again. Faced with threats that requires a coordinated response, a fractured, individualist society can only throw up its hands in exasperation. As Chigurh himself notes: "People don't pay attention.

And then one day there is an accounting. And after that nothing is the same" (McCarthy 57).

### The Sheriff

Rugged individualism not only allows the epidemic to thrive, it also undermines the "good guys." Consider Sheriff Ed Tom Bell, a man who, by his own admission, has been lucky: lucky to have met the love of his life, Loretta, in his teens (they're still happily married more than 30 years later); lucky to have followed his father and grandfather into law enforcement in Terrell County; lucky to have sent only one person to the gas chamber in his career as the sheriff (1). But when Moss finds briefcase and Chigurh turns Terrell County on its head, that luck seems to take a turn.

Under the leadership of Bell, the Terrell County Police Department is responsible for hunting down the killer and stopping his rampage and for locating and ensuring the safety of Moss, a citizen of Terrell County. However, they remain several steps behind Chigurh and Moss, not even identifying the killer as Chigurh until near the end of novel. They even fail to identify Chigurh's weapon until the majority of the novel's violence has passed. Bell incorrectly informs his men it is a wadcutter (they have no idea what a wadcutter is) (78, 106, 291). They fail to communicate with Chigurh (43) and follow up a lead to Moss's whereabouts too late as he moves on to escape the killer's relentless pursuit (135). This litany of failures results in disaster for Terrell County as a whole: motels are shot up, a pharmacy explodes, citizens die in shoot-outs in the middle of town. Bell himself must inform the townsmen's wives (including Carla Jean) that their husbands have been killed as a result of drug-cartel-related gang violence.

In the midst of this carnage, McCarthy distinguishes Bell's character as one of the only ones with whom to sympathize. He has a sense of right and wrong, critiquing corrupt lawmen and apathetic citizens. He holds himself above corruption despite recognizing that, "The opportunities for abuse are just about everywhere" (64). He resents hypocritical cops who imprison drugs dealers but use and deal themselves (218). He prefers negotiation to violence, and prides himself in not feeling the need to carry a gun on the job (216).

And yet for all Bell's awareness of problems, he takes no active steps to stop them. While the cowboy is navigating his individualistic hellscape and the killer is wreaking havoc, the Sheriff only watches. He is dispassionate and disengaged: asked by a neighboring county sheriff if he has a "dog in the [the] hunt," Bell answers, "Not really. A couple of kids from my county that might be sort of involved that ought not to be." When asked if these kids are "kin," he answers, "No. Just people from my county. People I'm supposed to be looking after" (197). Bell finally says out loud what has been implied to this point in the novel. He doesn't really care. He does not consider the endangered citizens of his county as kin, despite being a third-generation Terrell lawman.

He feels no real sense of duty towards them, but for the responsibility his job places on him: he's "supposed" look after them. Bell, the man at the top of the pecking order at the Terrell County PD lacks a sense of civic duty. Regardless of the body counts, bereaved widows, and property damage Bell clocks out at the same time every day, goes home to his ranch and Lorretta, and lets it all go. Every two weeks, he gets a paycheck for his efforts.

Although supposedly a "good guy," Bell arguably represents the novel's most pointed critique of rugged individualism. The moral islands represented by the Cowboy (whose fantasy of self-reliance gets him and his wife killed) and the Killer (who is an unmoored nihilist) are not representatives of rugged individualism's acceptable social face. But Bell has reached (or inherited) a position of power and privilege in which he can hold himself morally immune and suffer no real repercussions. He is physically and materially unaffected by the devastation, and given that his own social position and income is assured regardless of events, has no incentive to change his beliefs or approach.

But Bell is also a tragic figure who suffers a crisis of conscience near the novel's end. A true believer in the individual moral failings of drug users and dealers, he comes to recognize that he cannot make sense of the drug epidemic's scale in those terms. He witnesses dope dealers selling narcotics to school children (194), peace officers along the Texas border enriching themselves through narcotics (216), even white collar, middle-class citizens falling prey to crack cocaine (304). Faced with overwhelming numbers that cannot be explained away as mere individual choices his worldview wavers: "There's always been narcotics. But people don't just up and decide to dope themselves for no reason. By the millions" (303).

But that is also the extent of his insight. To him, the issue cannot be explained in terms of socioeconomic or cultural issues that brought the crack cocaine epidemic to his town in the first place. Rather than consider the phenomenon in its cultural or collective aspect, he internalizes it as his own individual failure. Bell retires at the end of the novel, with Terrell County in near-ruins and having failed to apprehend Chigurh. When his wife says that these things were not his fault, he answers that they were, because "if you got a bad enough dog in your yard people will stay out of it. And they didn't" (299). Ever the rugged individualist, Bell seems to believe that he should have been able to stop the Chigurh and the drug epidemic by sheer force of personal will. Of course, Bell was never going to be enough to address the crushing socioeconomic conditions and pervasive alienation that allowed for the epidemic's spread. But his rugged individualist ethos also meant he did not conceive of a unified department or community as a path forward. All he could do, and all he empowered his deputies to do, was throw up their hands in exasperation.

In the end, the Sheriff walks away from his failing jurisdiction materially and physically unharmed. But he also knows that the consequences of his passive negligence are borne by others. Just as Carla Jean suffers because of

Moss's actions, so Terrell County pays the wages of Bell's moral failure. Bell leaves behind him a county that is demoralized and shot up, Moss and Carla Jean dead, and an incompetent police force that is in no position to handle the next onslaught. An unnamed reporter asks Bell one last question before he hangs up his badge: "Sheriff, how come you let crime get so out of hand in your county?" (304).

**An Epilogue**

As I write this essay's conclusion, more than a million Americans have died of COVID-19, with the United States leading the world in per capita cases and deaths (World Health Organization 2022). Even before the killer pandemic, healthcare infrastructure was decayed due to a lack of public funding, and health workers were overworked to the point of underperforming (Anderlini 2018). For too many Americans, it has been impossible to stay ahead of the virus's relentless onslaught. And yet, America has failed to respond as a coherent collective, with leaders that have seemed at times self-serving, apathetic, or simply inept.

McCarthy's archetypes speak clearly to this context. The questions that need asking amidst the political posturing, the self-righteousness, the insistence on individual rights, is not just what is good for us as individuals, but what we owe to society as a whole. The killer's success in breaking down Terrell County in 1980 parallels the present-day breakdown of America's economy, social structures, and health care systems, with too much moral authority ascribed to individual interiority (Mangrum 110).

In the end, none of the three archetypal characters in *No Country* leave neutral legacies behind them, despite their implicit belief that their actions are nobody else's business. None succeed in establishing and maintaining the closed circuit that forms the moral foundation of rugged individualism. Even Bell, who does no harm directly, is morally at fault for the suffering allowed by his passive negligence. His tragic realization of his culpability comes too late. *No Country for Old Men* shows that the ideology does not work.

As Americans resisted vaccinations and masks, despite rampant hospitalizations and deaths, they did so in the name of individual freedom over the collective good. Holding themselves immune from the consequences, America's rugged individuals put its most vulnerable citizens at risk. In the era of COVID-19, America is no country for old men, or poor men. It suffers under the illusion that it is a country of lone men fastened to the lie of their own immunity.

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