

Introduction

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In literary analysis, there's a common joke about whether "the curtains were just blue"—a playful critique of overanalyzing symbolism. But, as someone who takes things too seriously, I can't stop myself from wondering: *What if they weren't?* What if those curtains reflect sorrow, constraint, or the weight of the world pressing in on a character? What if they reveal something about the author's world, the society they lived in or the systems that shaped them? To me, English has always fundamentally been about language, storytelling, and interpretation—how texts reflect, shape, and challenge our understanding of the world.

With each passing day, we are faced with new and growing challenges of political instability, social unrest, and an uncertain future. In times of upheaval, many of us seek comfort in literature, film, and other forms of storytelling to process the world around us. It is not so surprising then, that in a year where the managing editor of *The Albatross* is a political science student, the eight works featured recognize how power structures are reinforced or subverted, identity is negotiated, and history is remembered or erased. It is only fitting that all eight papers are inherently political. Volume 15 of *The Albatross* explores how literature, film, poetry, and music challenge historical, social, and political structures, through colonial resistance, gender and class critique, or artistic subversion.

Our first two essays embark on how marginalized communities resist oppression through narrative forms, specifically storytelling and poetry, to highlight the power of art in giving voice to those who have been historically marginalized or silenced. Informed by Métis scholar Jo-Ann Episkenew, Nicole Rogers illustrates how Indigenous storytelling resists colonial narratives in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* (2021). Rogers argues that "Highway challenges the dominant 'victim-only' narrative by portraying

complex, joyful and humorous Indigenous characters,” thus asserting creative sovereignty (15). Focusing on cultural resistance and the assertion of Indigenous identity and sovereignty through storytelling techniques and content, Rogers forces the reader to engage in a framework that demonstrates Indigenous peoples as more than the victims the colonial narrative makes them out to be. Conversely, Elise Luik demonstrates how poetic expression serves as a tool of resistance against the dehumanizing practices experienced by refugees. Analyzing Warsan Shire’s poetry collection *Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head* (2022), Shire’s poetry “evokes the embodied experience of living as a marginalized individual,” challenging the state’s power to define and classify refugees as less than human (21). Luik emphasizes the resistance against de-humanization and the reclaiming of humanity by refugees through the visceral and personal expression of their corporeal experiences in poetry.

Following similar themes of challenging dominant power structure narratives are our next two essays focusing on how history is constructed and manipulated. Michael Haneke’s fictional film *Caché* (2005) and Emad Burnat’s documentary *Five Broken Cameras* (2011) are used as examples of “witness resistance” to expose how surveillance challenges state-sanctioned narratives of colonialism. Audrey Mugford analyzes how surveillance, as a form of filmmaking, can be used to contradict and resist dominant, “constructed colonial narrative of history” (30). Mugford ultimately argues that both films employ “transformative resistance” by appropriating the colonial medium of film and surveillance to expose and challenge dominant historical accounts, whether through psycho-logical disruption of a forgotten past or real-time documentation of ongoing oppression (37). Through a different context and method; Alison Dyck examines how Timothy Findley’s novel *The Wars* (1977) critiques “official history and historical narratives” of the Canadian experience in the Great War (39). Findley uses Robert Ross’s character to debunk myths about the war perpetuated by recruitment propaganda and to chal-

lenge the societal expectations of early 20th century Canadian society that informed these narratives. Dyck exhibits how a literary work can critique already established “official history” and propaganda narratives of past conflicts by presenting an individual experience that contradicts those constructions (40). These papers highlight the ways in which history is not a neutral recounting of events but is actively constructed and can be manipulated to serve particular agendas.

The journal takes a turn with the next two articles, offering critiques of capitalism’s impact on morality and human relationships, highlighting how capitalism undermines genuine human connection and ethical behaviour by prioritizing material values. Jessica Jay critiques capitalist greed by exposing how F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (2021) “commodifies [female] selfhood” (51). Femininity is shaped and constrained by the logic of commodification, where identity is fashioned through wealth, appearance, and desirability—often at the cost of authenticity and agency—resulting in a world that is “material without being real,” (57). Jay demonstrates how materialism replaces genuine human connection through the character’s pursuit of wealth as a means to achieve love and social standing, which ultimately leads to tragedy and emptiness. Alternatively, through Theodor Adorno’s social critique, Alexander McLauchlan analyzes Franz Kafka’s *Betrachtung* (Meditation) suggesting that late capitalism renders ethical living feasible by fostering alienation and the internalization of bourgeois ideology (59). Drawing on multiple Kafka short stories, McLauchlan explains how relationships are shaped by the assimilation of cultural norms, and how fulfillment is found in transactional relationships and the assumption of power over others, rather than genuine human connection. Using Adorno’s lens, Kafka’s narratives suggest that capitalism’s inherent structure fosters alienation and undermines the possibility of moral living and authentic solidarity.

The final two papers tackle alternative ways of perceiving reality through nature or artistic expression, suggesting that these perspectives can challenge the dominant

norms. Ava Ugolini provides a unique and exciting comparison between William Blake's artistic work and the new wave music movement, arguing that both offer different ways of perceiving reality which challenge orthodox conventions and socio-political norms (66). Blake and new wave music provide alternative ways of understanding and engaging with reality, offering critical perspectives on power structures, societal issues, and human experiences through respective art forms. Shifting from music to text, Sarah Evans explicates how Nan Shepherd's writing and *The Living Mountain* presents the perception of reality through a deep and spiritual connection with nature. Ultimately, Shepherd finds a "new body in the mountain's 'Being,'" suggesting a new way of perceiving not only the natural world but also the self in relation to it, advocating for the mountain's preservation by recognizing its intrinsic value (85).

These eight critical works collectively analyze how literature, film, and music serve as powerful mediums, each challenging dominant narratives and reshaping how we understand the world. In a time when uncertainties shape our everyday lives, I encourage you, reader, to engage with these texts that remind us how stories are never just stories. Perhaps, then, the curtains were never just blue, but rather a window into something far greater. Without a further ado: *The Albatross*, Volume 15.