

The Broad Sheet

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Editor's Note

The main body of this issue of *The Broadsheet* features a collection of reviews treating a range of popular and literary media, showcasing analytical and interpretive skills our majors hone in the English program. The issue also includes photo essays featuring images from two English field activity courses currently running this semester, ENG 4102 The New England Shore and ENG 3715 American Witches: in Salem and on Screen. The New England shore focuses on works of nonfiction produced by New England coastal writers, such as Robert Finch, Henry Beston, and Celia Thaxter, and takes students to local seacoast locations about which they are reading. American Witches was designed by Professor Christy Pottroff and it concentrates on the 1692 Salem Witch Trials “and their many invocations over the course of American Literature and film.” Professor Pottroff’s brochure description informs students that they “will spend the first half of the semester in the archive, studying diary entries, trial transcripts, and other records of the Salem Witch Trials, as well as interpretations of the trials in their immediate aftermath.” The photo essay relevant to her course shows students working with archival documents housed at the Phillips Library in Rowley, Massachusetts and participating in an ink-making workshop held at the Writers House. The photo essay from The New England shore includes shots of students hiking along the shoreline and traversing dune forest trails on a sunbathed 13 degree Saturday in February at Crane’s Beach in Ipswich, Massachusetts. The excursion coincided with their reading of William Sargent’s *The House on Ipswich Marsh*. Both courses represent ongoing effort by English faculty to provide students with exciting opportunities to extend learning beyond the traditional classroom. (Incidentally, Professor Pottroff will teach an additional field activity course during the fall 2019 semester called Literary Boston.) Cheers!

Professor Vatalaro

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.

A COSTLY *GAME OF THRONES*: SEASON FINALE MAKES IT THE MOST EXPENSIVE SHOW ON TELEVISION

BY KRISTIN COLE

In the nine years since *Game of Thrones* premiered, the HBO hit fantasy has taken the world by storm. After seven seasons and sixty-three episodes replete with gruesome deaths, breathtaking battles, and shocking plot twists, the eighth and final season, consisting of six episodes, is set to air this April. The success and popularity of the drama has subsequently come with an astonishing price tag, as the budget for the series finale makes *Game of Thrones* the most expensive television show to date. So, why the sudden surge in production costs?

Though based on the best selling fiction series by George R. R. Martin, *Game of Thrones* has shot beyond the plotline of the novels, primarily because Martin has apparently been crippled by writer's block, thus suspending the next installment of his series (much to the irritation of his large fan base.) The latest novel and the source material for the sixth season, *A Dance With Dragons* was released back when the show began in 2011. Martin explained that he neglected to create maps for his storylines, a proclivity that leaves him struggling to oversee complicated, intertwined narrative strands. Meanwhile, fans of the novels wonder whether or not they will have to rely on the television series to find out what will happen to their favorite characters.

Surpassing *The Sopranos* as HBO's most popular show of the decade, the penultimate season finale of *Game of Thrones* broke viewer records. The episode, titled "The Dragon and the Wolf," aired in August 2017 and attracted an estimated 12.1 million viewers. If one were to include viewers that used the network's streaming apps, the number increases to over 16 million. Though HBO might revel in its success at producing a cultural phenomenon, the achievement carries a hefty price tag. It has been reported that the final six episodes cost a whopping \$15 million each. According to an article by CNBC, this figure reflects an abnormally large budget for a show that was already expensive to make. The article explains, "starting with the show's sixth season, a single *Game of Thrones* episode cost around \$10 million to produce...That marks a budget increase of around \$4

million per episode, up from the approximate \$6 million earlier episodes cost..." Numerous factors contribute to the escalating expenses for the network, including a commitment to shooting at exotic locations, incorporating realistic battle scenes, constructing elaborately designed sets, and, of course, paying cast salaries.



When *Game of Thrones* debuted, the cast included many low profile, B-list actors, with the exception of a few big names, such as Sean Bean and Peter Dinklage. The show's success has shuttled many of its lead actors into the celebrity spotlight, including Kit Harington, Lena Headey, Sophie Turner and Emilia Clarke. The actors behind the main characters in the show each have a net worth of over \$1 million, with some, including Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, coming in at more than \$15 million. These stars, according to *Marketplace.org*, earn \$1.1 million salaries per episode. The consistent quality of the performers, however, makes the impressive dollar outlay worth every penny. Over the course of the show's seven seasons, character development has been fantastic, despite increasingly complicated storylines, and the chemistry created by the cast members off the set permeates the characters they play on set, allowing them to bring greater depth and richness to Martin's abundantly captivating stories.

Battle episodes, two of the most famous titled "Blackwater" (season two, episode nine) and "Battle of the Bastards" (season six, episode nine), also challenge the show's budget, sometimes spanning almost one entire hour. "Blackwater" cost approximately \$8 million, after producers requested additional funding for the purchase of extravagant props (one being a 14th century battleship.) According to CNBC, the expenditure paid off, as "Blackwater" became

“one of the show’s most admired and popular episodes, and it drew even more viewers to the series.” “Battle of the Bastards” proved equally arresting. While the exact price of this episode remains unknown, *Entertainment Weekly* listed some of the astonishing numbers involved in the shooting: six-hundred crew members, five hundred extras, 160 tons of gravel, seventy horses, twenty-five stuntmen, twenty-five days of filming, and four camera crews.

The producers of *Game of Thrones* understand that vivid battle scenes serve as powerful vehicles for character and narrative development. For example, a highly underappreciated battle occurred during the penultimate episode of season four, titled “The Watchers on the Wall.” This episode uncharacteristically focused on one storyline and consisted of almost 60 minutes of intense combat scenes. The CGI and parallel camera work captured memorably the battle and its most climactic moments. This action-packed episode represented the atrocities of war and the rise of unlikely leadership., specifically the development of Jon Snow, true heir to the Iron Throne.

The beauty and stunning detail of on-location settings over the first seven seasons of *Game of Thrones* also inflates production costs. *Thrones* has

The penultimate season finale of Game of Thrones attracted an estimated 12.1 million viewers.

filmed in a wide variety of locales, including Northern Ireland, Iceland, Croatia, Malta, Morocco and Spain, and in the process has benefitted economies in these nations. For example, CNBC stated that, when *Game of Thrones* was filmed in Iceland, “250 crew, actors, and extras were working on the scenes...and 500 hundred rental cars were used during shooting.” The consequences resemble the windfall triggered by the *Lord of the Rings*, which was shot in New Zealand. Even a decade after the first trilogy was filmed, the country still collects millions of dollars in *Lord of the Rings*-based tourism. While shooting on-location may have been a pricey endeavor for the HBO network, the approach contributed realism and credible detail to the show’s overall texture. Actual location combines with groundbreaking CGI effects to bring to life Martin’s terrifying White Walkers and majestic dragons.

While production practices and their costs remain eye-popping, *Thrones* gains back some of the ex-

penditure through merchandise. Fans can purchase thousands of products, from t-shirts to mugs to wall tapestries, online through sites such as Amazon and the HBO Shop. Even *Game of Thrones*-themed alcohol had been released by numerous companies such as Diageo, which purveys bottles of scotch ranging from \$30 to \$65. With the highly-anticipated final season coming up next month, it is likely that de-



Game of Thrones set in Northern Ireland. © HBO Game of Thrones

mand for *Game of Thrones* swag will shoot into the stratosphere.

Channeling so many resources into production of the series has deepened its texture, added complexity to its plot lines, and broadened the profiles of its characters. Though fastidious commitment to production has never guaranteed success at the box office or in the living room, one consequence of the investment HBO has made is that fans really do not know what to expect from the upcoming season. The season seven finale wrapped with one of the most memorable cliffhangers in television history, promising an explosive and unexpected final season. In the meantime, we remain tantalized by observations made by cast members: Kit Harington, who plays Jon Snow, admitted that he wept during the initial table reading of the script for the finale, and Peter Dinklage, the Emmy-award winning actor who plays Tyrion Lannister, said, “It’s brutal. It makes the ‘Battle of the Bastards’ look like a theme park.”

The final episodes will air on HBO Sunday nights starting April 14th.

LOVE, THE WORLD, AND BECOMING: A REVIEW OF ANDREA GIBSON'S *TAKE ME WITH YOU* BY DAN ROUSSEL

At a glance, Andrea Gibson's poetry collection *Take Me With You*, reserves itself to a thin, pocket-sized binding; the title underscores its portable size. This volume carries us through heartbreak and breakthrough much as we might carry it with us through our day. However, many years of dedication and struggle with Gibson's experiences and identity have been compacted into this small work. And, because Gibson's work explores issues involving the plurality of gender identity, in this review I will be using gender-neutral "they/them" pronouns when referring to Gibson and her poem's speakers. Gibson discovered performance poetry at an open mic in Boulder, Colorado, initially taking on the Denver Grand Slam, and subsequently winning four times. After two decades of practicing and performing, the award-winning author has been a finalist in both national and international slam poetry competitions, such as National Poetry Slam, Individual World Poetry Slam, and the Women of the World Poetry Slam. Currently, Gibson has embarked on a world tour including venues in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. This poet—who in my opinion, has an almost godlike stage presence—may seem unapproachable, because of their massive success, as well as their open non-conformity, but this book brims with nothing but authenticity. It should come as no surprise that the worldly Gibson writes about a wide breadth of experiences in love, spite—and most surprisingly given some of their work—forgiveness. *Take Me With You* should be read in quiet moments—a ride on the train, a few minutes before class, or in the last hour of the weekend. In an unexpected change of pace, Gibson has contained each poem to a handful of lines. In these stories, a typewriter may be a dream; a closed music box may become heartbreak. The texts demonstrate this best midway through the book, saying "as for my heart / I'll say: / a music box is / still a music box / even when it's / closed." In 2014, Button Poetry published a video to its personal YouTube channel, entitled "Andrea Gibson: To the Men Catcalling my Girlfriend as I'm Walking Beside Her." For context, the Button Poetry company emphasizes accessible slam poetry as an independent poetry publisher based out of Minneapolis, regularly refreshing its

social media with recorded poetry from some of the world's most notable slam performers. Button Poetry currently boasts over one million subscribers on YouTube, about 200 million views, and a series of chapbooks from its most featured artists. In addition, it holds an annual contest to find upcoming performers, offering the finalists publication. As a slam poetry performer, I often pour through Button's extensive



video catalog. By chance, I stumbled upon Gibson's work and quickly fell in love with it. Gibson's recorded performances generate impressive vocal, conceptual and emotional power. Each piece served their signature flair: sharp delivery, biting wit, and acerbic admissions of both joy and fury. "Any feminist who has taken the high road gets backed up sometimes, and sometimes you need to take a detour straight through the belly of uncensored rage," Gibson admits in their October 2017 piece.

The biographical introduction to the book sums them up well, describing their work as "...a rally cry for action and a welcome mat at the door of the heart's most compassionate room," inviting readers and onlookers to join Gibson in rebellion against societal norms while acknowledging their own more tender inclinations. Their body of work supports this blend of calm and chaos with previous poetry collections such as their first, *Pansy*—which balances war with wonder—and their latest, *Lord of the Butterflies*—which focuses on the problematic, yet deeply intimate, nuances of family, gender, and love. *Take Me*

With You, unlike any other collection of Gibson's, doesn't feature full poems. Rather, it has been written in snippets, collected from the author's slam poetry and previous books alike. One such example is their poem "Royal Heart," which in full contains four minutes of material; in this chapbook, one line has been pulled from it for its own poem, simply stating that "feelings / are / not / the / enemy"—a phrase that has become the hallmark of Gibson's brand, featuring across much of their merchandise. The poet brings their emotions to the forefront in *Take Me With You*, as evidenced by the core three themes of the book.

Chapters entitled "On Love," "On The World," and "On Becoming" split the book into three sections, and three subsequent threads. I particularly enjoyed the way the book connects each small poem to each of the greater themes, as each of the three topics comes to the forefront at different moments, but still exists faintly in the background of other poems. A poem from the first section begs, "my love, / come beside me, 'til I find / your first silver hair in our tub. / 'Til I find your last silver / hair in our tub." While it asks for lifelong love on the surface, it also reflects on eventual death, and the nature of growing old—two concepts focused on in "On Becoming." The first section grapples with the fear of falling in love, intertwined with various metaphors for Gibson's multitude of lovers; these people become astronauts traversing celestial bodies, and those bodies themselves. The speaker's love feels paradoxically impossible yet promising as they say, "she makes me feel like / I could win the lottery / with a parking ticket." By the end of "On Love," however, they begin to struggle with loss. The aforementioned silver hair poem precedes the final piece of the section, which discusses Gibson's wish before they die to be one's confidant.

The second section, "On The World," revolves around the social justice aspect of Gibson's work—as an outspoken advocate for gender equality, non-binary people, and feminism, the diversity of the material has an expectedly wide span. My favorite piece of the entire collection lies within "On The World," where Gibson discusses the concept of tolerance toward minority groups. The speaker's words leave no gray area in their feelings, as they say, "I want to stoke the holy / fire of my own impatience

and / burn the world "tolerance". / Tolerance is a murderer. / Tolerance shines / the bullet," referencing the undercurrents of oppression and violence in a term made synonymous to "patience." The use of "impatience" and "tolerance" plays both words against one another, subverting expectations by painting Gibson himself as impatient, yet still morally upright. It plays on real-world issues but still features an internal shift, as Gibson acknowledges their own change as their impatience reaches a boiling point. This section features less direct narrative flow than "On Love," fluctuating without warning between peace, resignation, and outrage. "Wake me / when the / American / dream is / over," Gibson asks halfway through, before launching into a handful of poems about tear gas and seas of blood. As a result, I personally felt some tonal whiplash that made the section difficult to read and understand. While each individual poem worked within its own context, most of them fell flat when viewed as a collective section.

I thought this issue would continue into the third section because of the broad nature of "becoming," but it did not. The pieces all center around Gibson's existence in the world—what it means and how the poet exists, imperfections and all. I found that this third portion worked best because it did not restrict itself to a theme like "love" or "world," which conjures specific cultural images that aren't always congruent with Gibson's vision. Here, the scattered pieces simply work on their own. One of the poems reads, "...my heart has been rattled all day / because of it, and then I saw this / tree, this beautiful, beautiful tree / and I want to find a shovel, and find / that woman's house, and plant this / tree in



her front yard while she's / sleeping ... and I want no / one but God to tell her who it's from," while another simply says, "Bitterness is hell. / I've been working my ash off." These two poems, placed next to each other, have completely different stories to tell, but there's no inherent need for them to match. The open nature of this section leads Gibson in a thousand directions, with each piece coming toward their own little conclusions (or lack thereof). Upon first reading of *Take Me With You*, I found myself in awe—Andrea Gibson could become a full-fledged philosopher with the various musings in this single book. However, a second close reading of the text brought about one glaring issue I had. While I had made note of the excerpted nature of this collection the first time, the second time felt rather underwhelming. What makes Gibson's poetry work lies in the arc each piece follows—they all share a certain ebb and flow.

Gibson's "Button Poetry" currently boasts over one million subscribers on YouTube & about 200 million views

When these poems are cut up and scattered through the book without context, they lose most of their weight as a larger concept. For example, "I do not need air / traffic control to / tell me there may / never be enough / flights for me to lose / all of my baggage" is one such hard-hitting passage from the larger piece "Truce," (of the self-titled poetry album), which deals with emptiness and roadblocks in the way of growth. The next lines allude to this greater theme, saying "I am learning to claim it at the same carousel where I am learning [that] beating yourself up is never a fair fight, only knocks the wind out of our chances to come clean through that canyon." This exemplifies one piece that suffers when fragmented—one of many. As a whole, "Truce" powers through the weaponization of words, self-hatred, and the aversion of quiet moments. Another line from "Truce" and *Take Me With You* covers this aversion, where Gibson says, "the teacher said / 'silence is best' / I said / 'silence is bronze / at best.'" Once again, this line loses its context of youthful anxiety and the conflicting desire to speak out; rather, *Take Me With You* paints it as irreverent without much purpose. Overall, the snippet-style selection strips each quotation of its meaning, which shallows a sizable section of the collection. I love Gibson's work

for its depth and variety. Poems like "Truce" and "To the Men Catcalling My Girlfriend as I'm Walking Beside Her" cover several topics in a short span of time, flitting between concepts and connecting the pieces all throughout. *Take Me With You*, on the other hand, feels singular.

However, I have no intention of downplaying the entirety of Gibson's work—on the contrary, I find myself loving most of what they put out. *Pansy*, *Pole Dancing to Gospel Hymns*, *The Madness Vase*, and *Lord of the Butterflies* all feature full-length, self-contained poems of Gibson, with no line emphasized over another. Rather than acting as small compendiums of clever phrases, these books showcase the intricacies of Gibson's world; each individual poem demonstrates not just fear and rebellion, but how both concepts work against each other and what ties into them. These themes expand beyond any three categories, and a poem on love never encapsulates just love. In *Take Me With You*, Gibson summarizes what I've gleaned from their writing, saying "I hope never to be an / honest poet. / I hope to always / forgive faster than I / write." This line actually comes from one of Gibson's Facebook posts. In it, Gibson reflects on what can happen to an audience they're reading to, and the difference between bringing an audience to their feet and to their knees. Gibson ponders love, the world, and the peaceful solitude of simply being in a friend's kitchen, reading poetry while cooking breakfast. In one post, they cover the entire scope of this book. While I cannot help but feel tinges of disappointment in the format of *Take Me With You*, I believe it stands as an attempt at recreating that moment in the kitchen. This book invites quiet, small reflections, and maybe that just does not work for me. Perhaps the book aims for a different audience entirely. However, I still believe that some poets cannot be contained—poets such as Andrea Gibson. While *Take Me With You* makes a valiant, and arguably successful, attempt at doing so, I instead choose to draw inspiration from the poet's other works—works that let themselves crawl across pages and command your attention, that demand more than a snippet of time in one's ride on the train. In my opinion, Gibson works best with no filter, limit, or chain—just, as they say themselves, straight through the belly of uncensored rage.

A CURSED CHILD BECKONS: THE NEW YORK PRODUCTION OF THE HARRY POTTER SEQUEL

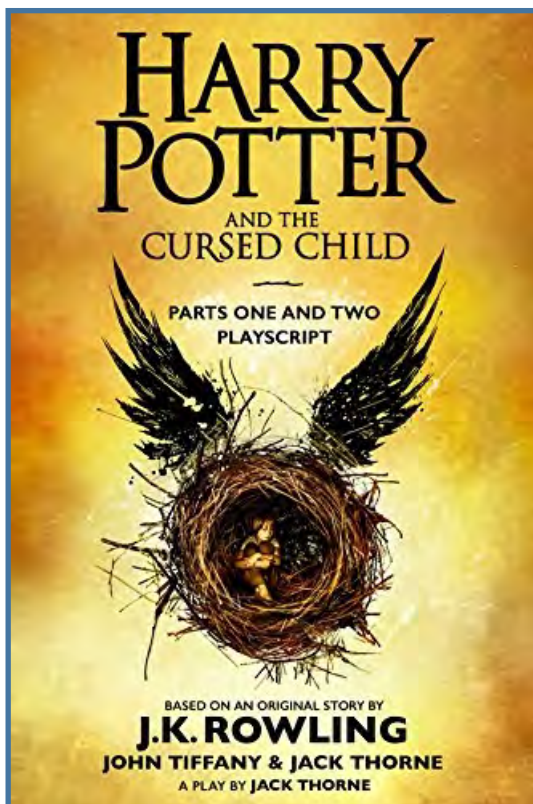
BY CASSANDRA KACOYANNAKIS

Harry Potter and the Cursed Child Parts I and II premiered at the West End Palace Theatre in June 2016 and did exceptionally well. The play eventually moved to Broadway, premiering in March 2018 at the Lyric Theatre. *Cursed Child* took out almost every competitor in the Tony Awards, winning Best Play, Best Direction of a Play, Best Scenic, Costume, Lighting, and Sound Design of a Play, while also being nominated for Best Actor in a Play, Best Featured Actor and Actress in a Play, as well as Best Choreography. The show continues to preserve its status on Broadway and will probably continue to do so.

The Potter fiction series was famous for its complexity, its depiction of childhood innocence and its shaping of magical adventure. It stars an orphaned boy named Harry Potter, who spent his first 12 years at 4 Privet Drive with a horrible Aunt, Uncle, and cousin. He only learned about his wizardhood when he was recruited to attend the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. During his six-year tenure at that institution, he learned the way of his dual life and continually battled with the evil Lord Voldemort, who had risen back to power. In his final year, Harry and his two best friends fled Hogwarts to hunt and destroy the remaining bits of Voldemort's soul. Harry concluded his journey by defeating Lord Voldemort and creating peace once again in the Wizarding World.

I started reading the books in first grade (the year 2003) and remember running back and forth from my room to my sister's, asking her how to pronounce each of the Latin spells. I was hooked. Every time I

finished the current sequence, I would start over. And I wasn't alone. As film adaptations were released, international obsession grew, no doubt motivating Universal Studios to create a theme park devoted to the Wizarding World *Potter* fans knew and loved.



Promotional poster for Harry Potter & The Cursed Child © JK Rowling

In April 2012, J.K. Rowling released a website called *Pottermore*. Fans could go through Harry Potter's story and be sorted into their houses. While *Pottermore* managed to keep the love alive, it fizzled out pretty quickly. Still, many gaming options existed, from game consoles to computer (which remain favorite adaptations for me). However there was still something missing. J.K. Rowling attempted to fill that void by releasing the movie trilogy *Fantastic Beasts* to create a new story and satisfy fans' cravings for answers. Though the trilogy became popular, fans longed for a continuation of Harry's story and with that, *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* was born.

The play spans two separate parts, a total of about five hours of theatre. Its plot concerns Harry's relationship to his second-born son, Albus. Albus believes he brings

failure to the "Potter" name, and to compensate he attempts to eliminate stress his father experiences at work by changing the past. This story provides Harry Potter fans with circumstances reminiscent of those Harry navigated when he attended school. By the end of the second play, Harry and his son (along with some friends) work together to destroy the evil forces dedicated to corrupting the world. Harry learns more about his son, and Albus learns more about his dad. Like Rowling's fiction series, the play resolves all conflict. Peace and harmony dominate the Potter universe.

Last November I jumped at the opportunity to see both plays in one day. My boyfriend and I pooled together our money and headed to New York for the performances. Just as we always do for any car ride, we spent our traveling time listening to *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*. Monday turned out to be a 16 hour day (we crawled into bed around 3 am), but, overall, it was well worth it.

As we walked into the theatre, every inch was altered from the floor to the ceiling. The ceiling contained different Patronuses painted around the edge and the flooring consisted of small “Hs” surrounded by stars, representing Hogwarts. In the corner of the lobby, a Christmas tree with a snowy owl (to represent Harry’s sacred owl, Hedwig) stood proud. “The Patronus Room” could be found just off the lobby, incorporating paintings of different Patronuses, accompanied by quotations from the novels serving as outline. Audience members of all ages arrived dressed up in diverse Harry Potter attire, from House shirts to the full Hogwarts robe. I was impressed and not at all surprised by the devotion. Once in the theatre, the set seemed fairly simple. I noticed only a single spotlight with some suitcases and a movable door. The proscenium consisted of steel arches that contained one clock on each side. I sat in anticipation waiting for the lights to go down. Once they did, the enchantment began.

Part I opened with an exuberant burst of energy. The Hogwarts students and their parents used suitcases to maneuver their way around the stage. Pieces of luggage became the Hogwarts Express (the magical train on Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$). The cast loaded the luggage on trolleys to quicken their pace and sustain the energy. The dialogue remained minimal, though the actors seemed dedicated to “walking with a purpose.” The students were eager and ecstatic at the prospect of returning to school, and it showed. Integration of music into the opening sequence of *Part I* startled me. I call the opening a “sequence,” because it reminded me briefly of a musical number. Although singing remained absent, every actor moved rhythmically to the music. The only moment of “true” dancing occurred when the students arrived at school for the year. That moment featured a genuine dance break that included jumping and twirling. I found the number magical and jaw dropping, primarily because it was so unexpected in a play that originates from a series involving many dark moments. At the end of the opening sequence, I almost stood to applaud the

cast members. No wonder the play was nominated for Best Choreography. With the help of the creative and production crews, the actors facilitated a new reality that whisked auditors away from their own lives.

When cast on Broadway, children sometimes perform astonishingly well; sometimes they miss the mark. When I saw *Matilda* and *Fun Home*, children and teenage actors delivered performances beautifully. The same applies to the children and teenage actors of *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*. Most of the characters, but especially Albus Potter, delivered skillfully long monologues informed by difficult emotions and lines for young actors to transfer accurately to the audience.

As for the adults, Jessie Fisher, who played the evil witch, Delphi, played the only part in the play that did not meet my expectations. I had difficulty overlooking this actor’s age throughout the performance. I couldn’t ignore the fact that the adult Fisher played a teenager but looked twice the age of Albus. However, I don’t place blame the script. The discontinuity originated with the actress. When Delphi reached her climactic moment of kidnapping the boys and taking them back to the moment in which Harry’s parents died, the play became unbelievable. She failed to pull off the transition from an inherently good witch to an evil witch.

Harry Potter and the Cursed Child became the top-grossing play in Broadway history, making \$2,138,859

That being said, I must give Jessie Fisher the benefit of the doubt. The best way to keep a story going is to create contrast with a new character. Delphi was the new creation. The actress developed her own background and cultivated a freedom that Harry’s actor could not. Although the play creates an original plotline for Albus, conflicts built into that story seemed forced. I would also like to note that Jessie Fisher has never taken part in a production as “out of this world” as Harry Potter. She has worked on the hit television show *Chicago P.D.* and performed in theater productions of Shakespeare. Jumping from Shakespeare to *Harry Potter* is not as simple as it sounds for any actor. Just like athletes, actors and

actresses have their strengths and weaknesses. I do not think Fisher did a bad job as Delphi. It might be a role not entirely suited to her talents. I would, nonetheless, welcome the opportunity to see her perform in a Shakespearean drama, at which she has been so successful.

As for the production of *Cursed Child*, much of the magic appearing throughout both plays remained noticeable if you knew what to look for. For example, I was able to make out the appearance of clear, heavy duty strings that permitted objects to move across stage. Bigger objects such as doors or tables moved via remote control, almost like toy airplanes. However, other magic tricks were executed with incredible care and managed to maintain illusion. During a duel between Harry and a nemesis from school, for example, chairs and books flipped through the air and halted evenly. How did books manage to stop so quickly and smoothly? While the objects were most likely on fishing wire, backstage actors stood just behind a specific sightline to catch them. As one of the chairs stopped suddenly in mid-air, I noticed that part of it turned black. Within a second, the chair moved a bit and the blackness disappeared.

*I knew it was a trick of the light, but
could I be sure?*

The most difficult execution of magic occurred when Potter's and Malfoy's children activated the Time-Turner. The entire stage seemed to move. I knew it was a trick of the light, but could I be sure? My boyfriend, having taken part in professional shows before, recognized that lighting created the trick. To alter color, lighting designers place different gels in front of the bulb. To create a dizzying effect, the gel moves back and forth on each light at slightly different paces.

Part II felt odd coupled to *Part I*. Urgency existed and kept audience members on the edge of their seats; however, this was not the same kind of energy that *Part I* produced. As I left the theatre, I realized the reason for my ambivalence have been that I really saw one play consisting of four acts, rather than two plays that were two acts each. *Part II* picks up right where *Part I* left off, yet did not feel nearly as cohesive as *Part I*. This occurrence should not have surprised me, since experience has taught me that the second act of a show is never as strong as the first.

Typically, the reason is that the story must resolve in Act II; therefore it struggles to maintain the same energy from Act I. It often seems to me that excessive dialogue and repetition often burden second acts and some scenes often feel completely unnecessary, yet for some reason they remain in the show.

The opening sequence of a show performs the crucial role of establishing energy and exciting the audience about the journey ahead and the finale of Act I typically creates a dilemma that the protagonists must resolve. In Act II a decisive moment normatively occurs indicating whether or not the performance will end happy or sad. This part commonly surfaces within the final scenes of the show in Act II. *Cursed Child* strays from that model.

Though I don't want to spoil the play's denouement for someone who has not yet seen it, the plot twist that emerged at the height of *Part II* of *Cursed Child* taxed my ability to find continuity and to figure out what was going on. Things did not fall as easily into place as I hoped, which almost made the conclusion feel forced. The play abandoned an it's-the-end-of-the-world trajectory and set course for comforts reminiscent of a *Leave It To Beaver* episode in the space of what seemed like sixty seconds. While I am still in love with the product I witnessed I must admit I may have set myself up for some disappointment. J.K. Rowling wrapped it up marvelously, but the ending felt too cliché, though I am convinced director John Tiffany did his best with the script he was given. He succeeded in creating a magical world for Harry Potter fans to inhabit for a while, but it will not last forever. The overall quality of *Cursed Child* should ensure it will last longer than the *Fantastic Beasts* franchise as well as Pottermore, but this play won't bring the story to rest.

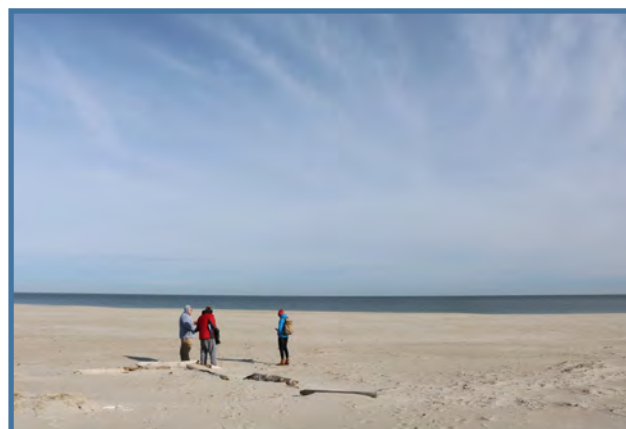
That being said, while issues exist within this play, they do not deter my adoration for *Cursed Child* or the *Harry Potter* series as a whole. *Cursed Child* remains the strongest spin off of *Harry Potter* I have witnessed. While it is not perfect, nothing will be as perfect as J.K. Rowling's original seven books. Fans still had questions from the international series, and this sequel served as J.K. Rowling's way of responding. Frankly, I find this much more heartfelt than a tweet intended to address readers' issues. I know I will be back in that theater soon, most likely with my sister, who also adores the *Harry Potter* narrative and the magical world it delivers.

**THE NEW ENGLAND SHORE. DESTINATION: CRANE'S BEACH, IPSWICH, MA., FEB 2, 2019.
TEMPERATURE 13 DEGREES.**

The Crane's Beach field trip coincided with the class reading William Sargent's *The House on Ipswich Marsh* (UPNE, 2005). Sargent's book weaves together natural history with memoir.

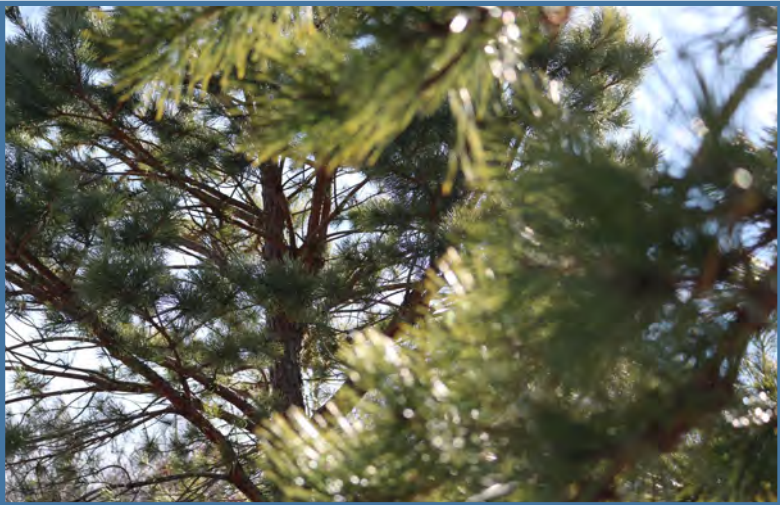
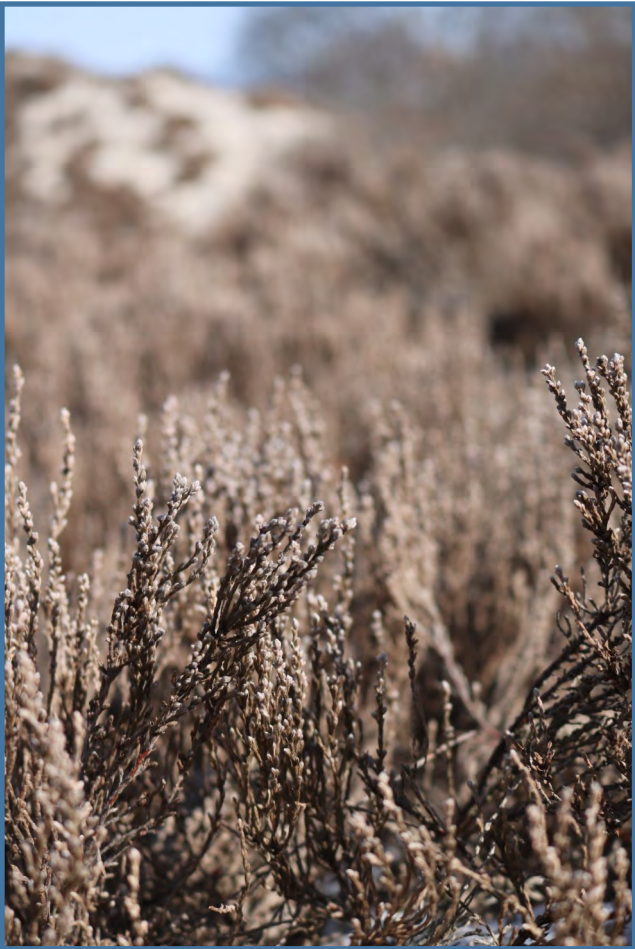


The New England Shore seminar travels to nearby coastal landscapes that inspired modern and contemporary local seacoast writers students study in the course.



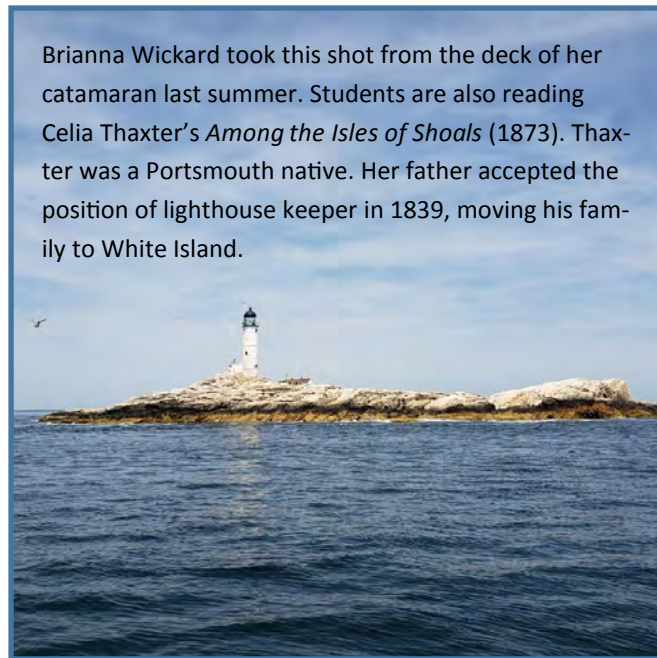
The class gathers for its first outing.
Top row, left to right: Rochelle Brothers and her service dog, Adriana, Calvin Evans, Nicolas Frisiello, Ryan Shannon, Peter Reed, Lexi Cournoyer, Ray Terry, Joshua Noonan
Bottom row: Hannah Schnyder, Brianna Wickard, field intern Melissa Lawson, Professor Paul Vatalaro, and Sean Conroy.



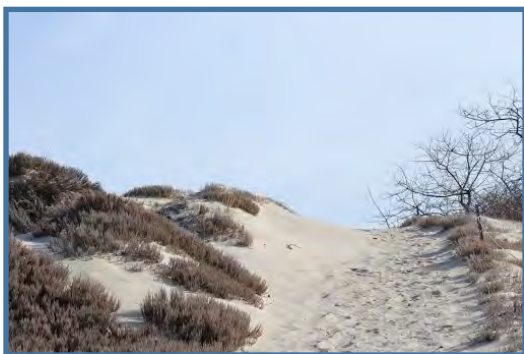




Above and below: Students explore shoreline and dunescape and take field notes .



Above: White Island, one of the Isles of Shoals off the coasts of Maine and New Hampshire

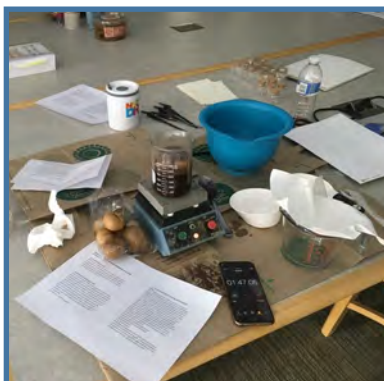
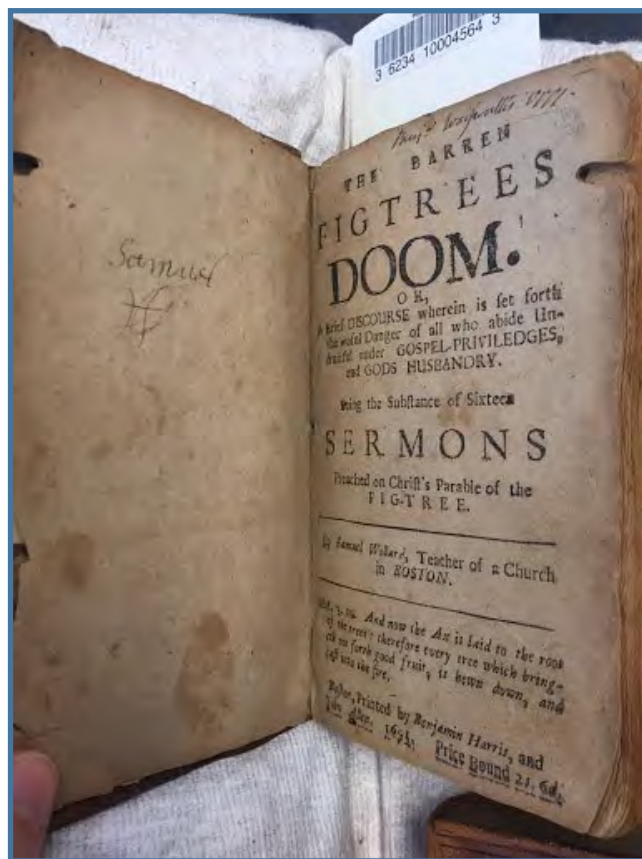


Photos by Emma Leaden, Ryan Shannon, and Brianna Wickard

SCOURING THE ARCHIVES OF THE SALEM WITCH TRIALS AND MAKING IRON GALL INK USING A 17TH-CENTURY RECIPE.



Above: students (from left) Rochelle Brothers, Tyler Pollock, Ashley McLaughlin, Calvin Evans, and Mari-sa Cuggino read historic witch trial records at the Phillips Library Archives in Rowley, MA



REPRESENTATION AND AGENCY IN *LOVE, SIMON* AND *ALEX STRANGELOVE* BY CALVIN EVANS

Representation is important. This seems obvious; you may not see yourself in every book you read or every movie you watch, but when you see someone matching your demographic become something other than a stereotype, that role takes on a deeper meaning. One group that is traditionally left out, at least in movies from major studios, is the LGBT+ community, especially in leading roles of romantic comedies. In 2018, two films were released to help fill this void: *Love, Simon* and *Alex Strangelove*. Both movies focus on male high school seniors and their experiences coming out.

Love, Simon debuted in theaters on March 8, 2018. It stars Nick Robinson (*The Kings of Summer*, *Jurassic World*) in the titular role and is directed by Greg Berlanti, who is best known for producing the DC television shows *Arrow*, *The Flash*, and *Supergirl*. It is based on the book *Simon vs the Homo Sapiens Agenda* by Becky Albertalli. *Love, Simon* tells the story of Simon Spier, a gay high school senior who just wants to ride out the rest of the year in the closet until he goes to college, where he'll come out. However, an anonymous admission online that someone who goes by the pseudonym "Blue" in his school is gay complicates the plan. Simon and Blue begin to email back and forth, sharing stories from their respective gay experiences, and Simon attempts to discover Blue's true identity.

*It goes beyond the expected clichés
of situation and talks to Simon as
an individual.*

Alex Strangelove stars Daniel Doheny (*Adventures in Public School*, *The Package*) as Alex Truelove and is directed by Craig Johnson (*Skeleton Twins*). It was released on Netflix on June 8, 2018. Like Simon, Alex is a high school senior, but his experience is vastly different. Alex has a girlfriend, Claire, and the movie largely revolves around them planning on having sex for the first time, until questions about Alex's sexuality and the introduction of recent-high school grad, the out-and-proud Elliot, muddle the

situation. After a lot of partying, drinking, lecturing, and awkwardness, Alex falls into a pool, remembers the time he got bullied at camp for getting an erection in the pool showers, bursts out of the pool, and reveals to Claire that he's gay.

For *Love, Simon*, the gay experience is all about agency and perceived identity. Simon and Blue point to the desire to keep things the same as a major reason to stay in the closet. No matter how accepting the people around you might be, coming out can still be a terrifying experience. The truth is, you don't know how people will react until you actually tell them. *Love, Simon* also understands that coming out is not a one-time experience. Simon comes out to himself before the movie begins; he comes to the audience in the opening sequence; he comes out to one of his friends on his own terms. Even after another character tells the whole school Simon is gay, Simon still has to come out to his parents. He breaks the news on Christmas Day, but it takes time for his parents to process what happened. Simon later has one-on-one conversations with both his parents, during which they finally get a chance to respond. Both scenes are incredibly emotional and get to the heart of the movie. Simon's mom, played by Jennifer Garner, gives a speech that makes me cry every time I watch it. It goes beyond the expected clichés of the situation and addresses Simon as an individual. The scene with Simon's dad, played by Josh Duhamel, presents masculinity in a radically different light than normally seen on screen. Duhamel cries because he thinks he was treating his son insensitively and not truly seeing him. He doesn't get mad that his son is gay; he's not even disappointed. Both of these scenes serve to illustrate that coming out is something that happens multiple times and can have different effects on different people.

Alex Strangelove's greatest strength lies in its focus on internalized homophobia, or when LGBT+ people begin to hate other LGBT+ people, and themselves especially, because after being subjected to bigotry and abuse for so long, they start to believe it. Where Simon's biggest fear is that people might see him differently after he comes out, Alex has pushed the

possibility of being gay so far down that it takes the whole movie for him to come out, even to himself. It is not until the pool scene towards the end of the movie that Alex can finally accept his own sexuality. Prior to that, he would experience flashes of feeling attracted to Elliot, but he would always go back to Claire, saying how much he loved her. These incidents would largely only take place after Alex had been drinking and his inhibitions were lowered, showing how deep he had buried those feelings. Furthermore, many gay jokes were made at Alex's expense, which highlight the kinds of casual homophobia that make it easy to internalize, and provide something else for Alex to push back against as he tries to prove his straightness. The film then becomes a struggle within Alex himself as he navigates his own complicated feelings and the attitudes of those around him.

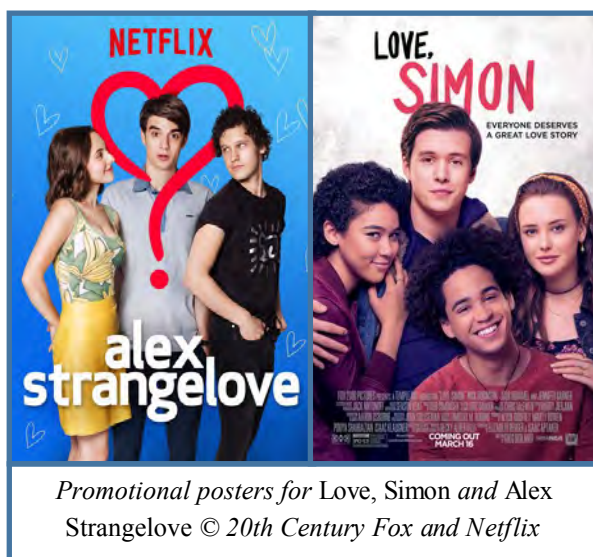
While neither *Love, Simon* nor *Alex Strangelove* feature antagonists in the traditional sense (these aren't spy thrillers, after all), both integrate characters that complicate the lives of the protagonists. Examining closely these characters, provides further insight into how each of these films handles representation. In *Love, Simon*, that character is Martin, played by Logan Miller. Relatively early on in the movie, Martin stumbles upon Simon's emails with Blue. In exchange for his silence, as telling the school about Simon and Blue would scare Blue farther into the closet, Martin enlists Simon to help set him up with one of Simon's friends, Abby. When the prospect fails, Martin posts the pictures of the emails he saw, outing Simon to the school. The movie makes it clear at this point that Martin's true crime involved taking away Simon's agency. Yes, he exposes Simon to the two homophobic bullies of the school, but they are handled swiftly and beautifully by one of the teachers, before being let off the hook by the Vice Principal, which reveals more about how people in positions of power handle oppressions that don't directly affect them than anything else. With Martin, Simon makes it explicitly clear that outing him to the school is a big deal, not because Simon was afraid to come out, but because it should have been his choice how, why, and when he came out. Even before Martin does this, the movie shows that

he is not inherently a bad guy. Yes, he is obnoxious and a little creepy, but he also genuinely cares for the people around him. He helps Abby regain self-confidence she had lost when she switched high schools halfway through her senior year. However, his assistance allows Abby to maintain her agency. When Martin finally asks her out, she says no. He did not give Simon that same luxury. Simon also find his friends shunning him, not because he is gay, but because he tries to manipulate them behind their backs in order to keep Martin silent. *Love, Simon* places great emphasis on agency, but it also allows its characters to make mistakes. Martin and Simon

become redeemable only after they recognize what they have done is wrong in the context of taking away the decision-making power of those around them, especially their friends.

Martin's closest analog in *Alex Strangelove* is Dell, who is played by Daniel Zolghadri. Dell is Alex's best friend and closest confidant. He is the one who tries to get Alex to come out of his shell and have fun with his life. He is also the one Alex goes to when he has

questions about sex and relationships. The problem with Dell is that he is always trying to simplify things. When Alex first starts to question his sexuality, he comes to the realization that he might be bisexual, as that explains both the feelings for his girlfriend, Claire, and the guy he recently met, Elliot. When he shares this insight with Dell, Dell launches a rant about why sexual orientation and gender identity remain so confusing these days and that he wishes that everyone would just be male or female, and either gay or straight. While this dismissive attitude towards the spectrum of gender and sexuality identity was met in-movie with a middle finger from the token non-binary periphery character, it never comes back to Dell—he never learns from it. This attitude emerges earlier in the movie as well when Dell's and Alex's other friends call him gay and dickless for still being a virgin. Statements like this conflate the notion of gayness with femininity, because traditional masculinity has no place for different forms of masculine expression, so it seeks to demonize and minimize them; it's classic toxic masculinity. Dell is the constant voice in Alex's ear



Promotional posters for *Love, Simon* and *Alex Strangelove* © 20th Century Fox and Netflix

encouraging him to have sex, because it will make him a man. This also represents an example of toxic masculinity, because someone's sexual prowess or experience should not determine how much of a man, or a woman, they are. And while Dell is ultimately proven wrong when Alex finally comes out, the plot still rewards him. A subplot to the movie revolves around Dell trying to woo a girl, Sophie, since sixth grade when he sent her an unsolicited picture of himself in just his underwear. While this should be viewed as sexual harassment, it's seen as a joke because sixth-grade Dell was quite small, and so not deemed attractive enough to send those types of pictures. But at the end of the movie, Sophie somehow feels pity for Dell and agrees to go out with him. Not only does her attitude qualify as an unhealthy basis for a relationship; it also rewards Dell for constantly pursuing and harassing her and delivers him to a happy ending, despite his non-inclusive views and lack of character growth.

An additional set of characters we can look at to further examine these movies are the two girls in Alex's and Simon's lives, as their relationships with the protagonists reveal a lot about their respective stories. As I mentioned earlier, Alex spends most of his movie dating Claire, played by Madeline Weinstein. Claire serves as part of the reason Alex spends so long in the closet. He really does love her, but just not the same way she loves him. She seems more frustrated by his inability to communicate with her than by his final admission that he is gay. The main issue I have with Claire involves the amount of time and focus the movie spends on her. The movie is called *Alex Strangelove*, yet much of the film devotes itself to Claire and Claire's feelings. For a movie to become representative of its gay protagonist, it needs to focus on its gay protagonist. While Claire's feelings are entirely valid, when the focus shifts to her it subtracts from Alex's story; it no longer represents his own. This failure in narrative surfaces most clearly at the end, when Claire invites Elliot to Prom and literally hands him off to Alex. Through this scene, the film tells Alex that his gayness must be approved and handed to him by other people in his life, not by his own means. Claire is not the only culprit in this move, however, as far too much time is spent on Dell and his drug trips and relationship problems, but the end result is the same. *Alex Strangelove* becomes *Alex Strangelove* and *Friends*, and in doing so loses a lot of the representation at which it aimed.

Claire's counterpart in *Love, Simon* is Leah, played by Katherine Langford. Whereas Claire's importance demonstrates *Alex Strangelove*'s lack of focus, Leah helps to reinforce the importance of agency that runs throughout *Love, Simon*. Leah is one of Simon's best and oldest friends. To the audience, it becomes pretty obvious that Leah has a crush on Simon, but he remains too caught up in his own world to see it. Conflict in the film arises when Simon tries to set up Leah with their mutual friend, Nick, in order to keep Nick away from Abby, so Martin can get closer to Abby. While this all seems complicated and convoluted, that's part of the point. In the same way that Martin violated Simon's agency concerning coming out, Simon takes away his friends' agency about whom they form relationships with. Simon doesn't even realize what he is doing, because he worries so much about his own problems. Leah then comes to represent Simon's selfishness, as she is hurt not because he is gay, and not even because he didn't tell her, but that he knowingly set her up to fail in order to save himself. Leah helps expose Simon's flaws not because he is a bad person, but because we all have flaws. *Love, Simon* does not expect its characters to be perfect, but it demands respect and gives characters like Leah the voice to express themselves once they lose respect.

The film is telling Alex that his gayness must be approved and handed to him.

It is important to note that both *Love, Simon* and *Alex Strangelove* represent progress in representation, but they fall short of qualifying as comprehensive. Simon and Alex come from upper-middle class white families that live in relatively liberal communities. Part of the reason I was drawn to these movies is that those factors mirror my own experience. What these movies fail to represent is what it is like to be poor and gay, or a person of color and gay, or in a less accepting environment and gay. What *Love, Simon* and *Alex Strangelove* do well involves showing why coming out remains difficult even under the best of circumstances, but there are still other stories to be told. Movies like *Moonlight*, *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*, and *Boy Erased* all tell equally valid and important stories about the gay experience. So while *Love, Simon* and *Alex Strangelove* are welcome additions to the pantheon of LGBTQ+ films, they should not be, and cannot be, the last from a major studio.

WHY *AQUAMAN* IS THE WRONG KIND OF BAD

BY EMMA LEADEN

Though its viability as true art was once contested, the medium of film has become not only a well-established art form with a rich history, but one of the most widespread and popular. From its beginnings in the humble Kinetoscope to the wonders of the modern digital camera, the moving picture has captivated, delighted, shocked, and challenged its viewers for over a century. Awards programs such as the Academy Awards draw millions of viewers, and its record low of 2017 still reached 26.5 million people, more than any other arts award show. We love films; we love to watch them, to celebrate them, and to criticize them. Film is the most popular and accessible art form to the masses, a fluid storytelling method which dispenses spectacular stories to billions worldwide. Of course, we all know that incredible art is not the only product of Hollywood or independent filmmakers, and those vastly less-than-stellar works are the ones I wish to focus on—nay, the ones I wish to exalt!

Cards on the table: I love entertainingly bad movies. My high school friends were a group lovingly dubbed the ‘Nerd Herd’, who spent weekend nights in a nearly empty movie theater, laughing and criticizing films that barely made back their budgets in ticket sales. Through their influence, I developed an appreciation for movies that are hilariously bad—whether in their scripts, the technical competence of their filmmaking, their acting, or a glorious combination of all three. Obviously not every bad movie is the right kind of ‘bad’, since there are plenty of awful movies that only manage to be boring and unremarkable. There are so many reasons a film can be considered ‘bad’ that it’s difficult to pin down exactly what qualifies. A film can be competently constructed, but suffer from an underdeveloped script or poor performances; likewise, strong performances can be undercut by awkward editing and technical issues. However, I believe that bad art—especially bad art that manages to entertain, even if it’s not on purpose—deserves its own form of appreciation.

Bad films can be a wonderful tool for students to cut their teeth on, since ‘bad’ films more often than not

provide a smorgasbord of technical and storytelling mishaps that can help develop critical thinking skills. Obviously great film allows us to delve deeply into the text and examine what truths it reveals or themes it explores, but art which fails allows us to examine how and why it fails, while developing an even greater appreciation for the works that excel while others crash and burn. It’s easy to rag on bad movies for just existing as they are, and today shallow criticisms abound on the internet. However, studying how poor editing, shot composition, script writing, and direction can destroy a final product can prove invaluable in learning how to approach those things properly, and appreciate when they are done well.

Additionally, failure occasionally becomes a better outcome than success. For instance, the films of Ed Wood would likely have fallen into obscurity had it not been for their utter lack of competence. It is exactly because of their incompetence that viewers remember them fondly, and even inspirational to some filmmakers (Tim Burton’s 1994 biopic *Ed Wood* comes to mind). Watching *Plan Nine from Outer Space*—which I highly recommend if you enjoy awkward 1950’s special effects, plus it’s all on YouTube for free—delivers a surreal and hilarious experience, and had the film been well-constructed much of its enjoyability would be lost. “Bad” films are fun because we don’t have to take them too seriously. They let us just sit back and enjoy the ride. In my opinion, if a film is so-bad-it’s-good, so bad it is extremely entertaining, it’s just as much a success as any well-constructed piece of entertainment. With all this in mind, I was extremely excited when the trailers for *Aquaman* (2018) first appeared.

Aquaman promised to be the amazingly goofy, so-bad-it’s-good superhero movie I’ve been waiting for. In my experience the vast majority of bad superhero movies are simply ‘bad’ because they’re boring, clichéd, unpleasant, and/or predictable. *Aquaman* was

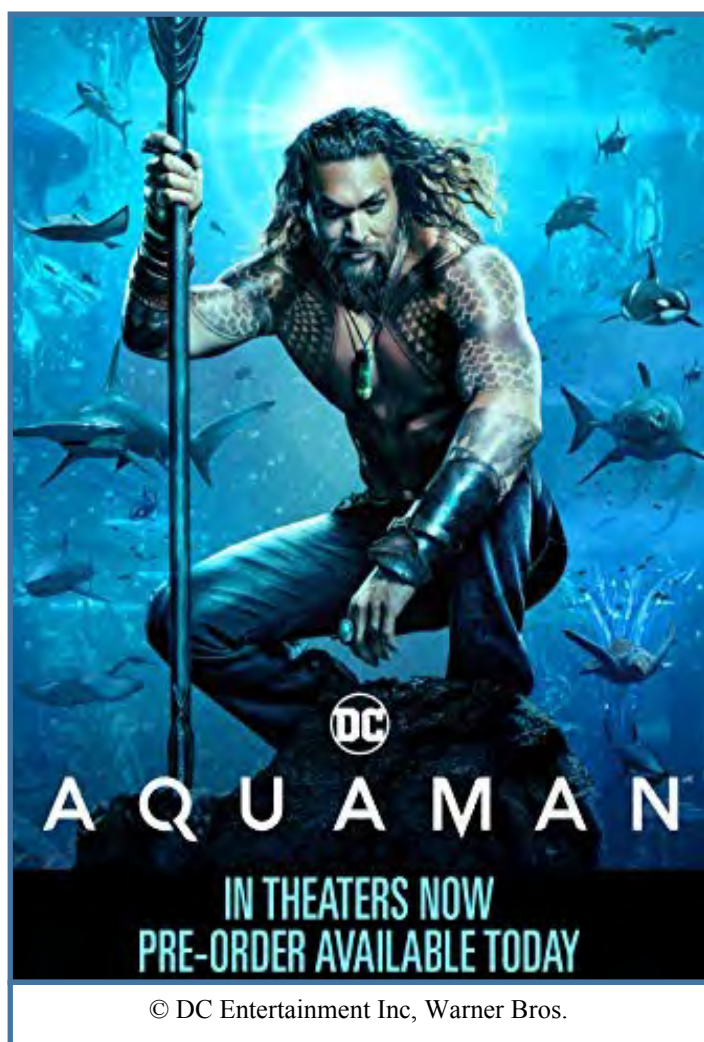
going to be a tricky live-action adaptation for several reasons, not least because the subject matter of the original comics clashes with the dark and gritty tone (not to mention the desaturated color palette) that DC has decided will coat its cinematic universe. For full disclosure, I have not read any of the *Aquaman* comics, nor have I seen the 2017 *Justice League* movie (which, according to some sources did feature a lighter tone than other DC Universe films). I have seen *Man of Steel* (2013), *Batman v. Superman* (2016), and *Wonder Woman* (2017), so those films provide my foundation in the DC cinematic world. The overall tone of the franchise, which emulates Christopher Nolan's famously dark, award-winning Batman films, probably wouldn't jive too well with a story inspired by Arthurian legend about a magical man who talks to fishes.

Now, superhero movies are almost all intensely silly by nature, and that needn't be an issue. Take Marvel's *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014) or *Ant-Man* (2015), for instance. *Guardians* was a massive hit that became the highest-grossing superhero film of

2014, despite its strange premise and characters unknown to anyone but fans of the comics. *Ant-Man* succeeded too, and both of these movies achieved a balanced tone by embracing the more ridiculous aspects of their source material through lighthearted, self-aware humor. Both films temper their humorous approach with scenes of genuine drama and pathos, treating their characters' journeys and flaws seriously. This was the balance I think, ideally, the creators of *Aquaman* wanted to strike: sure, our movie features crab centaurs and Atlanteans riding giant sea-horses, but it's funny, and our characters remain strong and likeable, so the audience is just happy to be along for the ride. That is not the product they wound up making.

My prediction—which proved about 25% correct—was that the film's own self-awareness would become distracting; in attempting to be dramatic the imagery would become unbearably silly; clichés would proliferate in the script, and the film would largely consist of Jason Momoa (who plays the titular character) running around shirtless, punching foes as guitar riffs blare dramatically. In short, I predicted a masterpiece of overblown, camp-tastic filmmaking, and for about the first twenty minutes of the film, I felt a flicker of hope ignite in my heart. The introductory scene, where we first see Aquaman in action as he saves a Russian submarine from high-tech pirates, features no fewer than three dramatic guitar riffs that play as Aquaman displays some reckless feat of badassery. As soon as I saw Jason Momoa drop down through the submarine hatch, flip back his glorious Fabio hair, look over his shoulder with a raised eyebrow and ask, “Permission to come aboard?”, I lost it.

Here was the absolute hilarity that I live for—cheesy one-liners delivered with just enough sincerity that you just have to laugh at them. I think the guitar riffs were meant to come across as edgy and cool, but to me they seemed overblown and gloriously absurd, which was exactly what I wanted. The script, too, right from the beginning was awkward at best and easily predictable at worst, and this trend continued throughout the whole film—which, to me, a bad-movie enthusiast, is perfectly fine, so long as the rest of experience proves over-the-top and enjoyable.



Unfortunately, *Aquaman* winds up being a pretty middle-of-the-road movie-going experience, though it is definitely better described as clichéd and predictable than creative, or even funny. What jokes there are fall horribly flat more often than not. One scene springs to mind: in it, Aquaman and his lady friend Mera are about to enter a bin full of trash. They mug for the camera, and Aquaman comments on the smell, to which Mera responds that the trash

Aquaman has grossed over \$1 billion worldwide, consequently becoming the fifth-highest grossing film of 2018

bin smells better than he does. It's a cheap joke, overdone, and it's unfunny to anyone above the age of seven. To make it worse, a thoroughly uncomfortable reaction shot of Aquaman sniffing his own armpit and wincing before he follows Mera in cemented the joke as an utter failure from beginning to end. I found only few humorous moments, which is unfortunate, since the film clearly tries to make its main character likeable by writing him as a sarcastic funnyman, and especially since it has such a strange and goofy premise. *Aquaman*'s inability to crack a good, original joke at crucial moments just makes the whole project feel boring and contrived. It doesn't help that the characters are paper-thin, meaning that little comedy can spring from their personalities clashing or working off each other, so humor almost entirely relies on the weak script and the actor's delivery, which is often awkward and stilted, because many of the jokes are written so poorly.

Additionally, the story is not fresh enough to carry underdeveloped characters and poorly-written jokes. *Aquaman* features pretty much all the superhero movie tropes we have come to expect as par for the course, and doesn't do anything particularly new and exciting. The plot follows a mystery that makes the movie feel episodic, with each set piece connected only by the loosest of plot threads. The mystery isn't even solved in a clever way; Aquaman's character has to go against everything we've learned about him to figure it out. In a scene strangely reminiscent of the market scene from Disney's *The Little Mermaid*, Aquaman and Mera wander in an Italian marketplace. A little girl, quite randomly, gives Mera a copy of Pinnocchio—why she is carrying a book around a market and why she gives it to Mera are

complete unknowns. Mera shows it to Aquaman, who says something along the lines of, "No way, Pinnocchio's a book?". This observation is in keeping with his character up until this point and, to his credit, when Jason Momoa gets to play that big, dumb, fun guy he does it well enough. However, less than five minutes later, the two of them need to solve a riddle that requires knowing which statue out of seven Roman leaders was an emperor. Aquaman knows which was a general, a poet, what have you, and which was an emperor. He waves away any questions by saying his mother drilled him on Roman history as a child, which...I'm sorry good sir, that's oddly specific and not at all in keeping with what we know of you as a character. Parts like this weaken the movie as a whole, but add strangely random details that are funny for all the wrong reasons. Herein lies *Aquaman*'s main fault: it contains plenty of weird moments that should make it entertainingly bad, but the rest of the movie is so predictable, and the performances so uninspired, that it becomes a slog.

Aquaman does have *some* good going for it; it's an extremely colorful movie, which is great to see in a franchise so committed to desaturating every frame, and some of the visuals are genuinely cool and inventive. The action scenes are all high-energy and fun, though I found the best and most exciting ones happen close to the beginning of the film. The character and creature designs stick close to the comics as far as I can tell from the Googling I've done, and in my opinion those campy Atlantean getups really work in the film's favor. It's an extremely goofy movie, and at the very least the filmmakers understood this and tried to make that tonal aspect work in its favor.

The scenes that painted Aquaman as a somewhat dim-witted but fun-loving protagonist were the ones that worked best, both for the movie as an entertaining piece of media and for the somewhat goofy, Guardians-esque tone its filmmakers seemed to be going for. Audiences seemed to respond to the lighthearted and fun tone that the movie advertised in its trailers, since *Aquaman* has grossed over \$1 billion worldwide, consequently becoming the fifth-highest grossing film of 2018, the highest-grossing DC Extended Universe film, and the 27th-highest grossing film of all time. This success was a surprise to me, because I absolutely did not expect *Aquaman* to do so well

(though I think I proved earlier that my predictions surrounding this film weren't terribly accurate). For one thing, Aquaman isn't a particularly popular comic book character, and certainly doesn't garner the widespread recognizability of characters like Batman, The Flash, or Wonder Woman. Secondly, superhero movies have been lucratively profitable for just over a decade now.

According to Wikipedia, out of the highest grossing films for each year since 2008, five of the ten listed are superhero films. It seems inevitable that at some point the popularity of the genre will wane, and superhero fatigue will start in earnest amongst the movie-going public. I'm interested to see when this will happen, and my guess would be once *Avengers: Endgame* premieres, but the financial success of *Aquaman* shows that there's still a plenty big appetite for traditional (even formulaic) superhero stories. So who knows: maybe superhero movies will continue to be huge hits for years to come, and perhaps *Star Wars* will be an eternal franchise. I, for one, hope not. As a professed nerd who grew up with the *Star Wars* series and religiously followed the Marvel Cinematic Universe through my adolescence, I don't want to see these two franchises full of creative verve milked to the sickly last drop, like some overworked cow buckling under the weight of an increasingly monopolistic film industry. I don't mind remakes, reboots, sequels, prequels, or adaptations, but I fear that the industry's reliance on certain genres and franchises as guaranteed money makers will lead—and has lead to—canned, uncreative products.

Why am I bemoaning the possibility of declining quality among big franchise and superhero films when I started out this article praising so-bad-they're-good films? For one thing, finding a film that is entertainingly bad is like finding a Shiny Pokémon: rare, and requires hours of grinding through lesser chaff to get to the good stuff. A bad film that manages to transcend its own inadequacy and loop right back around to amazing requires a perfect storm of factors, and for any given film those factors can be different. I usually find formulaic films that feature decent acting and competent technical skills to be disappointing, since I would rather a film be interesting (even if it's for the wrong reasons) than predictable. The juggernauts in the film industry are increasingly relying on 'safe' projects without taking the creative risks that make great films great. A prime example is the recent crop of Disney live-action remakes like *Maleficent* (2014), *Cinderella* (2015), and *Beauty and the Beast* (2017). Their quality is high enough that the brand as a whole remains untarnished, but they lack anything unexpected from the stories or characters, and many critics have found those very stories and characters to be disappointing anyway. However, all these safe remakes and sequels generate buckets of cash, so studios keep sinking money into these projects, which creates a glut of middling, uncreative films. Perhaps the glut is already upon us, but rather than despair, I, for one, hope that this trend will at least eventually result in some wonderfully awful films.



Aquaman cast and director at the first script read. From left to right: Patrick Wilson, Amber Heard, director James Wan, and Jason Momoa. © Hollywood Reporter

In the Next Issue of *The Broadsheet*

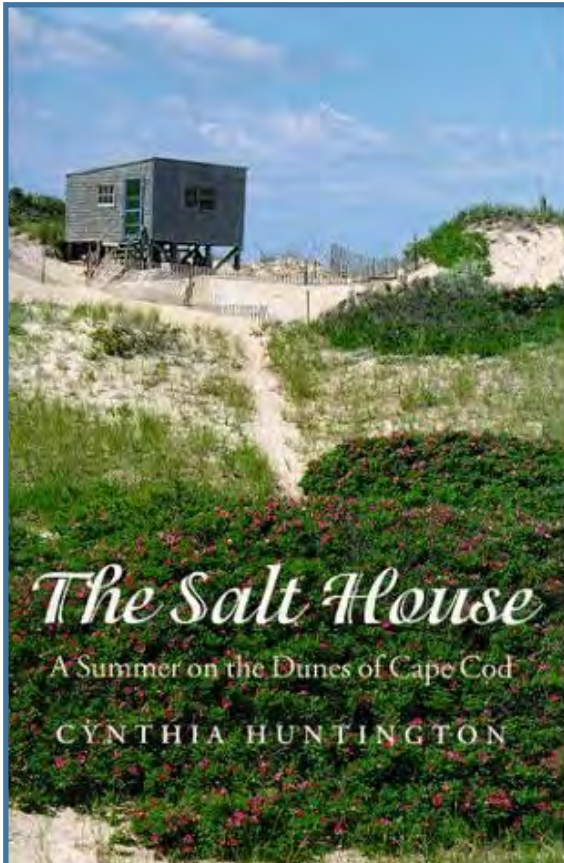
***Calvin Evans** is currently enrolled in Professor Pottroff's American Witches course and in Professor Vatalaro's the New England shore seminar. Both courses include assignments, workshops, site visits, and excursions that involve experiential learning. Calvin will explore the ways in which these opportunities to learn outside of the traditional classroom bring course texts to life and enrich the learning experience.

***Kristin Cole** will be covering the Annual English Awards Ceremony, which will be held April 16 at 4 pm at the Writers House.

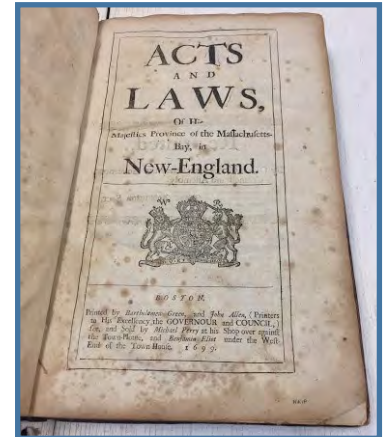
*English major, Music minor, and President of Measure Up A Cappella **Cassi Kacoyannakis** will be writing a feature on the performing arts at Merrimack.

*Cynthia Huntington, former Poet Laureate of New Hampshire and current professor at Dartmouth, has received awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, as well as a chair position in the 2006 Pulitzer Prize's poetry jury. Her publications include *The Salt House: A Summer on the Dunes of Cape Cod*, as well as several poetry books. In his next article, **Dan Roussel** will be reviewing some of her work, as well as reflecting on her upcoming reading at The Writers House.

***Emma Leaden** is a Merrimack senior who will be presenting at the annual Sigma Tau Delta conference in St. Louis, MO, March 27-30. She will write a reflection piece on the experience, focusing on the benefits that the opportunity to present and interact with other students and professors in a conference environment yield.



The Salt House © Cynthia Huntington



English Department News and Notes

***Isabella Connor's** short story "The Castle in the Woods" placed ninth in the contest "My Best Story 2018" by The Short Story Project. Isabella began the story in Professor Duffy-Comparone's Creative Writing Fiction course, and then revised it as part of a final project in Professor Pottroff's Poe and Hawthorne course.

*Students enrolled in **The New England Shore** participated in a field excursion that took place at **Crane's Beach** located in Ipswich, Massachusetts on Saturday, February 2. The students explored the area in groups, completed structured field activities, took field notes, and submitted a formal field report the following week. The trip coincided with their reading of William Sargent's *The House on Ipswich Marsh: Exploring the Natural History of New England* (University Press of New England, 2005).

***Rochelle Brothers** held a retirement party for her service dog, **Adriana**, at the Writers House on Thursday afternoon, February 28. During the retirement festivities, Rochelle supervised a revised version of the game hangman (she called it "leash dog"), challenging attendees to guess her dog's name.

*Students enrolled in **American Witches: in Salem and On Screen** traveled to the **Philips Library in Rowley** Massachusetts on February 1 and examined documents preserved from the Salem Witch Trials of 1692-1693 as well as books printed in North America during the Seventeenth Century. On Thursday, March 7 they participated in an **ink-making** workshop at the Merrimack College Writers House. Ink ingredients consisted of oak galls, gum Arabic, iron, and wine. The formula was used from the Medieval era through the nineteenth century.

***Emma Leaden** and **Ashley McLaughlin** will present "Ex Machina as a Subversive Gothic Tale" (Emma's essay) and "The Waste" (Ashley's short story) at the annual Sigma Tau Delta 2019 International Convention, "Work in Progress," which will be held March 27 through March 30 in St. Louis, Missouri. **Professors Emma Duffy-Comparone** and **Ellen McWhorter** will accompany them.

*There is still time to submit original poetry to the **Annual Reverend John Aherne Poetry Contest. Deadline for submissions is Friday, March 22.** First Prize entry will receive \$100, second prize \$75, and third prize \$50. Submit entries to English Department administrative assistant, **Helene Nicotra**. Winners will receive their prizes and read their poems at the Annual English Award Ceremony and Reception.

***The Annual English Awards Ceremony** will be held at 4 pm on April 16 at the Merrimack College Writers House. The event will include the induction of new members to the Merrimack chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, presentation of prizes to place-winners in the Annual Rev. John Aherne Poetry Contest, readings by the Aherne contest winners, and a reading by a guest speaker.

*Dartmouth College Professor of English, poet, and memoirist **Cynthia Huntington** will meet with students enrolled in the New England Shore seminar on April 11 at noon at the Writers House. The public will be welcome to attend Huntington's reading at 4 pm.

***Professor Paul Vatalaro's** article "The Gaze of *Frankenstein*" has been published in a new collection of critical essays called *Lacan and Romanticism*. Ed. Daniela Garofalo and David Sigler (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019). Professor Vatalaro's essay appears as Chapter One in the collection

***Professors Joe Vogel and Christy Pottroff** have organized an **alumni panel discussion** devoted to the prospect of applying to and attending graduate school. It will be held April 3 at 6:30 pm.

