

# THE BROADSHEET



The Bradstreet Fellowship.

Photo: Isabella Connor

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## FINDING ANNE BRADSTREET: UNCOVERING A LOCAL POET'S PAST

By: Isabella Connor

In seventeenth-century New England, Anne Bradstreet was a literary sensation. Her book of poetry *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in the New World* was the first to be published by anyone in the American colonies.

Despite Bradstreet's prominence and relatively wide readership during her lifetime, she lies buried in an unmarked grave in an unknown location. Bradstreet spent the last years of her life in North Andover and some speculate that her remains are within walking distance of the Merrimack campus. Hoping to solve this 350 year-old mystery by locating the site of Bradstreet's final resting place, Merrimack English Professors Christy Pottroff and Ellen McWhorter formed the "Finding Anne Bradstreet" fellowship. Alongside myself, the undergraduate team consists of Dakota Durbin, Rochelle Brothers, Emma Leaden, Taylor Galusha, Daniel Proulx, Robert Tolan, and Jessica Melanson.

English born in 1612, Anne Bradstreet survived smallpox as a child, had her entire life uprooted and transplanted to the unfamiliar North American colonies as a teenager, and gave birth to eight children at a time far removed from modern medical advancements. Bradstreet's life story exemplifies resilience. Though an earlier generation of literary scholars dismissed her as "the Puritan poet," her poetry brings into sharp resolution a spirited, defiant female voice aware of how it might be received.

An official publication of the Merrimack College English Department, The Broadsheet is published four times during the academic calendar year. Its mission is to celebrate the English Department's role in promoting the literary arts on campus, to acknowledge the accomplishments of faculty and students, to profile students and alumni, and to create a forum in which issues relevant to English studies can be discussed.

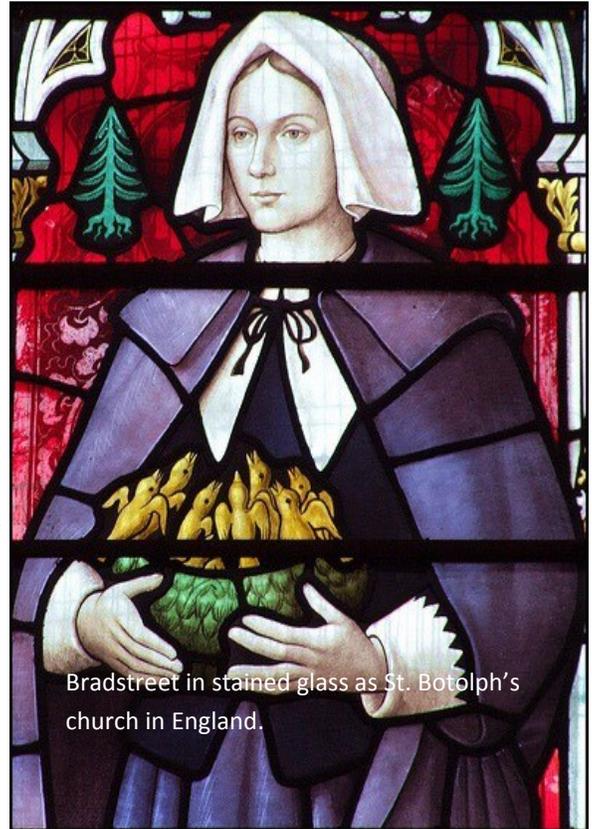
*The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in the New World* was originally published in England as *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America*. Upon the publication of the second edition of her book, Bradstreet included this “Prologue”:

I am obnoxious to each carping tongue  
Who says my hand a needle better fits.  
A Poet’s Pen all scorn I should thus wrong,  
For such despite they cast on female wits.  
If what I do prove well, it won’t advance,  
They’ll say it’s stol’n, or else it was by chance.

Here Bradstreet chafes at the likelihood that, because of her sex, critics would question her priorities and remain skeptical about her authorship. At the risk of predisposing readers to regard her as an upstart woman who has stepped out of line, she presents her work with confidence and pride. Moments like these in Bradstreet’s poetry confer on her an appeal for modern readers, fortunate enough to be living at a moment more accepting of women writers and aware of the pressures created by a gender stratified culture.

Though the main focus of the Fellowship’s research involves discovering Bradstreet’s grave, it also aims at shedding light on her life and her work, establishing a connection between Bradstreet’s North Andover and ours. We hope our efforts will further vitalize North Andover’s history. The team spent the end of the summer scouring archives in search of clues that might lead us to Bradstreet’s resting place. We visited North Andover’s Old North Parish Burying Ground, which is only a few minutes away from the Merrimack College campus. The cemetery features a memorial for Anne Bradstreet placed at the cemetery in 2000; however, what most surprised us were the number of bare spaces in the cemetery. This observation made us wonder if more bodies have been buried at this site than the current number of grave markers would suggest. Puritan graves were often marked with wooden headboards, resembling what one might find attached to a bed. Wood, of course, deteriorates much faster than stone, so this burial practice raises the possibility that the grave of Anne Bradstreet is located in one of those unmarked areas, and we have been hard at work looking into that prospect.

The beginning of the Fellowship’s exploration of local archives began at the Phillips Library new facilities in the town of Rowley. While at the Phillips Library, we were able to examine two documents written by Anne’s husband, Simon Bradstreet, in addition to other seventeenth and eighteenth-century materials. Next, we visited the North Andover Historical Society, where we were given access to the most up-to-date research regarding the Bradstreet family and seventeenth-century North Andover. Carol Majahad, executive director of the North Andover Historical Society, furnished us with a copy of a seventeenth-century North Andover map showing the location of Simon Bradstreet’s land. Finding exactly where the Bradstreets lived at the time of Anne’s death could be the key to finding her grave. We have also spent time analyzing the map relative to the location of the Merrimack campus and hope to use our findings to establish our institution’s connection to local colonial history.

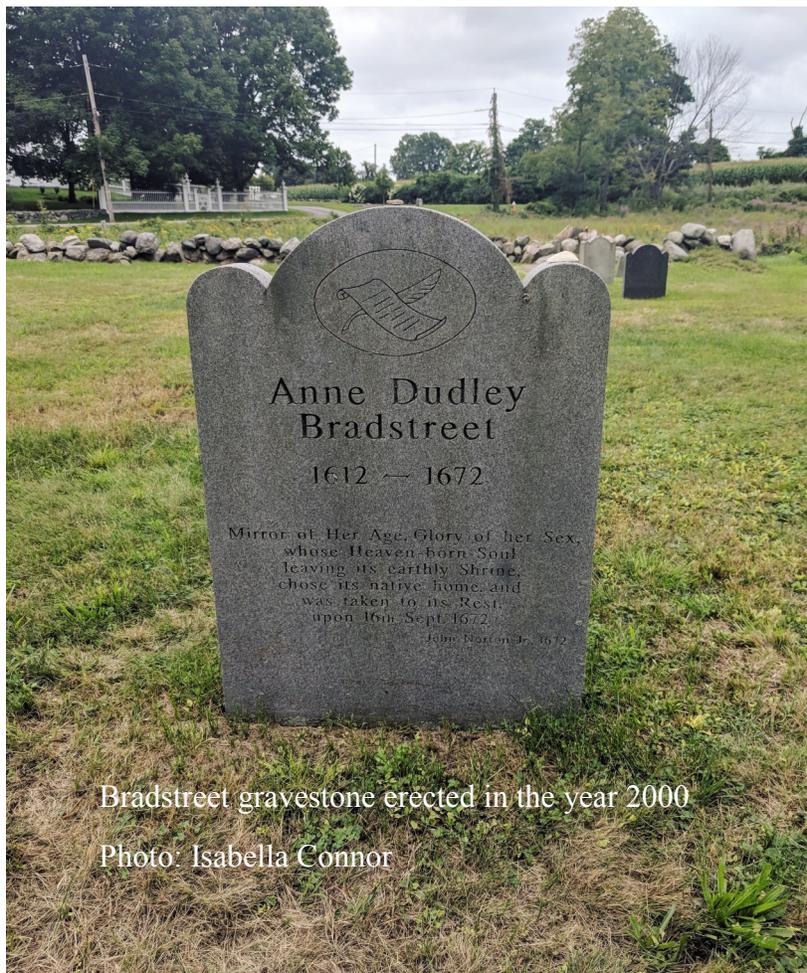


Bradstreet in stained glass as St. Botolph's church in England.

In her poem entitled “Contemplations,” Bradstreet wrote:

Under the cooling shadow of a stately Elm  
 Close sate I by a goodly Rivers side,  
 Where gliding streams the Rocks did overwhelm;  
 A lonely place, with pleasures dignifi’d.  
 I once that lov’d the shady woods so well,  
 Now thought the rivers did the trees excel,  
 And if the sun would ever shine, there would I dwell.

These lines exhibit Bradstreet’s pre-Romantic kinship with the natural world. Her inclination to draw inspiration from the New England landscape that surrounded her recurs throughout her poetry. Inspired by Bradstreet’s verse, Taylor Galusha and I set out to form similar connections to our local environment. Noticing many of the trees on campus were of great size and appeared to be very old, we set out to discover the age of some of the trees and find out if they existed when Bradstreet was alive. We were able to ascertain that a Norway Maple we found was estimated to be approximately 526 years old and a Silver Maple approximately 418 years old. Bradstreet mentions trees often in her poetry and, considering she didn’t live far from the Merrimack College campus and was known to stroll through the woods while composing, it is possible that she saw these very same trees, for us a startling prospect. Possibilities such as this close historical gaps and demonstrate how literary inquiry can create continuity between authors, readers, and environments. Taylor and I wrote up our methodology and findings in an essay called “Anne and the Trees,” which we posted on FindingAnne.org. Follow our progress on Twitter (@WhereAreYouAnne), Instagram (@FindingAnneBradstreet), Facebook (Anne Bradstreet Fellows), and our website (FindingAnne.org).



Bradstreet gravestone erected in the year 2000

Photo: Isabella Connor

# HAUNTED HOTELS, HIDDEN CORNERS, AND ELECTRIC SLAM AT THE 2018 MASS POETRY FESTIVAL

By: Daniel Roussel

Throughout most of the year, Salem, Massachusetts looks much like many New England coastal communities. During Halloween and during the Massachusetts Poetry Festival, however, the city becomes more lively than most. I attended the Poetry Festival last spring and, as a result, witnessed this infusion of energy and excitement first hand. The Festival features readings performed by accomplished professional poets, such as Merrimack College Writers House Director Andrea Cohen and Associate Director Danielle Jones-Pruett, both of whom have read their work at the event, and opportunities for amateur writers to make public their work. Among those opportunities is the intercollegiate slam competition and I was lucky enough to participate as a first-time member of the Merrimack Slam Team.

The Merrimack Slam Team, informally known as the “Slam Shadies,” is a performance poetry group mentored by Danielle Jones-Pruett. Last year the group consisted of seniors Dakota Durbin, Chrissi DiMartino, and Bridget Kennedy and three underclassmen: Savannah Robbins, Marissa Cuggino, and me. We spent the majority of fall semester in composition mode, writing in response to prompts Danielle created. The topics she chose often involved volatile social justice issues, such as gun violence, domestic abuse, sexual harassment, and stereotypes in media. The spring consisted of revision and refinement mode, as we honed our poems and our performance based on feedback from Danielle, Dakota, and visiting writer Krysten Hill. Before we knew it, May arrived; finals loomed; the slam competition awaited, and the time to revise had passed. On the way to Salem, I remember feeling ready, unprepared, confident, and anxious all at once. I wasn’t sure whether to hang on to my printed-out poems or spread them across Route 114. The festival, a looming unknown, could intimidate anyone with its all-star headliners.

***Why can't you understand  
I am a powerhouse  
My body is my temple  
And you will get on your knees  
You will pray  
To all the women that couldn't  
meet your standards  
You will respect them, you will  
respect me  
—Savannah Robbins***

As an event, the Festival is huge, filling every corner of Salem. The old town hall served as central staging area, where dozens of volunteers passed out badges and booklets to droves of readers and writers. Waiting lines extended out the doors of every entrance to the building. During the process, people began to recognize one another and fall out of line to embrace, or catch up, or promote their own events over the weekend, and these sparks of familiarity carried through the restaurants we sat in, the stores we ventured through, and the streets we explored. Banners strung between buildings spanned the width of avenues, announcing the festival in bold maroon letters. Advertising, however, did nothing to convey the true nature of the weekend; more specifically, it gave no indication of how underground the Poetry Festival would be. From hotel basements to hollow churches, authors read their works from folding chairs and pulpits. The Hawthorne Hotel was one such reading hotspot; coincidentally, it hosted the Merrimack Slam Team. We arrived the morning of the 4th and parked beneath the awning of the towering building. I remember reading Yelp reviews of the Hawthorne, totally unaware of its notoriety as a haunted staple of Salem.

Imagine my surprise when I saw that one reviewer characterized the site paradoxically as “welcoming” and “chilling.” The author confessed to having paranormal experiences in the hotel rooms on the second and third floors. Imagine my surprise when I found out, five minutes later, that we were staying on the second and third floors of the hotel! Though I didn’t experience bedside hauntings, our stay at the Hawthorne did set the mood for the rest of the weekend. In a way, residing in such a spiritual place relaxed our minds and fueled in us



a willingness to encounter all the festival had to offer.

No one can understand the power of slam without having experienced it. Until you've found yourself raw-voiced, hands splayed and shaking before the crowd while you deliver a poem in which you've invested your passions, your vulnerabilities, your furies, you can only imagine what it's like to feel the shot of energy

***Praise Marx, whose name once  
dropped gave us license to  
show our snowflake hearts  
Praise her courage to tell the  
joke she thought was bad,  
about snowflakes winning  
against Nazis in Stalingrad  
Praise our education that we  
both  
knew Stalingrad.  
—Marissa Cuggino***

you receive from delivering a word to an audience. And if you've never been on the receiving end of a slam poem, it remains unlikely that you have ever felt the power of a word, phrase, or image coursing through your person. Slam poetry is a close relative to one of our culture's oldest art forms. Before the invention of paper and writing, we passed down our most important and captivating narratives by word of mouth. Poets, who were often traveling performers, delivered them to audiences and those core stories shifted a bit during every delivery and evolved over time. The temporal nature of the tales and those who shaped them electrified the medium; there was no going back to experience those words uttered in that exact same way again. Now, slam poetry is one of the few remaining vestiges of that tradition. Perhaps participating in this medium feels so liberating because of this pedigree. Like the covens still pocketed

away in Salem, slam poets embody voices and styles from histories long forgotten. Slam allowed our team to pierce barriers we found unbreakable before; it provided a powerful, public and immediate delivery system for our thoughts, as well as our hopes for the future.

The slam-off occurred the night of the 4th in the basement of the Hawthorne, a room inexplicably decorated like a ship and covered in mirrored surfaces. We performed alongside Salem State University, Gordon College, and Endicott College. Judges rated every performance on a scale of one to ten, and the moderator subtracted the highest and lowest rating before calculating the final score. Bridget and I performed pieces on gun violence in schools and homes, while Chrissi performed a piece about unhealthy relationships, Marissa focused on the wonders and angst of new love, and Savannah vocalized her experiences with sexual harassment. Performances by the other colleges included poems about mental illness, sexuality, the education system, and other topics similar to our own. The Merrimack Slam Team, in the end, came out victorious, with each performer scoring some of the highest individual ratings of the night. We took home a cash prize of \$100, but as sentimental as it sounds, I think each of us valued the experience above the cash award.

Each slam team and even each slammer seemed to embody a unique style. One young woman—a student from Gordon—performed in speed-rap style, performing with such flawless delivery that every word came through with a sharp edge. Another student from Salem State delivered an emotional piece on his last moments with a deceased friend. Admittedly, our Slam Team became a bit of an echo chamber over time, as we grew accustomed to one another's styles and the stories. However, performing at this competition felt fresh—brand new, and exploratory. I can only hope we had the same impact on those who witnessed our recitations. After the competition participants had little time to talk to one another, but each individual had something kind to say to his or her fellow performers. From start to finish, despite the scoring, it didn't feel like a true competition—it became a friendly gathering of virtual strangers.

The next day, I found myself stopped in the street by a familiar face. The night of the competition, a woman referred to as the "sacrificial poet" had performed a piece to "calibrate" the judging process, showing us the range of scores and how critical each individual judge tended to be. This same poet and I crossed paths once more, and this time, she complimented our poems as a team, before discussing my two pieces and going far enough to invite me to a bar. Since I am only nineteen, I sadly had to decline. Regardless, in that moment the random kindness expressed by this newfound writer felt life-changing. I didn't find it particularly hard to fall into the art of slam poetry, but to be validated by a writing professional in the field proved to me that if anything, I was truly growing my skills as a performer.



We'd see our newfound friends again and again over the course of the weekend, as we used our cash prize to eat, shop, and tour our way through the town. \$100 didn't go very far, but thankfully the poetry readings came free of charge and the variety among available choices was tantalizing. Two events of note were "You Are Here: Writing From Your Place in History", which consisted of talks by Danielle Jones-Pruett, Jill McDonough, and Nomi Stone, three poets who used their art to discuss their personal experiences with recent political issues, Jill concentrating on the ethics involved in drone warfare. Another choice was labeled the "Four Way Books" reading. At this event five poets read from their latest works—published versions and drafts. The panel consisted of Vincent Guerra, Andrea Cohen, Miranda Field, Margaree Little, and Kamilah Aisha Moon. Kamilah and Miranda read works about their families, while Andrea read a series of poems she'd written that morning. These two events, held within a couple of hours of one another, demonstrated the wide variety of events offered at the Mass Poetry Festival. I left with the impression that someone could attend a panel devoted virtually to anything....provided that individual could find the hidden corner in Salem where it would be held.



Below I have reproduced excerpts of some of my favorite poems from our collection of winning pieces:

***PRAISE—THE GOTH.***

***PRAISE THE METALLIC SHINE OF TAPPING NAILS ON BATHROOM COUNTER,  
PRAISE THICK EYELINER THAT KNOWS NO OTHER WAY TO BE BUT BOLD,  
PRAISE, PRAISE THE MIND WHO CONCEIVED OF METALLIC GUNMETAL LIPSTICK.  
GOTH BLESS THIS SHADE IN THE NAME OF THE OLD GODS.  
PRAISE THE EASY WAY IT GLIDES OVER SKIN, LEAVING THE FAINT SCENT OF POSTFEMINIST  
POWER BEHIND IT  
PRAISE THE WAY THE CURVE MAKES APPLICATION EASY, HOW QUICKLY IT COVERS RED  
WITH DARKNESS  
PRAISE IMPULSE BUYS AND CHANCES GIVEN TO USE THEM.  
PRAISE HER LIPS NEARLY THE SAME SHADE IN MATTE EYESHADOW  
PRAISE THE WAY DIM LIGHT REVEALS THE GLITTER ON HER FACE IN ONES AND TWOS—  
PRAISE THE CONSTELLATION THEY MAKE . . .***

—Excerpt of "Goth Bless" by Marissa Cuggino

*You can look at me  
Just a brief up and down  
You can pick and choose what part of me turns you on  
What part of me is good enough  
Because of course  
You have standards  
And what are you looking for  
Knowing I could never fill your requirements . . .*

—Excerpt of "Sexualized", Savanah Robbins

# OCTOPATH TRAVELER: THE QUEST FOR TOTAL POWER AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

By: Calvin Evans

*Octopath Traveler* is a Japanese role-playing game, or JRPG, developed by Square Enix and published by Nintendo for its console, the Nintendo Switch, in 2018. A JRPG video game places a player in control of a character who fights enemies, gains experience, and can then use that experience to level-up and earn new abilities, increasing stat points such as strength, speed, or defense. JRPGs typically take place in a fantasy setting and challenge protagonists to save kingdoms, or even worlds, from a great evil. Mechanically, JRPGs feature turn-based or open world battling, a pre-scripted plot, and non-player-character, or NPC, interactions that help guide and inform the player. *Octopath Traveler* conforms to these conventions, but it also modifies them all in a way that makes for a compelling, if disjointed, story.



*Octopath Traveler* presents the player with a choice of eight separate protagonists: Ophelia, Cyrus, Tressa, Olberic, Primrose, Alfyn, Therion, and H'aanit (the first letters of each name spelling "OCTOPATH"). Instead of offering only one primary protagonist who meets friends and forms alliances, which is standard to JRPGs, in *Octopath Traveler* each character becomes the protagonist of his or her own story. Each pursues a four-chapter growth arc that players monitor.

At the beginning of the game, the player chooses one of the eight protagonists, but then can collect the other seven over the course of the development arc and experience those stories as well. However, the player's protagonist of choice remains locked in to their party, while the other seven can shift in and out of the tale to make different compositions of four party members. For example, on my first playthrough of *Octopath Traveler*, I selected Alfyn, and then met up with the seven other characters. My main party consisted of Alfyn, Primrose, Olberic, and Tressa, though I could use any of the other four, so long as Alfyn stayed in my party.

While this feature of the game might initially appear gimmicky, its novelty quickly emerges. Having eight distinct character histories and storylines to engage and navigate becomes critical to the macro-narrative of the game. Because of this element of choice, *Octopath Traveler* takes a genre oriented conventionally to a simplistic plot line, that is "saving the world," and complicates things by requiring personal investment. The effect becomes similar to the way in which Glen Cook's *Black Company* series shifted the fantasy genre focus from the typical world-saving exploits of Frodo, Aragorn, and Garion to the daily-grind challenges faced by common soldiers. *Octopath Traveler* leaves high fantasy tropes behind. In place of those tropes, the player experiences stories along a broad spectrum—from the classic revenge tale to the coming-of-age story, from the journey of faith to the man struggling to understand why he wields his sword. Regardless of which character the player chooses, the story feels incredibly personal and the stakes are high, but only for that particular character and not the world. These smaller scale stories relegate plot, usually the main driving force behind JRPGs, to the back seat, moving character development to the front.

The main difficulty when designing a game with eight separate story lines involves connecting the characters. *Octopath Traveler* accomplishes this goal through world building, battle mechanics, and party chat, with some of the connections working better than others. The world of *Octopath Traveler* is large. With eight distinct regions, each with three cities and towns, four routes, and four dungeons, it can take hours to explore every single area. The dungeons do begin to feel formulaic after going through three or four, but the amount of time and effort involved in designing each area I found palpable. By inventing a live and vibrant world, the designers created an environment in which players believe real people could live and interact. The game also maintains all eight characters in the same physical space. They visit the same cities and meet the same people. This aspect of the fantasy, though laudable, can become a bit clunky. An issue surfaces when two characters in your party have a chapter in the same city. The first time you go to that city, the story progresses normally. But when you open the next character's chapter, you quickly recognize that all of the characters are experiencing the city for the first time all over again. This element of repetition illuminates an element of disconnectedness that tends to mitigate the player's fantasy experience while playing.

Battle mechanics, which are a critical part of the JRPG genre, serve as another way in which the designers of *Octopath Traveler* tie characters together. Each enemy in the game carries a certain amount of armor, which a number inside of a shield indicates. Additionally, boxes located next to the armor rating list the number of weaknesses hampering each enemy. Weaknesses might be physical, such as swords or axes, or magical, such as fire or ice. Six weapon types and six types of magic tally twelve weaknesses overall. By attacking an enemy with its weakness, a player lowers that enemy's armor value. When that number reaches zero, the enemy becomes disabled for an entire turn. During this period of vulnerability, characters inflict more damage on one another. However, each character lacks the omnipotent capacity to employ every type of weapon or magic, so trying to defeat enemies in the game with a single character becomes nearly impossible. Therefore, characters must rely on one another to compensate for their own weakness. Alfyn, for example, might not be sufficiently capable of weakening a particular enemy, but Olberic is. To succeed characters must embrace interdependence.



A major problem concerning character alliances becomes prominent during the cut scenes of their specific chapters. Because there are so many potential party compositions, designers have written each storyline so that it focuses only on one protagonist and this feature at times ignores troublesome questions involving ethics. In one narrative thread Alfyn, for example, who is an apothecary dedicated to saving lives, helps Primrose avenge her father's death by killing her father's murderers. *Octopath Traveler* never addresses these issues head-on, making supporting characters often seem like incidental fringe elements. To compensate, the designers introduced the Party Banter feature into each chapter. Here, the player can view small conversations between the current protagonist and his or her party members. These conversations reveal the responses of the other characters to what is going on in the protagonist's story. While these snippets are useful, I found myself wanting more. Banter elements succeed at showcasing friendship and camaraderie between characters, but because they were so short and far apart, they ended up highlighting the lack of character interaction more than making up for it.

In the post-game ending all story lines really come together and show that *Octopath Traveler* is a complete game, not just an anthology of stories that exist in the same world. After the player finishes all eight story lines, along with two specific side quests, he or she may then choose to enter the final dungeon. Here, the player navigates a gauntlet consisting of previous bosses that are much more difficult to defeat than their original incarnations, culminating in the final boss battle of the game, requiring the cooperation of all eight party members in order to succeed. This ultimate alliance represents the first time all eight join in a single fight. But this dungeon transcends the conventional mechanical connection. After beating each boss in the gauntlet, victory rewards the player with the privilege of reading a journal, letter, or some other document that fills in more history of the world. These supplements disclose the greater forces at work behind the scenes of the main characters, elucidating the ways in which each of their stories and actions have both been influenced by the same set of characters and how characters behind the scenes have influenced the protagonists.

It would be easy to interpret this miracle coda as an example of lazy writing, that is, that the designers failed to meaningfully affiliate their characters, so they threw some stuff together at the end. I would argue, however, that this means of bringing about closure in the game is remarkable, because it addresses players directly. Video games are an interactive form of art and JRPGs tend to interact with their players on a mechanical level: if you choose the right options in battle, you will win, but going to one town before another will not affect the plot of the game. *Octopath Traveler* avoids this element of predictability. The ending, departing from the rest of the game, does have world-saving consequences, but that becomes possible only if the player accomplishes specific tasks. In trying to complete the game, you, the player, are slowly pushing the world of *Octopath Traveler* towards a terrible darkness. As a genre, JRPGs encourage players to explore, to find and do everything, but in *Octopath Traveler*, finding and doing everything ends up being manifestly bad for the world. This is not to say that you should purposefully avoid certain side quests or objectives, just that a quest for total knowledge and total power might unleash unwanted consequences—as it is in life. “Players” must learn the rules of the game (which are constantly shifting), weigh options, make sacrifices, rely on others, and ultimately make choices of consequence.



In this way *Octopath Traveler* forges true connections. The characters must work together to accomplish their personal goals. The world, the battles, and the conversations all link the characters together. And more than that, the game links itself to its players by revealing the consequences of all choices and all actions. *Octopath Traveler* reminds us that everyone reaps the reward and pays the price for his or her decisions and behavior.

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## THE PRICE OF ADAPTING *MOULIN ROUGE* FOR THE STAGE

By: Cassandra Kacoyannakis

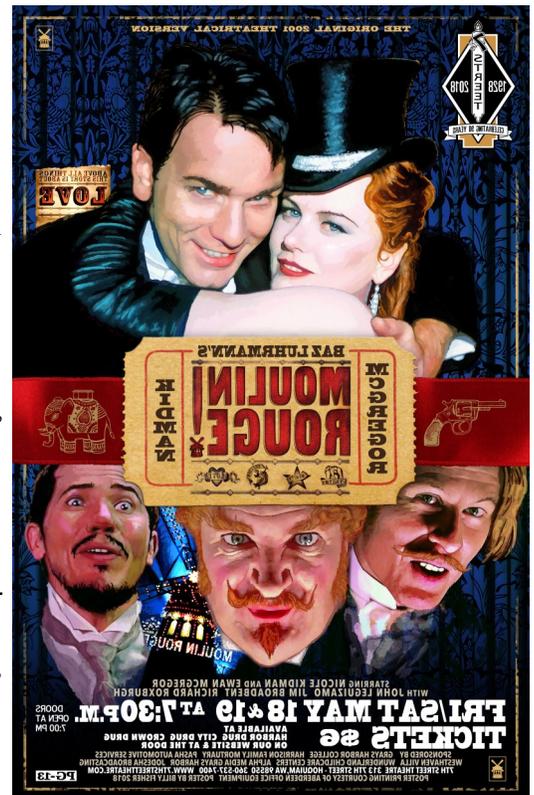
The 2001 film *Moulin Rouge* produced a mixed bag of reviews. While some critics regarded director Baz Luhrmann's creation as a hot mess, others found the film captivating. I found this movie to be one of a kind, because it was one of the first musicals to integrate covers of popular songs instead of a score consisting of original music. The film features calculated melodrama, multiple dream sequences, and pop-up book inspired transitions as means to engage its viewers. The film has left a lasting impression on my generation, one that I have never quite understood until now.

The film's narrator, singer and writer Christian (played by Ewan McGregor) recounts his time spent in Paris at the Moulin Rouge, a nightclub that caters to those who do not belong. The club's leading lady, called Satine (played by Nicole Kidman), and its owner Harold Zidler (played by Jim Broadbent) find themselves delighted when a man that goes by the title of the Duke shows interest in investing in the Moulin Rouge. As an insurance policy, Zidler encourages Satine to seduce the Duke later that same night in the Elephant Room. In a crazy turn of events, Christian ends up in the Elephant Room and he and Satine fall in love. Once the Duke enters the scene, the two convince him to finance a musical on which Christian and his friends have been working. The Duke, smitten with Satine, spends the entire rehearsal process pursuing her. However, she finds any excuse to be with Christian. Once the Duke learns of the affair, he contemplates Christian's murder. He doesn't understand why in the world Satine would choose to be poor with Christian rather than financially well off with him. Zidler forces Satine to end her relationship with Christian, clearing the way for the Duke to continue putting his money into the club. Complicating matters further, Zidler reveals that consumption has caused the fainting spells besetting Satine and he apologizes for withholding the information. She breaks off the relationship with Christian, but toward the end of the film they end up together. The Duke has lost. The romance denouement shatters, however, when Satine, at the end, collapses. Christian holds her as she dies.

Though the film is now 17 years old, the beauty of *Moulin Rouge* endures for me. Luhrmann is known for his creative directing style. For me, this film has always generated a reaction in me similar to that produced by a pop-up book, as scene transitions and new characters unfold in ways that fill me with wonder. Luhrmann takes great care to ensure the viewer understands that the film conveys a retrospective. You learn within the first minute that Satine dies in the end, eliminating the element of surprise. While I can't say I favor this film above all others I've seen, I can appreciate many of its features and respect its ability to inspire such strong reactions in its viewers. Many of my friends developed an obsession for this movie. McGregor and Kidman are glorious singers, and McGregor, on top of that talent, is pretty easy on the eyes. The film makes you laugh wholeheartedly and cry with a broken heart. It moves you. John Logan was obviously struck by the film's power and wanted to adapt it for the stage.

Last summer, the Emerson Colonial Theatre in Boston held a pre-Broadway tryout of a stage adaptation. Logan endeavored to resolve what he must have regarded as some of the film's problems, but the restaging engendered its own set of issues.

For the most part, the plot remained the same in the stage adaptation. Few minimal changes occurred, such as the circumstances under which Christian meets his artistic friends and the fact that the story would now unfold live on stage. In addition, the musical incorporated into the script substantially more musical numbers, and that scoring included songs from contemporary popular culture, such as "Firework" by Katy Perry and "Chandelier" by Sia.



One of the boldest decisions was the opening song at the Moulin Rouge. The movie featured a quick chorus whereas the musical stretched the number out. As a music enthusiast, I loved that the musical piled on melodies, including the movie's only original song, "Come What May." However, that additional delight pushed the running time to three hours, just under an hour longer than the movie. It became difficult to sit through, but during the performance I attended the audience endured because the stage adaptation was immensely entertaining.



I mentioned earlier that the staged version of *Moulin Rouge* resolved some of the problems I believe plague the film. Some of those problems involve continuity. For example, one minor plotline issue involves whether or not the Moulin Rouge needs a financial investor. When the film introduces the nightclub, the audience can't help but notice that the club is filled with affluent-looking men dressed in tuxedos, suggesting that the club's clientele has more than enough money to spend on drinks and women. This visual image undercuts Zidler's claim that the club needs money, indicating that Zidler is more greedy than his establishment needs. Luhrmann fails to supply Zidler's motivation until the end of the film, making it almost

impossible for a viewer to resolve the potential contradiction. Logan's opening scene, however, places a sparse group of patrons at the club, suggesting the Moulin Rouge remains financially strapped and, consequently, justifies Zidler's request that Satine seduce the Duke and break off her affair with Christian.

Other issues involve character motivation and behavior. Zidler, for one, remains ridiculously problematic in the movie. Movie-Zidler only cares about his business and does not show much genuine concern for Satine. When he learns about her illness, he demands that everyone in the room suppress the information. Furthermore, when movie-Zidler first learns of Satine's affair, he screams at her, asking "Are you mad? The Duke holds the deed to the Moulin Rouge. He's spending a fortune on you. He's given you a beautiful new dressing room. He wants to make you a star and you're dallying with the writer." Movie-Zidler pressures Satine to end her relationship with Christian. His explanation reveals selfishness, his desire to become rich and famous. Other factors, however, motivate what I'll call stage-Zidler. From the beginning, audience members know that everyone at the Moulin Rouge is family. When Satine suffers a coughing fit and Zidler catches her, they share a heartfelt moment over her illness in which he demonstrates genuine compassion. He communicates the same reaction when he learns of her affair with Christian. Zidler on stage comes across as a concerned friend, not a rapacious boss.

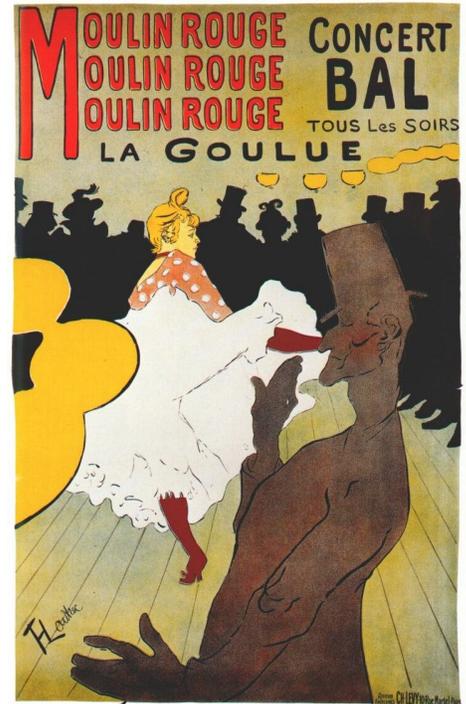
In *Moulin Rouge* the film, Satine understands that her job description includes more than singing and dancing. The club and her own financial circumstances force her to seduce men. And she seems to enjoy her career choice. When Zidler identifies the Duke as Satine's next target, Kidman embraces the prospect. She shows no remorse and is eager to seal the deal. Stage-Satine, played by Karen Olivo, plays the role differently. While Kidman plays Satine as someone confident in her choices, Olivo creates a different character. Her version of Satine expresses no pleasure over having to seduce the Duke, though she knows circumstances give her little choice. This small adjustment creates a colossal shift in the adaptation, since it furnishes Satine's character with a true emotional arc. She feels guilty from the start, and tries to pull away from Christian, but cannot. The conflict tears at her heart. Only once she recognizes the nature and severity of her illness does she end her relationship with Christian. This emotional complexity makes the Satine we witness on stage immensely more interesting than the same character we see on celluloid. The stage version of Satine absorbs audience members into her story and allows us to empathize with her decisions. In the movie, although we want her to be with Christian, she seems so headstrong that she would probably manage if she were forced to remain with the Duke.

This is not to say the stage adaptation was perfect. It was not. The longer musical score lengthened the story and the amount of time I had to sit in the theater. What's more, throughout the performance, specifically during intermission, I was trying to decide if I was watching a conventional stage performance or one encouraging audience participation. In participatory theatre the cast prompts participation from the audience, which might take the form of singing and dancing along, or becoming a kind of collective character in the show. The 2016 tour of *Pippin*, for example, used this dramatic mode and it worked brilliantly. Purist theater-goers, however, often regard this generic variation as a lesser form, because it often sacrifices narrative depth, texture, and emotional intensity. Participatory shows aim at providing fun, not sending a deep, and sometimes difficult, message. Traditional theatre, however, shoots for the opposite. Auditors listen, observe and react; they do not sing and dance along. As a genre, the traditional stage manifests a capacity to compel audience members, as they become witnesses to a live unfolding of character and events, perhaps encouraging them to look at themselves and reevaluate past decisions, a different form of participation.

The Emerson Colonial Theater version of *Moulin Rouge* frustrated me because the show evidently convinced some of my fellow theater-goers that they were entitled to participate. The actors playing Christian and Satine took outstanding vocal liberties with some of the songs, leaving me breathless; however, a group of young women sitting in front of me somehow got the impression that this performance was really a concert and they were allowed to sing along. I wanted to beg them to stop dancing and singing and to listen to the music. Despite the blood-pressure raising annoyances, though, I found Aaron Tveit, who played Christian, to be one of the most talented tenors I have ever heard. Someone singing over him seemed sinful. Furthermore, Olivo acted out Satine's death with grace, beauty and drama, and I can say that I haven't been as moved by a performance since I saw *Fun Home and Matilda* on Broadway in 2016...but then John Logan ruined it.

Immediately after Satine's death, Christian sang the tagline from "Your Song," "how wonderful life is, that you're in the world" and the theatre went dark. The audience sat in silence. A light appeared on Zidler's face and he whispered the words "because we can, can, can," which is one of the most infamous songs of the movie. At this cue, the lights went up full blast, with the cast singing and dancing happily, as if Satine hadn't just expired! I was appalled and hurt. The show seemed to mock the fact of Satine's death (or to acknowledge that people needed time to process the event), resorting to burlesque. After talking with a few people as we walked to our cars, the consensus was that the show had insulted us, that it had failed to make good on promises it had made throughout the performance.

So what's my verdict? I'm still trying to work that out. While I preferred the some aspects of the stage version's musical arrangement, its plot coherence and more moving character portrayal, the ending made me cringe to no end. As for characterization, Satine's emotional development felt more relatable, because of her ambivalence and insecurity, complexities missing from the headstrong movie-Satine. At times, furthermore, the movie felt choppy and its characters difficult to understand. I had a hard time staying in the movie. Luhrmann made it clear that his film delivers a retrospective and makes no effort to conceal the ending. Sitting through the stage version I found myself, almost ridiculously, getting so caught up in the plot and the music that I would forget the tragic ending. I don't think I can create a more definite answer until the musical premieres on Broadway in the 2019-2020 season. Until then, I will continue to wrestle with the complexity of my own mixed reactions.



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