
THE BROADSHEET

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This Issue

Summer Internship at the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center

Incidental Representation in *The Dragon Prince*

Understanding Poe's Twin Muses

Down syndrome Well Represented in *The Peanut Butter Falcon*

News and Notes

Photographs of Halibut Point State Park in Rockport, MA

Next Issue

Annual English Career Night

Industrious Summer Reading

Thoreau and the Scullery

An Educational Un-Journey

The Other Adam Sandler

The Broadsheet Staff

Phoebe Chetsas

Kristin Cole

Calvin Evans

Dan Roussel

Ryan Shannon

Faculty Editor: Professor Vatalaro

Editor's Note

The four features we are running in this issue of *The Broadsheet* focus on issues involving the difficult topic of representation. Kristin Cole's review of the independent film *The Peanut Butter Falcon* praises the film's makers for showcasing in the best way possible one of the narrative's two main characters who lives with Down's Syndrome—that is, by *not* showcasing that feature of the character's makeup at all. Calvin Evans' review of the animated fantasy series *The Dragon Prince* strikes a similar chord, applauding its creators for taking full advantage of fantasy genre's flexibility by designing a world in which sexual choice, skin color, and gender remain in the background. Instead, *The Dragon Prince* embraces “incidental representation,” establishing an ethos in which issues involving the formation and expression of self-identity never directly inform character motivation or behavior. A third feature written by new production staff intern Phoebe Chetsas sets out to redress common popular cultural representations concerning Edgar Allan Poe's relationships with women in his life and the ways in which those representations take shape in Poe's poetry and fiction. That leaves Dan Roussel's memoir about the summer internship he was awarded by the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center. Dan's feature provides a narrative focused on the demanding grind of maintaining support for the Center's intense summer workshop program. The essay engages the topic of representation in its own indirect way, of course, as it examines the complex, frenetic, rewarding, and vexing process of wrestling the blur of experience into the structures of art. Finally, the New England coastal photographs that appear on both covers and throughout the issue were taken by Ryan Shannon during a recent English course field excursion to Halibut Point State Park in Rockport. Many of Ryan's images represent ways in which natural and constructed aspects of landscape shape experience and the representation of it. We hope your brief journey through this issue will exert positive shaping effects of its own.

Cheers!

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 SUMMER INTERNSHIP AT THE FINE ARTS WORK CENTER IN PROVINCETOWN, MASSACHUSETTS

DANIEL ROUSSEL

In the last edition of *The Broadsheet*, I recounted my conversation with Cynthia Huntington about my upcoming internship with the Fine Arts Work Center (FAWC) in Provincetown. “You’ll have the time of your life,” she’d told me. Despite her encouragement, many aspects of the prospect filled me with trepidation. For one thing, this would be my first off-campus internship; second, many applicants had vied for the position; and third, FAWC stood out as one of the most prolific art spaces in the country. These three thoughts muddled together in my mind, creating an anxiety cocktail that haunted me in the weeks leading up to my first day of a three-month stay in Provincetown, Massachusetts. And yes, those fears would be validated once I met the other interns, hailing from schools such as Smith College, Vanderbilt University, and Dartmouth College. If you can believe it, throughout my first week at FAWC I engaged in consistent denial of my own skills and my ability to perform the duties required. Consider those feelings magnified the following week when I, alongside a fellow intern and MFA graduate Cydnee Devereaux, became a co-captain of the interns. In hindsight, the two of us had a simple task: be on call with master keys when needed; fill in for sick or absent interns, and manage any issues between the intern team and the professional staff. As a whole team, our duties revolved around the weekly operation of the Work Center. The Summer Program ran this way: every Sunday, a new cohort of faculty and students would arrive at the facility. The faculty—talented and acclaimed poets, memoirists, painters, sculptors, and more—would each teach one week-long workshop. Fees per workshop ranged from between \$500 to \$700, and despite the somewhat high cost, many aspiring (or even accomplished) writers

and artists would pay their tuition fees, and join the workshop as students. Attendees shared no common age, race, gender, class, experience, or goal. As compensation for our work, every intern had the chance to select and participate as a student in two workshops during the summer. Nevertheless, high demand for seats in the classes often made it difficult to secure a slot. Courses would often fill up so fast that students had to choose backup classes.

Sunday would mark the first day in the cycle for new students. The Intern team would be responsible for organizing a reception, complete with food and



The FAWC interns' first day, with Dawn Walsh and Kelle Groom.

drinks. Students would watch a brief presentation we put on about expectations for guests of the Work Center, and then disperse into their respective workshops to collect syllabi. Every weekday morning, some of us would prepare a continental breakfast for the students. (Unexpectedly, we all got pretty great at cutting fruit for salads, but I still haven’t figured out how to word that in a resumé.) The schedule of events and daily routine proved to be pretty entertaining, as students could range from fun, to strange, to shockingly rude. One student would go on to sketch another intern as they worked, then leave the drawing behind with the ominous phrase, “Now you get to clean.” During evenings, the first half of the week included faculty readings and art presentations,

which the interns set up, running the sales table, taking photos, and assisting with A/V needs. On Thursdays, in lieu of faculty, the weekly students would sign-up to read their work in the company of their peers (which would include the interns). After a fateful, four-hour long event, complete with booing and mass dissent, the rules would be changed to include a three-minute time limit per reader. This also caused quite a stir, but only for a week or so. Finally,



The interns wearing FAWC's annual design, "Big Fat Flowers" by Vicky Tomayko.

Fridays would be reserved for interns to prepare for the upcoming week with posters, paper-copying, and Sunday preparations. On weekends, many of us would resort to part-time jobs to make money for our various needs.

On our first day, the Summer Program's organizers, Dawn Walsh and Kelle Groom, supplied us with several resources introducing us to the Work Center and to Provincetown. One small booklet left unread 'til late July narrated the history of the Center. I wouldn't bother reading this until the day I met Gail Mazur (an encounter to which I'll return in a moment). In 1968, a group of creatives and patrons founded a center for the arts in Provincetown, which was—and still is—one of the longest-standing colonies for artists in the United States. Part historic fishing town, part creative paradise, Provincetown had attracted artists for decades, providing affordable lodging and inspiring landscapes—and most importantly, a supportive community. Now, that community has dwindled, in part because Provincetown has embraced a seasonal, tourist economy. Though the town struggles to maintain its year-round solvency, costs for living have increased substantially,

making year-round residency a difficult prospect for so many. The Fine Arts Work Center has aimed to restore that space for a lucky group of chosen writers and artists, selected for fellowships by a board of master creatives. I've only managed a glimpse of the fellowship cohorts of prior years, but they seem like a diverse group of talented people. As a minor downside of the Summer Program, it's fundraising nature creates a system that doesn't allow many low-income artists and writers to attend.

Two names in the history of the FAWC stand out: Stanley Kunitz and Hudson D. Walker. The names of these benefactors grace structures at the Center, specifically the common room and the art gallery, respectively. Kunitz, a former U.S. Poet Laureate and recipient of a Pulitzer Prize, founded the Work Center alongside Walker. Walker, on the other hand, was a patron of art. He collected art, dealt it, and often showcased it in his gallery. The shared commitment to the production and preservations of art may have been one of the reasons that FAWC initially survived; combining artists with those who sought it, the space sustained itself on the creation and value of art within its community. One former fellow, Indira Ganesan, once told me that at one time she had lived in Provincetown by working for Kunitz, Walker, and founder-and-painter Myron Stout. Because of their support and encouragement, she cultivated her own creative talents. I walked through these spaces without knowing the legacy for the longest time. The buildings haven't changed much since their inception, either—once a lumber mill, then gifted to the founding group, the small campus retains its unique architecture and its strange fishhook shape. Other



My first view of Provincetown at sunset, taken at MacMillan Pier.

elements of the Center's history emerged at unexpected moments; one artist seemed all-too-happy to tell us that he'd conceived his first child in the little red barn we lived in. Another would try to haggle the price of books down with her own memories of being a fellow in the 1970s.

In 2019, the FAWC boasts an incredibly competitive seven-month fellowship program for twenty creatives, funded in part by the Summer Program for which I interned. The Summer Program drew in more than a thousand students over the course of the summer, largely because its faculty roll included high-profile artists such as Gabrielle Calvocoressi, Nick Flynn, Yvette Drury Dubinski, and Eileen Myles. I'm grateful to have come to the Summer Program in its period of self-actualization; this was one of the first years where it began to really perform well, and as its own valued entity. I participated in the second annual Social Justice Week, and the first expanded Poetry Festival. The former celebration featured amazing poets, such as Samiya Bashir; though I didn't take her workshop, we became friendly after she read during a night featuring faculty presentations. Samiya had only been at the FAWC for a day, with little time to rest—on top of that, she had also been living out of her car for months. When I pressed on that matter, she explained that she'd just sold most of her belongings in preparation for a long-term fellowship in Rome, as one of the recipients of the 2019 Rome Prize. With that in mind, it's no wonder that she delivered one of the most expressive, dramatic readings of the night. In one awe-inspiring moment, Samiya jumped off the stage, moved into the crowd and read to members of the audience. Even some of the service animals in the audience were treated to a few moments of magic. Students in the workshop she ran would praise it as one of the most valuable workshops they had ever taken. Later in the summer, the Poetry Festival generated similar energy. I will never forget that particular space. From my experience, poets tend to be strange, if not charmingly insane. Participating in a gathering that included two-hundred poets over a period of two

weeks became an almost other-worldly experience for me.



A night of faculty readings and book signings, with Craig Morgan Teicher and Monica Youn.

Many of the poets I met proved warm, and wonderful, like Samiya, Nick, and countless others. Many of the interns would mark our shared calendar to remind us when a favorite poet, or professor, would be coming to teach. I interned alongside Tom Bosworth, a Dartmouth sophomore; Cydnee Devereaux, a Vanderbilt MFA graduate; Faith Franzonia, a Rutgers senior; Francie Huntley, a Smith senior; Claire Joseph, a Scripps sophomore; McKenna Ritter, a UNC senior; and Sarah Terrazano, a Brandeis graduate. All are talented artists and wonderful people to whom I owe the joy I experienced, a newfound confidence, and a host of fond memories. We found nothing more exciting than watching one of our own get the opportunity to introduce a faculty member at the nightly readings and presentations. Tom would introduce Vievee Francis and Matthew Olzmann; Sarah would introduce Carl Philips; McKenna would introduce Alan Shapiro and Gabrielle Calvocoressi, who embraced McKenna in tears; I had the honor of introducing my mentor and Merrimack faculty member and Writers House Director, Andrea Cohen, who taught a poetry workshop in the early weeks of the summer. These connections provided me with the opportunity to meet wonderful, highly-regarded poets on a more intimate level, while also learning about my fellow interns' lives outside of FAWC. One memorable experience came in the form of a bonfire we held at Head of the Meadow Beach in nearby North Truro. We were accompanied by poet and activist Liz Bradfield, and her partner.

The evening remained informal and provided all of us with a respite from the daily pressure of our responsibilities at the FAWC.

One day toward the end of Andrea's week at the Center, she asked a favor of me. "I have a friend," she began. "You might know her, another poet, Gail Mazur." Gail Mazur—a poet whose work I had silently revered since I had been introduced to it. Gail needed some help with her computer, an IT issue that Andrea didn't know how to fix. Andrea handed me an address and a phone number a couple hours later. "It's a landline," she said, warning me not to try and text her. "And she hasn't set up her voicemail yet." I cannot recall this moment without also remembering how much I dreaded calling a stranger out of the blue—not just one I knew through her work, but one that had no idea of my existence. Later on, I'd learn



Andrea Cohen and I in the backyard of FAWC, taken the night of her faculty reading.

that Andrea had emailed Gail to tell her a student would be coming by to help her. "It's a special place, her house," she told me. "I think you'll enjoy it."

I made the call, spoke with Gail, and walked down to the East End of Provincetown an hour later to her home. Gail lives up against the sea in a beautiful Cape Cod revival house. The fence surrounding it blooms thick and full with flowers, which continue into the garden linking her home to her late husband's art studio, with its large glass front. When I looked in, I could see his paint splatters, ever-so-faded against the floor. Gail greeted me at the door, and we chatted while I went about resetting and fixing her computer. I'd learn that Andrea had inherited

the Cambridge Blacksmith House Poetry Series from Gail, and that the two had met during Andrea's undergraduate years. Gail told me about their early encounters, and that she entrusted to Andrea the Blacksmith Series after Andrea had assisted Gail for years. We talked about her arrival in Provincetown, and about the growth of the FAWC and the arts on the Outer Cape. Gail would serve on the writing committee for the fellowship for some time, at the request of Kunitz and others. To my surprise, she admitted that the founders of the FAWC had anticipated the gentrification of Provincetown. They'd known about the rising costs of living and initiated the fellowship as a counter measure. She'd recount even more of its history to me, spurring me to later read through the history booklet we'd been given in our first week. Then, after some time spent talking, and some very kind, very sage advice from her about life as an artist, I left the house. I understood immediately what Andrea had meant; Gail Mazur's home housed hopeful energy. And, later on, I would find a local news article about her return to Provincetown. She brought the kind of celebrity that spun a number of news cycles.

I've always favored poets as friends, because it seems kindness radiates from them; I can't explain why. Gail serves as an example and so does another poet I forged a bond with, named Gabrielle Calvocoressi. I've mentioned her several times in this article, neglecting to mention my participation in her workshop. In our week together, my workshop peers and I would write several dozen poems in response to assignments Gabrielle had created. I had the good fortune of writing and learning alongside English professors, young poets, established older poets, and excellent writers. Everyone brought valuable, nuanced feedback as we approached topics we dreaded—one poet would break down as she read about her father's recent passing, in a beautiful piece entitled "Passionem." We grew together much like a family over the week, and one student even gave me a book of poems to pass along when "the time was right," as he put it. Gabby would ask us to draw forbidden rooms from our memories, and write letters

to those who would never read them. In one session, we scattered around town, and I sat alongside another student on the shoreline of the bay, pulling lines and stanzas out of a lengthy generative exercise given to us earlier in the week. As one of our last activities, we'd assemble our small poems into a form called a "crown," where they're linked together through repeated lines on each end of a stanza break. I ended the week with roughly sixty poems—an unprecedented number in such a short time for me. The week would end in tears, and many hugs, the exchange of numbers, emails, and social media. Gabby's workshop techniques forever revolutionized how I approach a poem, and as I told her, I feel like a better work-shopper since I took her course. When I returned to The Writers House, and the Writers' Circle at Merrimack I knew I would have new methods of enriching the workshop experience for others. Gabby taught me how to revitalize existing poems through new forms, and how to recycle a line, or an image. She taught me that during the writing process, a writer had to keep going, no matter how the process ended. I bring these lessons with me, and they have influenced how I respond to the complaints of fellow writers about bad poetry, or bad prose. They've given me



The FAWC interns enjoying our last bonfire of the season before parting ways.

hope for even the smallest, most unfulfilled piece. The following week, with no workshop to take, I felt a bit incomplete. Gabby Calvocoressi changed my writing forever.

There were tough moments, of course—my experience didn't come without a dose of pain. As with any internship, the work often seemed thankless, in part



Introducing myself, before reading a poem written in Gabrielle Calvocoressi's workshop.

because enrolled students often expected more than we could provide. Sometimes the hours would drag on, and we'd be working short, or working extra shifts to cover for sick interns. Some weeks, I would work the morning shift all the way to the evening shift several times over, and come home completely drained. Once, at one of the summer's biggest events, a patron told me I'd "be the reason the event failed," though the circumstances were beyond my control. That same night, another guest snapped his auction paddle at the end of the night and tossed it in my direction. Every step of the way, I faced self-doubt. I had, at a few dire moments, calculated the cost of an Uber ride back to my home in Rhode Island. Some weeks, breaks and days off disappeared because large events and other commitments required our services. Despite these pressures, the interns made it through the summer, sad when it was time to leave. We stay in touch and continue to communicate almost daily in a group text. We shared meals, cleaned together, traveled together, and experienced the same highs and lows. We found the best local dogs to pet, the cheapest restaurants, and the niche spaces that make Provincetown such a wonderful space. In one of our last weeks, we watched the waters of the bay as fishermen cast out lines to catch squid, which glinted below the surface. We were quiet as we watched them; it's one of my fondest memories. Without my new friends, I don't know if I could have made it through the program. We had the fortune of wonderful bosses—Dawn and Kelle—and caring coworkers.

On my last day, as I packed my car full of boxes and treasures collected over summer months, several FAWC community members came to say goodbye. One of the building managers, a former fellow of FAWC named Jerome Green, would come out to hug me and reminisce about the summer. We had watched Jerome and his band play at the Old Colony Tap on Commercial Street many nights. Two summer-long residents would follow him. Laura Vinnedge, an artist sponsored to stay in Provincetown for the summer, thanked me for all my help over the season; another extended an offer to me and the other interns to stay at her home in Vermont whenever we needed it. In a crowning moment for me, Nick Flynn himself—another wonderful writer and person—would come to say farewell. I admit, with a little embarrassment, that I wept about that moment in the car on my way home. Besides these lovely few, I had said many more good-byes the night before with friends such as Bert Yarborough, Dawn Zimiles, and Bette Warner, the executive director of FAWC.

That night, Bette offered me a potential job opening with FAWC's online program, 24PearlStreet. Consequently, I continue to work alongside the FAWC family as 24PearlStreet's blog coordinator, where I conduct interviews with faculty instructors and assist with content creation. In a way, I feel like I never left—my heart remains rooted with the Fine Arts Work Center, an organization that has offered me so much. I found a home in Provincetown and I keep reminders close by—among them, articles of jewelry and a pointillist painting done of me during an art workshop, I've pieced the town together in my life back at Merrimack. In many ways, I think the "edges" of who I am—my personality, my comfort zone, my abilities—began to fray, expand, and come together once more. The Fine Arts Work Center inspired in me a passion for the protection and cultivation of the arts, and the need to find and maintain creative spaces. The experience has inspired in me newfound career aspirations and a reason to move forward with my English education at school. Now I see clearly goals and options for the future; someday, I think, I'll return to Province-

town. Or maybe I'll find another magical space, one in need of something—a spark, a thought, a commitment. And with any luck, I'll be able to pay forward everything the FAWC conferred upon me, creating a space that invites potential—and grows it into something special.



The view on a foggy day, taken at St. Mary of the Harbor.



INCIDENTAL REPRESENTATION IN THE DRAGON PRINCE

CALVIN EVANS

This past summer I replaced some of the bookshelves in my house, so I also decided to reorganize my books by genre and publisher. This meant keeping my books in piles on my floor for the better part of a month. As it turns out, I have over 100 fantasy novels. All this is to say that I like the fantasy genre. A lot. So back in July of 2018, when Netflix announced the production of a new fantasy animated series, *The Dragon Prince*, I was immediately on board. Season One released on September 14, 2018. I watched all nine 30-minute episodes in one day. The



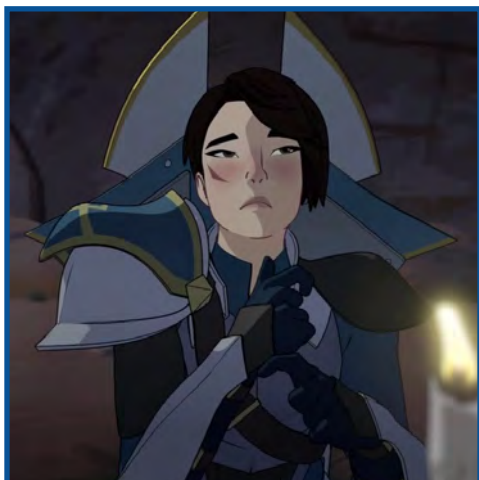
nine episodes of Season Two premiered on February 15, 2019, and again, I watched it all back-to-back. So what drew me to this series so much? It's not that it was just fantasy (I never really got into *Game of Thrones*); the series managed to do something different with the genre. What I love about fantasy is that it doesn't have to confine itself to traditional sociocultural constraints. Sadly, this does not frequently get translated into commercial works. Think, for example, about the lack of representation in *The Lord of the Rings* Trilogy. *The Dragon Prince*, on the other hand, illustrates the flexibility the genre provides. Not only is the story provocative and engaging, but it revels in incidental representation, that is, characters that exhibit diverse identities but their stories aren't fully about those identities. *The Dragon Prince* features characters of color and LGBTQ+ characters, but those aspects aren't the focus of who they are as characters.

But where did *The Dragon Prince* come from? The co-

creators are Aaron Ehasz and Justin Richmond, neither of whom are strangers to the world of animation. Before being showrunners on this project, Ehasz worked as head-writer and executive producer of another great fantasy cartoon, *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, as well as writer and story editor for *Futurama*. Richmond co-directed the Triple-A video game *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception*, which was the winner of many 2011 Game of the Year awards, and sold over six million copies by 2015. But as popular and successful as their earlier projects

were, *The Dragon Prince* enters new territory. At its most basic level, *The Dragon Prince* is high, epic fantasy. It follows three main characters, princes Ezran and Callum, along with their elven friend, Rayla, as they go on a quest to return a dragon egg to the Dragon King with nothing less than the state of the world at stake. It seems cliché. And in many ways it is. Teenagers need to save the world again, all while dealing with issues of increased responsibilities and complicated, burgeoning romances. But to reduce *The Dragon Prince* to its most basic level does it a disservice. It examines topics of war, difference, grief, and love in complicated, nuanced ways. It treats its characters with enough respect to allow them to fail and not shame them for it. And while there are three protagonists, many other major characters appear in the series who feel vibrant and alive to the viewer. *The Dragon Prince* understands the power of fantasy and the power of television and uses that understanding to create a messy, beautiful world.

One episode that exemplifies this attention to world building and characters occurs in the second season episodes, “Breaking the Seal” and “Heart of a Titan.” This episode is largely a flashback to when the older



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generation of characters (the parents of the main protagonists) embark on a quest of their own to slay a Magma Titan and take its heart. King Harrow makes this decision because he believes it to be the only way to save his kingdom from starvation during an especially harsh winter. King Harrow’s wife, Queen Sarai, joins his quest, as does her sister, General Amaya, who is deaf; Harrow’s advisor, the wizard Viren; and the neighboring kingdom’s two Queens, Annika and Neha. But in order to find a Magma Titan, they must cross into Xadia, the land of dragons and elves where humans are forbidden from going. Throughout the episode, the viewer is treated with small character moments that speak to their identities. Amaya and her sister have a conversation in sign language that is not translated for any other character or even the viewer. Queens Annika and Neha are shown to have tender moments on screen; their relationship as wives becomes explicit. King Harrow, as a black man, makes important decisions as the person in the highest position of power. Here, we see how these characters’ identities intersect with who they are as people. They feel real and the representation doesn’t feel like a form of tokenism.

It is important to reiterate that co-creator Aaron Ehasz also wrote for *Avatar: The Last Airbender* because the similarities are so readily apparent. Most obviously is the animation style, which looks nearly identical. While different production companies animated *Avatar* and *The Dragon Prince*, the art style looks as

though *The Dragon Prince* spins off from *Avatar*. Character drawing remains especially similar. Both series feature geometrically pleasing character design with a sharpness to the outlines. But where *Avatar* leans towards brighter colors, muted color tones characterize *The Dragon Prince*. The crossover of voice actor Jack DeSena creates an additional jarring similarity. DeSena voices both Callum in *The Dragon Prince*, and Sokka, a main character from *Avatar*. Callum and Sokka also share many character traits: hopeless romantics, fiercely loyal, and minds for strategy and tactics. But where Callum is self-conscious and over-thinks situations, Sokka frequently acts before thinking and serves as comic relief for the show. But why does this matter? It matters because *Avatar* is largely seen as the gold standard for young adult animation. It told well-crafted, age-appropriate stories that didn’t speak down to its target audience, and in many ways *The Dragon Prince* can be seen as a successor to *Avatar*. One area where *Avatar* exceeds *The Dragon Prince* involves its use of humor. *Avatar* is a



L: © Wonderstorm 2019 R: © Nickelodeon 2008

great example of timing for jokes. It knows when it is appropriate to break the tension with a bit of slapstick or absurdist humor and when a moment needs to sit. *The Dragon Prince* has not yet found its comedic voice, and tries too hard to mimic *Avatar* in this way. For example, towards the end of Season Two, Callum falls into a magically-induced fever dream where he has to make decisions about the kind of person he

wants to be. Absurdist humor intersperses throughout the dream, but instead of helping to balance the seriousness of the situation, it jars in a way that ultimately cheapens the experience for the viewer. *Avatar* falls behind *The Dragon Prince* in its understanding of the scope of what fantasy can do. For example, *Avatar*'s actual sequel, *The Legend of Korra*, indirectly features a lesbian relationship between the protagonist, Korra, and another main character, Asami. The relationship qualifies as indirect because it is never explicitly acknowledged in the show, in large part because of its distributor, Nickelodeon, who feared a negative backlash from parents. The same restrictions don't hamper *The Dragon Prince* so the creators and writers are able to explore fully the freedom that fantasy provides.



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That freedom takes the form of incidental representation in *The Dragon Prince*. Again, incidental representation occurs when characters represent an underprivileged group, but their membership in that group fails to serve as the focus of their storylines. A good example of this from pop culture is in *Avengers: Endgame* when Captain America leads a support group for survivors. An attendee talks about how he went on a date for the first time since a painful incident, and through the use of pronouns, we learn that the date was with another man. This is incidental representation because the plot of *Endgame* isn't about that man or his relationships. It doesn't ask any questions about queerness or the queer experience. It acknowledges the existence of that individual as a gay man, but then moves on. Compare this strategy to focused representation, which occurs in the movie *Moonlight*, an explicitly and unabashedly queer story about the intersectionali-

ty of growing up gay and black. Incidental representation tends (but does not need) to coincide with assimilation stories, which, in terms of queerness, means incorporating the queer experience into the straight experience. This can be contrasted with liberation stories, which advocate for a unique queer experience that celebrates the differences between the straight and queer experience. Obviously, advantages and disadvantages spread across incidental and focused representation, and those arguments only become more complicated when they emerge in a fantasy cartoon that doesn't have to follow traditional social norms because the in-world society can be radically different.

One of the major benefits of incidental representation is that, as in *Endgame*, it allows for minority groups to exist within majority narratives. In *The Dragon Prince*, this representation takes form in King Harrow and Prince Ezran, who are black, Queens Annika and Neha, who are married lesbians, and General Amaya, the deaf aunt of Ezran and Callum. For *The Dragon Prince*, incidental representation is not limited to one person or one group. Having black, queer, and deaf characters in positions of power challenges the traditional norms of the real world. Genre permits *The Dragon Prince* the flexibility to accomplish this move because it is fantasy, so writers don't need to provide an explanation as to how characters achieved these positions. And while the inherent properties of fantasy allow for role reversal, the representation it provides has real-world effects. Now people who are not white, straight, and/or able-bodied can see themselves as kings, queens and generals. History may not be full of underprivileged people in positions of power, but fantasy can be.



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The other side of incidental representation lies in the name: incidental. *The Dragon Prince* may feature many characters who are members of minority communities, but it doesn't do anything with them in terms of their identity. Finding black King Harrow in a position of power heartens, but *The Dragon Prince* is not a story about what it means to be a black king. The narrative never mentions King Harrow's and Prince Ezran's skin color; neither is Queen Annika's relationship with Queen Neha's mentioned in any terms that represent queerness as we know it. Yes, it is wonderful that these characters exist, but does it really count if the show doesn't deal with their identities in a meaningful way? That issue becomes the central question of the incidental-focused debate. Fantasy occupies a privileged position. It incorporates incidental, assimilative representation without dealing with questions of how to get there, or even if we should. Fantasy can show us a world where a black king and his deaf sister-in-law hold two of the highest positions of power. But it doesn't have to tell us what it's like to be a black king, because race is a social construct, and so without the socio-historical context, King Harrow is not a black king; he's a king with dark skin.

So what does this mean for the future

of *The Dragon Prince*? In the short term, I'm eagerly awaiting Season Three, which comes out on November 22. Season Two ended (predictably) at a cliff hanger, and I want to know how it resolves conflicts. Ehasz and Richmond discussed the long-term plans for the show at San Diego Comic-Con this past summer. Beyond Season Three, they have four more seasons planned, along with a spin-off series, books, and a video game. One of the greatest strengths of *The Dragon Prince* has always been its world building, but the relatively narrow narrative scope of the show limits how much we see of it. By delving into other media, the creators can better explore that world and share it with the audience. Whether or not that means they will change their method of representation, I do not know. Incidental representation has worked for them so far, and for me at least. *The Dragon Prince* emerges as a fantastic addition to the fantasy genre, showcasing the ways in which fantasy can shake off the traditional sociocultural roles to which realistic fiction is beholden. *The Dragon Prince* is not a queer story, or any other story about people from minority groups. It is a story that presents an assimilated world.

It doesn't need to be anything more than that. But it could be.





UNDERSTANDING POE'S TWIN MUSES

PHOEBE CHETSAS

When picturing gothic horror writer Edgar Allan Poe, few think of romance. More likely, readers will remember the ghastly murder in the “Tell Tale Heart,” or recall images of spectral women undone by broken hearts, or perhaps a simple silhouette of a raven will come to mind. Undeniably, Poe proved a morbid and melancholy man. He spent a great deal of time crafting tales of terror that continue to disturb, even in modern society, where we are accustomed to reading about real, unimaginable horrors every time we check our phones. With that said, the period of Poe’s career during which he was the most prolific coincided with the time in which his wife, Virginia Clemm Poe, was dying. He wrote in an effort to pay for medical treatment for Virginia’s tuberculosis. Oftentimes, readers make the mistake of fusing Poe with his deranged narrators and their depravities; readers get hung up on the violence inflicted on Poe’s female characters and assume that he must have hated women.

At points, Poe’s adoration of a long list of personal muses (his biological mother, Eliza Poe, his loving foster mother, Fanny Allen, his paternal cousin and future wife Virginia Clemm Poe, and Elmira Royster Shelton, a childhood sweetheart to whom he became engaged roughly two years after the death of Virginia from tuberculosis) became for Poe embodiments of the ideal. The unbearable grief and longing Poe must have felt while writing “Annabel Lee” appears obvious. Edgar Allan Poe wrote horror in part because of the Sensationalism wave sweeping over the country in the 19th century, which enabled him to make a modest profit and gain notice. No evidence from Poe’s life indicates that he wished upon women he loved the fates of Rowena and Morella. There is, however, compelling evidence that Poe wrote “Annabel Lee,” “For Annie,” “Morella,” and

“Ligeia” about the same two women, Virginia and Elmira. “Annabel Lee,” moreover, almost certainly serves as a sequel to “For Annie.” Many consider “Annabel Lee” and “For Annie” some of Poe’s more positive pieces; however, certain textual features link these works to the ghastly short stories, “Morella” and “Ligeia.” Notwithstanding, closer examination of these apparent points in common suggests Poe was a kind and doting partner to Virginia and Elmira.

Readers make the mistake of fusing Poe with his deranged narrators

Poe and Virginia married in 1836. Virginia was only 14 and, according to James M. Hutchinson, Poe regarded himself as his young wife’s protector and mentor. She was a bright light in the gloomy author’s life, and she excelled in the lessons her husband taught her, ranging from music to mathematics before her untimely death in 1847. While terminally ill, Virginia promised Poe that should she die, she would become his guardian angel. Poe’s second muse, Elmira, was a childhood sweetheart and previous neighbor of Poe’s. The two were devoted to one another before Poe left for the University of Virginia, at which point her parents coerced her into marrying another man. Following Virginia’s death Poe proposed to Elmira and the couple was allegedly scheduled to marry only ten days before Poe’s mysterious death (“Tumultuous Romances”). Virginia and Elmira exerted powerful impact on Poe’s writing, that influence finding lasting expression in much of what Poe wrote.

“For Annie” is one of Poe’s more disputed and bizarre compositions; even the sequence of events is uncertain, but my understanding is that the narrative begins immediately following the speaker’s death, as

he proclaims, “the lingering illness / Is over at last— / And the fever called “Living” / Is conquered at last,” while stretched out in a coffin at his own wake.

His tone is triumphant rather than despondent, however, which might explain why some readers consider “For Annie” an uplifting poem. The speaker reflects on the tortures of living and the agony leading up to his death, namely his separation from a woman named Annie. In the moments before his death, her spirit appears to him and guides him to a peaceful end. Poe writes, “When the light was extinguished, / She covered me warm, / And she prayed to the angels / To keep me from harm,” a recollection that might very well serve as a reference to Virginia’s vow to Poe before her death that she would always watch over him. “For Annie” never explicitly references Elmira; however, several factors suggest Poe might have had her in mind when he was writing this poem. Despite the love and commitment the author and Virginia shared, some Poe scholars speculate that they never consummated their marriage (“Tumultuous Romances”). For that reason, it is strange that the narrator in the poem would create such erotic descriptions of his spectral Annie if it were solely about Virginia. At one point, for example, he muses,

Drowned in a bath
Of the tresses of Annie.
She tenderly kissed me,
She fondly caressed,
And then I fell gently
To sleep on her breast—

The recorded moment seems redolent with erotic overtones. Furthermore, the possibility that the passage hints at a sexual encounter becomes even more plausible when we recall that Annie and the narrator lie together in his coffin. Virginia would not have inspired such a physically intimate scene, but perhaps Poe’s more passionate first love Elmira would have.

The influence Virginia and Elmira exerted on Poe’s

work becomes even more evident in the poem “Annabel Lee.” The narrator and his wife live in a kingdom by the sea, where they cultivate a mutual adoration for one another. However, the narrator reports that angels became jealous of their idyllic romance, so “the wind came out of the cloud by night, / Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee.” At the end of the poem, the narrator finds comfort only in lying at her grave and remembering his long-lost love. Most readers regard this poem as a tribute to Virginia, considering Annabelle Lee’s youth and the tragedy of her protracted and premature death. The poem’s narrator recalls that the event transpired when “I was a child and she was a child.” However, Bradford A. Booth offers an alternative interpretation, suggesting “Virginia Clemm was a child...But Poe, twice her age, most certainly was not. It fits his first love, Sarah Elmira Royster, perfectly. ‘Myra’ was about fifteen when Poe met her.” Therefore, although many of the poem’s details would seem to correspond to Virginia, the same might be approached as allusions to Elmira.

“For Annie” and “Annabel Lee” share many similarities. The conclusions of the poems bear remarkable similarity, both finishing with a sense of consolation and the possibility of a spiritual reunification. Light serves as a metaphor of the hope Poe appears to nurture in both poems. In “Annabel Lee,” for example, the narrator observes, “For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams / Of the beautiful Annabel Lee; / And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes / Of the beautiful Annabel Lee.” In “For Annie” the narrator’s heart “glows with the light / Of the love of my Annie— / With the thought of the light / Of the eyes of my Annie.” Furthermore, both lyrics establish that eyes become light’s transmitters and the resonance generated by both poems suggests Poe might have composed “Annabel Lee” as a prequel to “For Annie.” He published both works in 1849, only months before his own death. At this point in his life, Virginia was dead, and Poe had planned to marry Elmira. While he cultivated a bond with Elmira, he was also likely feeling guilt towards Virginia for moving on.

These poems convey agony over the loss of a loved one, a reluctance to accept that loss, and compensatory faith in the lasting and revitalizing nature of love.

The influence of Virginia and Elmira also extends to Poe's fiction. Both muses served as the inspiration for the brides in "Morella" and "Ligeia." In "Morella," the narrator is married to a woman named Morella who he eventually grows to hate, in part because of her obsession with mysticism. He longs for her demise, and on her deathbed she warns him, "I am dying, yet shall I live," referencing her unborn daughter, who will also be named Morella at her baptism. When the narrator utters the name, the girl is transfigured into her dead mother. The transformation mirrors the story of Ligeia, whose spirit enters the body of the narrator's second wife, Rowena, while she is on her deathbed. The narrator of "Ligeia" adores his gifted wife and the two seem perfectly compatible. Ligeia falls fatally ill, however, only to be succeeded by the narrator's new wife, Rowena. Rowena also succumbs to an apparently fatal illness, perhaps the result of the narrator's use of black magic against her. At the story's conclusion, Rowena becomes Ligeia.

The plots of these two narratives mirror one another: an older and educated spouse dies suddenly, is replaced by a younger woman, and ultimately is resurrected through the death of the younger woman. Both tales echo Poe's romantic history. He fell in love with Elmira before they were quickly driven apart by her parents, who didn't approve of Poe (with Elmira serving as inspiration for Morella and Ligeia). Poe then married the young and bright Virginia, who could be compared to Rowena and the daughter, Morella. Following Virginia's premature passing, Poe pursues Elmira once more, dying before they could marry.

"Morella" and "Ligeia" were published before Virginia's death; however, events from Poe's life indicate he never got over Elmira. Both tales could very well express his desire to return to her. Virginia's death serves as an eerily unintended similarity be-

tween the fictional and real worlds. The similarity in timelines and sequences of events suggests that Virginia and Elmira served as inspiration for these short stories as well as the poems "For Annie" and "Annabel Lee." Following Poe's death, women from all over the country came forth, claiming to be the inspiration for the poems, attracted, perhaps, by the prospect of making a lasting, haunting, impact on a writer's imagination.

Many readers understand that Poe belongs to a large company of writers whose works suggest an obsession with at least one woman. Dante had his Beatrice, Petrarch his Laura, Byron his Augusta, Percy Shelley his Jane. The complete list would be a long one. Regarded in this literary context, it might not seem so strange that Poe's loss of so many women would have conditioned his imagination to create a female lover capable of embodying the sensual alongside the angelic object. In this regard it would seem that Virginia and Elmira might have formed twin muses occupying complementary poles, one signifying warm affection and spirituality, the other passion and sexuality.

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THE PEANUT BUTTER FALCON & SPECIAL NEEDS

REPRESENTATION IN FILM

BY: KRISTIN COLE

Streaming services, Blockbusters, and Remakes. Last summer's movie season felt a bit overwhelming for both average moviegoers and film connoisseurs. When companies like Disney capitalize on nostalgia through remakes, reboots and sequels, the practice becomes a redundant and exhausting trend. However, this year's independent films represent a welcome escape. They outshine the mainstream spinoffs and adaptations and hold their own in a cinematic world dominated by superheroes and scary clowns. Films such as Tyler Nilson's and Michael Schwartz's *The Peanut Butter Falcon* remind us to value narrative originality in an industry that is becoming increasingly rapacious and unoriginal.

The Peanut Butter Falcon is a gritty, heartfelt tale fea-

aturing two runaways who establish an unlikely bond on the outer banks of coastal North Carolina. Breakout star Zack Gottsagen's "Zak" is a lonely 22-year-old man who lives with Down syndrome. He has been abandoned by his family and forced by the state to live in a nursing home. His desperate attempts to escape and attend wrestling school put pressure on his exasperated but well-meaning caretaker Eleanor, played by *Fifty Shades of Grey*'s Dakota Johnson. Zak's third attempt at escaping the nursing facility proves successful, and he flees donning nothing but his underwear to a run-down fishing dock. Here, he meets Shia Lebeouf's Tyler, a weary, sullen fisherman struggling with unemployment and the untimely

death of his older brother. On his way to start over in Florida after angrily burning thousands of dollars worth of fishing equipment, Tyler agrees to bring Zak to his wrestling hero, the SaltWater Redneck, played by Thomas Haden Church. Fleeing entrapment and past mistakes, the two embark on a southbound journey down the rural outer banks. For Zak, the journey represents an opportunity to live an independent life. For Tyler, flight becomes a pilgrimage toward redemption.

And for Eleanor, who later joins the two fugitives, the experience delivers a lesson in freedom and letting go.

At a mere hour and thirty-three minutes, this "buddy film" that could have easily fallen prey to clichés instead debuts as an elegant, simple tale of friendship and acceptance. The char-

acters and their stories flow effortlessly. Raw, meaningful elements allow them to feel both familiar and splendidly ordinary. The cinematography takes advantage of the rugged landscape of coastal North Carolina to create a mesmerizing background for this Mark Twain-esque river journey. A sparse, run-down environment is shot in a style that emphasizes the subtle blend of country civilization with the beauty of nature. Buzzing marshes and gorgeous sunsets juxtapose with two dirty, gritty travelers, Tyler and Zak, who, not unlike the scenery behind them, showcase a mesmerizing humility, as they bond with one another. In a way, the setting reflects the story's profound simplicity. Nilson and Schwartz spend little



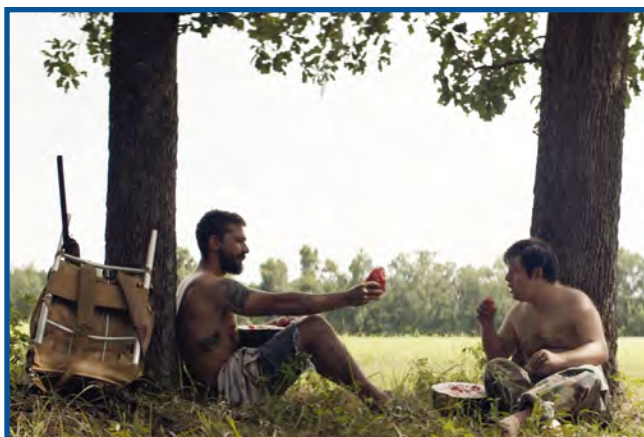
From left: Dakota Johnson (Eleanor), Zack Gottsagen (Zak), and Shia Lebeouf (Tyler) © SXSW Film Festival

time on character backgrounds and wasteful set-up, encouraging the audience instead to tag along with the two wanderers, accepting them for who they were and embracing them for who they are as the story unfolds. *The Peanut Butter Falcon* is a masterful movie. The film allows characters the room to develop and deepen naturally, rather than try to create depth and meaning by including contextually formational background stories.

From start to finish, the power and artistry that inform the acting performances serve as among the strongest assets of this film. *Variety* film critic Peter Debruge observes, “say what you will about LaBeouf’s off-screen troubles, but that same turmoil that seems so disruptive to his personal life gives a role like this a dimension few actors could achieve, resulting in a singular kind of pairing: In Gottsagen, we get a performer who appears to be playing an earnest, unfiltered version of himself, while in LaBeouf, there are layers at play.” Those “off-screen troubles” involved a rocky relationship with his father, the struggle of coping with childhood stardom, and an altercation with law enforcement that occurred during the shooting of this film. But Shia Labeouf is back, inspiring hope that this performance and his future ones will separate him from the controversial headlines that have surfaced in recent years. While he initially comes off as an impatient hillbilly, he slowly reveals his raw anguish and the crushing guilt stemming from the fatal car accident that took his brother’s life after Tyler fell asleep at the wheel. The affection for Zak that develops throughout the film helps map Tyler’s slow progression towards self-forgiveness. Gottsagen, who lives with Down’s Syndrome in real life, is equally as delightful to watch on screen. In fact, this story was written precisely for him after Nilson and Schwartz met Gottsagen at an acting camp for artists with disabilities. Captivated by his persona, the two filmmakers began writing *The Peanut Butter Falcon*. They gush about Gottsagen in an interview with CBS12 News in Florida. Schwartz states, “He’s impossible to look away from. I wanted to be around him, Tyler wanted to be

around him, and when he’s in front of the camera, everybody wants to be around him.” Gottsagen possess a unique ability to take everything at face value, a trait that inspires both humility and compassion from those around him. The chemistry between the two men is incredibly powerful, as their interactions are simultaneously poignant and playful. Their banter, combined with mutual understanding of one another, allows both men to ignore disability and haunting mistakes from the past.

The idea of seeing through disability urges me to note what could have served as a marketable feature for this film, but rightfully did not become one: Down syndrome. Early in the film, an exasperated Zak tries to explain to Tyler “I am a Down syndrome person,” to which Tyler bluntly replies “I don’t give a s***; do you got supplies on you?” This brusque exchange emphasizes a larger theme throughout the film: that Zak’s mental challenges, while an unavoidable facet of his makeup, never become a focal point for sympathy. Sheila O’Malley of *RogerEbert.com* points out that “[Zak] lives in the real world. Unlike so many disabled characters in film, [Zak] is not utilized as a symbol, a metaphor, or created to be ‘inspirational.’ He’s the central figure; he’s outspoken and strong, funny and vulnerable.” In short, characters in the film



Tyler and Zak share a watermelon while discussing plans to locate the Saltwater Redneck.

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treat Zak as they might any individual, equal to everyone else and capable of living a free and happy life.

Tyler's quip, therefore, does not signal a lack of sensitivity. Instead it underscores the importance of treating every person with respect. Later in the film, when questioned by Tyler about the R-word (that is, the unfortunate epithet "retard"), Eleanor acts much like everyone else does, vehemently denying the use of the insult. What Tyler subsequently points out is that when you unnecessarily coddle a special needs person, you are not only removing an element of their humanity, but essentially calling them the R-word without explicitly saying it. This scene emphasizes the underlying message of empathy: respecting, understanding and taking the time to learn about the unique strand of humanity in each individual.

An additionally compelling scene occurs when Tyler asks Eleanor about her plan for Zak. "I'm not going to sell him to you," Eleanor replies incredulously, but Tyler clarifies and asks what Eleanor wants for Zak's life: keeping him trapped in a nursing home, or allowing him to pursue his dream of becoming a wrestler. Eleanor's character, while stirring romantic emotions within Tyler and serving as the voice of reason throughout the film, travels its own developmental arc. She learns that there is far more to life

than protocols for polite behavior, college degrees and obeying the unethical demands of a boss. This gradual awakening parallels her renewed appreciation for Zak's life. Rather than coddle him, she can learn to let go and travel through life alongside him.

This beautiful story of friendship and redemption is supplemented by a twangy, folk soundtrack that subtly emphasizes the rugged beauty of the environment. For a relatively short film, the cinematography, scenery, soundtrack, writing, and masterful acting combine to deliver a humbling film experience. Many of us find it difficult to devote a pause to watching films. Nevertheless, this year's record-breaking number of blockbuster hits suggests that film-goers still manage their time efficiently enough to spend it sitting through three hours of super-heroic feats or two hours of digitally remastered singing animals. So when searching for a movie, look a little deeper, for there are films out there, shorter and much more artistic, with a story to tell and a message to spread. While what we see on the billboards shows an industry looking to burn a hole in our pockets and further line their own, the hidden gems that lie in the shadows sometimes prove to be much more worthy of our attention.



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NEWS AND NOTES

*Professor [Emma Duffy-Comparone](#) has sold her collection of original short fiction to the [Henry Holt Company](#). The publisher also extended to her a contract for writing a novel. Her latest short story, called “[The Package Deal](#),” is appearing currently in *The New England Review*.

*Writers House Director [Andrea Cohen](#) has published with Four Way Books a new volume of original poetry, titled *Nightshade*.

*Current English major [Tiana Lawrence](#) is currently organizing a cultural studies / experiential-style event called “[Hair Show: This Is Me](#).” Sponsored by the SGA, the event will be held February 22, 2020 at 7 pm in the Multipurpose Room of the campus Sakowich Center. Merrimack students will be admitted free of charge. Guest Fee for admission will be \$5.

*Merrimack English program alumna [Donna Harrington-Leuker](#) (class of 1976) gave a lecture based on her new book, [Books for Idle Hours: Nineteenth-Century Publishing and the Rise of Summer Reading](#) (University of Massachusetts Press, 2019), at the Merrimack Writers House on September 24. She serves as Professor of English at Salve Regina University. Professor Leuker’s English Department mentors Dr. Geraldine Branca (Professor Emeritus) and Dr. John Murphy attended the event. Professor Leuker credited Dr. Branca with inspiring her interest in book culture and Dr. Murphy with fueling her love of William Dean Howells.

*Professor [Steven Scherwatzky](#) attended a symposium sponsored by the Lewis Walpole Library on “Scholarly Editions of Literary Texts in the Long Eighteenth Century” on September 29 at Yale University. That evening he attended the annual Johnsonians dinner, held this year at Yale’s Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

*The English Department held its [Annual Career Night](#) event at the Merrimack Club on Tuesday, October 22.

