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Five Stars: Contemporary Review and Literary Discourse

Maxwell Louis Sims
Bard College, ms4172@bard.edu

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Five Stars: Contemporary Review and Literary Discourse

Senior Project submitted to

***The Division of languages and Literature
of Bard College***

by

Max Sims

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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Introduction:

"There must be some way out of here"
Said the joker to the thief
"There's too much confusion
I can't get no relief"

It was lines like these that earned Bob Dylan his Nobel Prize in literature - an incredibly controversial decision that calls into question the definition of contemporary literature. Can pop music really qualify as literature? And even if it does, can Dylan be considered as talented as the other incredible writers in contention? But perhaps Dylan's lyrics can lend us perspective on the state of writing, and on the controversy surrounding his award. In *Along the Watchtower*, two horsemen find themselves at a proverbial crossroads, lost in a troubled world. But, as the Joker says, "There must be some way out of here."

Some view Dylan's win as an answer to this troubling question. Perhaps the way out is just that – moving outwards, expanding the domain of Literature. An article from the New York Times implies just that, with the title *Bob Dylan Wins Nobel Prize, Redefining Boundaries of Literature*¹. Initially, the article highlights one side of the argument, which is an issue of quality – “Literary scholars have long debated whether Mr. Dylan's lyrics can stand on their own as poetry, and an astonishing volume of academic work has been devoted to parsing his music².” But every time a Nobel Prize is awarded, there will be arguments of quality. What makes this debate different and compelling its focus on how the Nobel comity “has stretched the definition of literature.³” When one looks at the vast majority of Nobel Prize winners and

¹ Sisario, Ben. "Bob Dylan Wins Nobel Prize, Redefining Boundaries of Literature." *New York Times* 14th Oct. 2016: n. pag. Print.

² Ibid

³ Ibid

recipients, one will find a number of novelists and short story writers. As one delves deeper and deeper into the debate over Dylan, arguments of quality give way to arguments of medium. When we discuss literature, we mean books and poems, and more broadly, the written word.

An article by *Slate* magazine, bluntly titled *Bob Dylan Is a Genius of Almost Unparalleled Influence, but He Shouldn't Have Gotten the Nobel*⁴, offers an elaboration of the medium argument. The article makes explicit in its very title that it will not be making the argument that Dylan's work is not of the proper quality, going so far as to acknowledge Bob Dylan as a genius. Instead, the author emphasizes a difference of medium, comparing Bob Dylan's Lyrics to the poetry of Richard Wilbur, arguing that "The first is poetry, the second are lyrics⁵." This is a distinction of medium- that a poem and song are mechanically different, and therefore one is literature and the other not. The writer goes on to define literature for himself, positing that "the distinctive thing about literature is that it involves reading silently to oneself. Silence and solitude are inextricably a part of reading, and reading is the exclusive vehicle for literature."⁶ This definition immediately puts a date to literature, as this conception of literature is relatively contemporary. Between oral narratives, poetry, and theater, many forms of literature have been spoken out loud. Some of the founding works of western canon – the *Iliad*, *Oedipus*, and the *Aeneid* – were recited orally. And the *Slate* author even goes on to acknowledge that "Literature as a silent and lonely activity is scarcely older than the printing press⁷." But they stick to their guns, insisting that they can only see literature as something read silently to one's

⁴ Metcalf, Stephan. "Bob Dylan Is a Genius of Almost Unparalleled Influence, but He Shouldn't Have Gotten the Nobel." *Slate Magazine* (2016): n. pag. Web.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

self. Ultimately, the struggle over Dylan belies a larger struggle, over what Mediums are inherently literary.

But this struggle is distracting, as it emphasizes the differences between Bob Dylan's pop music and contemporary novels and poetry. While the mediums are distinct, they share many formal elements. Indeed, Bob Dylan's music shares many formal elements with lyrical poetry or even Homeric ballads - narrative, lyrics, and other literary attributes. There is conceivably a way of approaching Dylan's work that focuses on literary elements.

Unfortunately, many modern scholars share the Joker's mindset - that they can't get "no relief." Many even bemoan Bob Dylan's Nobel Prize as yet another sign of Literature's gradual decline. There is a fear that our interaction with and appreciation of literature is dwindling. And indeed, the novel is in decline, with general readership down. The number of non-book readers in America has more than doubled since 1978, from 8% to a whopping 23%. And those who read at least six books a year has dropped from 42% to 28%⁸. And this trend is reflected in frightening rates of illiteracy in America. Illiteracy reached a low in 1978 at only 0.6%, while now illiteracy in the country is at 14%⁹. Given these stats, it is easy to see why some may despair. And yet, these polls are measuring books read. While book readership reaches new lows, interaction with writing has taken on new forms, some of which do not even require literacy. For instance, one can be exposed to pros through an online audio book, or can

⁸ "National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) - 120 Years of Literacy." *National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) - 120 Years of Literacy*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 Dec. 2016.

⁹ Ibid

appreciate lyrics in pop songs, or can listen to dialogue in movies. And in terms of the written word, the internet is awash with free books, poetry, and analysis.

In my project, I will be arguing that we still have a strong literary instinct. In fact, when we interact with many mediums, our focus is on the formal elements that are the most literary. Specifically, this project will be looking at review and its distinctly literary approach to multiple mediums, particularly the novel, pop music, and television. I believe that review offers us a potential “way out of here” for the field of literature. Review, I will argue, is a body of literary discourse with a variety new works to focus on, across multiple mediums. For roughly a century now, the main literary discourse has been on novels and poetry. But now there is a body of criticism and analyses that approaches more recently emerging mediums as well, in addition to still exploring the novel and poetry.

But first we must define what we mean by review, as not all review is the same. A great deal of it has a utilitarian function, letting us know whether or not to consume a product. Think *Rotten Tomatoes* or *Yelp*. But the sort of review I am thinking of serves a different function. Yes, review can indeed be about reaching a value conclusion about a given work – is this good, or more importantly, is this worth watching or reading? But many contemporary reviews contain “spoilers” for an entire episode or book, and are meant to be read after one has watched or read a work, to gain a deeper understanding of a work. When watching something on TV, I’ll often read a review from the *AV Club* or *The New Yorker*, but only after having seen the show. I don’t read these reviews because I want to know if I should watch something, but because I already have and want to engage with it further. Or a definition I find particularly useful comes from *The Empty Space*. In it, Brook explains the role of the critic, a term we can equate to a

reviewer. “When a critic goes to a play, he can say he is just serving the man in the street, but it is not accurate. He is not just a tipster. A critic has a far more important role, an essential one, in fact, for an art without critics would be constantly menaced by far greater dangers”¹⁰. Or to summarize, the reviewer is not simply reporting to the reader whether a particular work is worth consuming. The reviewer is a vital part of maintaining an art form. Reviewers give shape to how we understand various media, or at the least, help to start and continue a conversation that goes beyond a mere rating.

So how does review relate back to the issue of Bob Dylan, and finding literary elements in pop music? First, there is the intuitive way. For what links cinema, pop music, and review? In the simplest sense, all involve writing, whether it be the song lyrics of music, the screenplay of the movie, or the process of writing a review. But beyond this, review has an interesting relationship to these various art forms. What happens in contemporary review is similar to what happens in a college classroom. While economic and other constraints may keep one out of an actual college classroom, we can still perform a similar function online – collectively analyze narrative works, and borrow insights from others. And when we discuss a narrative work of art, like music or cinema, a certain vocabulary becomes involved. In this project, I will be arguing that review not only imitates the kind of discourse found in academia, but specifically resembles a literature class, choosing to focus on certain literary aspects of a work.

To make our argument clearer, it helps to look at the notion of linguistic determinism. In Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, he argues that “The limits of my

¹⁰ Brook, Peter. *The empty space: A book about the theatre: Deadly, holy, rough, immediate*. Simon and Schuster, 1996. Page 35.

language mean the limits of my world”¹¹. Or as he later elaborates “We cannot think what we cannot think; so what we cannot think we cannot say either.”¹² The notion is that our thinking is limited by the language at our disposal. For instance, if one’s language lacks a word for a particular concept, one may have a harder time imagining it. Or we may have a hard time articulating an idea when we don’t have the proper words to express it.

But I would like to take this argument one step further. I would argue that we are not only limited by what language we have, but also by our ability to use it. When it comes to analyzing a story, whether it’s conveyed through song lyrics, a screenplay, or pages of a novel, we are not looking at an ordinary use of language, but a wholly new way of conceiving of language. And our human toolkit of literary techniques – our conception of how words ought to be used in text - limits our ability to think about narratives and other forms of writing. This is a sort of determinism that applies to our interaction with stories. Or in lieu of determinism, we could use the words methodology or theory.

Thus, we start to think of art forms other than the novel in ways that fit into our methodological toolkit. We can start to think of Bob Dylan in literary ways. But at the same time, our current tools don’t perfectly fit all artistic formats. As we discuss and analyze cinema and music, we need to adapt our theories – we must alter our assumptions about the use of language. So the effect of review is twofold: review spreads our established literary theories to

¹¹ Wittgenstein, Ludwig. "Full Text of "Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus"" *Full Text of "Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus"* N.p., n.d. Web. 07 Dec. 2016.

¹² Ibid

forms other than the novel, while at the same time undermining those theories and forcing us to adjust them accordingly.

But before we go any further, we must address certain assumptions this project makes. First, we are assuming that literary elements are related more to methods of discourse than to medium. While first observed in novels, poems, or plays, we assume literary elements can be identified in other mediums. To take it even further, we could argue that a song, movie, or book can potentially take on a certain literary quality if perceived as such. And this line of reasoning – that literariness is not wholly bound to medium – is not without theory of its own. *The Theory of Literary Criticism: A Logical Analysis*, John Ellis argues that “Literary texts are not defined as those of a certain shape or structure, but as those pieces of language used in a certain kind of way by the community”¹³. This argument is mostly a reiteration of our previous ideas – that the literary is not only found in “shape or structure,” or in our case, in medium. The literary is located in discourse. Or specifically, literary qualities are found in “Pieces of language.” But Ellis does not mean any language – rather, language that possess two qualities. One of those qualities is the presence of a community to discuss this language. As we will see, community plays a significant role in shaping literary understanding in review. Review draws on online communities for both the production and consumption of content, and the readership may comment on or share review, helping to shape the overall discourse. So in terms of Ellis’ criteria for the literary, we certainly have that community aspect in review.

¹³ Ellis, John M. *The Theory of Literary Criticism: A Logical Analysis*. Berkeley: U of California, 1974. Print. Page 42.

But Ellis also speaks of language being used in “a certain kind of way.” He makes a key distinction between specialized use of language and other uses, or as he puts it, “That is to say, in our ordinary use of language we have all kinds of normal expectations¹⁴” Normal use may mean any number of things – a conversation in a hallway, or an advertisement in the back of a magazine. Just because something is a use of language does not mean it is a part of our literary instincts. When we speak of language, it is important to note that the way we use it in a literature classroom is not necessarily a “normal use.” In other words, academic discourse does not designate all use of language, but a very particular use. This clarification is key for those who oppose Dylan’s Nobel prize– who fear that once we abandon a “concrete” definition of literature, we will encounter a total free for all, where any use of language can be considered literature.

This project acknowledges that a specialized use and understanding of language is important for literary theory. That being said, we also argue that normal language can still exist in literary discourse, alongside a more specialized use. What makes review unique is that normal uses of language serve as a vehicle for the specialized language, potentially making the content more accessible. Also, a normal use of language can help convey elements such as emotion, which may be hard to convey through more technical language. Ultimately, there is a question of whether normal language belongs in literary discourse, or if it somehow undermines the quality of a theory. Even Ellis, who agrees that the literary can be found outside of any particular medium, is reluctant to find a place of normal language in the literary. In this

¹⁴ Ibid page 160.

project we will try to illustrate how normal language factors into review without undermining or negating its theory. And we will focus on Ellis's notion of the literary coming from uses of language by a community – or in short, we will focus on discussion.

In focusing our conversation on the discussion of a text, rather than its medium, we encounter another implicit assumption. We assume that literary methodology and theory is ever changing. Indeed, Bob Dylan's Nobel win seems to mark a significant change in literary perception. We can start to understand the source of this change by looking at P. D. Juhl's *Interpretation*. In response to the theories of E.D. Hirsh, he asks "What reason do we have for supposing that there can only be one 'real' meaning of a work?" and "How do we determine what a word or expression really means? Plainly there is no such thing"¹⁵. Implicit in this line of reasoning is the notion that there is the word on the page, and then, there is what we make of it. And while the words are fixed and never change, interpretations certainly can. As we look at review, we will notice how review often ignores "word or expression," focusing less on specific lines of text or dialogue and more on the reviewer's own interpretations. As a result, we will see reactions to text change over time, seeing as they are grounded less in the concrete text and more in personal sentiment. This constant flux is the nature of any literary criticism. Over the centuries, criticism has shifted from historicist methods, to formalist ones, to even Marxist or feminist readings. And just as change is integral to review, so is temporality. Review will often date itself intentionally, referring a show from "last night," or mentioning how the reviewer's viewpoint has changed over a certain span of time. Review is also deeply tied to time

¹⁵ Juhl, P. D. *Interpretation, an Essay in the Philosophy of Literary Criticism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1980. Print. Page 39

because of the pressure for review a work in close proximity to its release. Thanks to the advent of the internet, a review can be read within mere hours of a work being released. Ultimately, if we understand review as a conversation that changes, we can identify two of its key elements - time and subjectivity, elements we will see frequently the following chapters.

Now that we have addressed the assumptions of our project, we are starting to see certain elements and biases of review. A major goal of this project is to form a conception of what review, as a field of discourse, looks like. And the next aspect we will be addressing is how review prioritizes the reader and theorist over the author. To further this point, we can again look at P.D. Juhl's *Interpretation*. While discussing the many possible meanings of a word in a text, Juhl asks "whether the meaning of a text may change as the result of changes in language and culture or whether its meaning is indeed determined by the author's intention"¹⁶. We have already established that our argument is one of change, but where does the issue of change and impermanence bring us? Juhl offers us a possibility— approaches like ours, which prioritize the discussion of language over the language in and of itself, undermine authorial intent. For if we are arguing that a text has no fixed meaning, we are inevitably undermining the author's original idea – *their* fixed meaning. And we can see this favoritism in many aspects of our contemporary literary approach. First, there is the fact that any new narrative – be it television, literature, or music – is outnumbered by countless online entities, all making their own interpretations of the text. We also live in a day and age of fan fiction, where audiences can rewrite a story if they do not like the author's take on it. Even the fact that a great deal of

¹⁶ Juhl, P. D. *Interpretation, an Essay in the Philosophy of Literary Criticism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1980. Print. Page 41

internet content is anonymous favors the reader. We don't have an author to focus on – only the work itself.

However, our stance is not as strong as Juhl's. He posits that "culture and language" and "the author" are inherently apposed, each fighting for ownership over the meaning of a text. But both can be a source of meaning, as we shall see in review, which references the author and will speculate on their intent. That being said, Juhl's terms of "culture and language" are helpful to us, as they relate strongly to review. We've touched upon language already, and how its use is a critical part of understanding the literary elements in review. And because review incorporates such a large sample size of the population, dealing with works that are consumed in mass, it has clear ties to culture. The author is not dead, merely maimed. That said, culture and use of language are more relevant in determining meaning in review.

Whenever authorial intent is in question, it is hard to avoid mention of Roland Barthes' *The Death of the Author*. Specifically, his work helps us understand the distinction between contemporary review, and what Barthes calls "classic criticism." As Barthes declares at the end of his essay, "The reader has never been the concern of classical criticism"¹⁷. There is something of an innate inaccessibility to classic criticism, given its technical language and structural depth. And this inaccessibility is accompanied by many logistical barriers, such as accessibility to sources, the price of formal education, and field specific vocabulary. And while classic criticism does not necessarily ignore the reader, many readers have a difficult time accessing it. But in review, the reader exists on the page, hanging out in the comments section, declaring "here I

¹⁷ Barthes, Roland. "The death of the author." *Contributions in Philosophy* 83 (2001): 3-8. Page 6.

am.” One needs no credentials to see their critique read on a blog, or shared across internet forums – any can contribute. And we find ourselves far from the scenario that Barthes feared, where the author “still rules in manuals of literary history, in biographies of writers, in magazine interviews, and even in the awareness of literary men, anxious to unite, by their private journals, their person and their work”¹⁸. These previous modes of understanding literature revolve around the author, and have often been the work of a select few. After all, only a well versed academic can identify the writer’s intent through a swamp of metaphor and reference. But anyone can have their own personal view on a work.

Indeed, review focuses more heavily on the reader than the writer. A reason for this may be that, as we’ve mentioned, review acknowledges change. All criticism is subject to change, but review tends to pay particular attention to it. Often, time is a topic of conversation in review. And when change is so prevalent, authorial intent a shaky source of meaning. A useful example of this shakiness is Shakespeare, who carries unparalleled status in the literary world. But when it comes to his texts, such as *Hamlet*, his words are found amongst multiple folio and quarto editions, and “when we make our editions, of Shakespeare or any other dramatist, are not ‘getting back to the author’s original text”¹⁹. Shakespeare’s texts that we know today, such as the contemporary version of *Hamlet*, were not conceived of at Shakespeare’s writing desk – they were compiled through a series of editorial interventions, across various publications of the play. In *Bad Taste and Bad Hamlet*, Leah Marcus explains how, “for much of our century, editors were in substantial agreement about the broad shape of

¹⁸ Ibid page 3

¹⁹ Orgel, Stephen. "What is a Text?." *Staging the Renaissance* (2012): 83-87. Page 87.

the play, thereby cementing an elite community with each other and their discriminating readers”²⁰. This point speaks to Barthes, and to the larger concerns of our project. The notion of a singular, definitive meaning can only occur artificially, by the consensus of a small group of intellectuals. And the only way to ensure this consensus is through exclusivity - by only having “discriminating readers” and an “elite community.” This is not to say that such shadowy elite communities are commonplace in literary theory – if anything, they are nearly impossible. And form of criticism is more likely to contribute to change that stop it in its tracks. But review appears to truly seek out change, by having the opposite of an “elite community.” Review features a porous community, where communication between various members is strongly encouraged, and the reader is allowed to participate.

Another key element of review we must address is an interpretive approach to text. This approach, while it may seem intuitive, is an active choice. Review is choosing to promote and normalize a certain methodical approach, even though there are other ways to proceed. For instance, up into in the early twentieth century, most of literary criticism was philological historicism, in which “factual details are uncovered by historical research”²¹. An interpretive style of criticism resembles Erich Auerbach’s “biblical form,” which he outlines in *Mimesis*. Auerbach argues that such texts promote “intense subjectivity,” and revolve around the notion that “interpretation in a determined direction becomes a general method of comprehending

²⁰ Marcus, Leah S. "Bad Taste and Bad Hamlet." *Unediting the Renaissance: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Milton* (1992): 132-76. Page 136.

²¹ Marshall, Donald G. *Contemporary critical theory: a selective bibliography*. Modern Language Assn of Amer, 1993. Page 6.

reality”²². His approach puts the focus on a “form,” which resembles our terms of medium or Ellis’ term of “shape or structure.” Auerbach argues that form ultimately leads to method. But with review, we will be making the opposite argument – that methodology supersedes “form,” and that methodology is not a response to “form.” Instead, method shapes our understanding of form. Close reading review, we will see something closer to a “biblical method” than a “biblical form.”

Another element of review worth mentioning is religion. As ideas like the “biblical form” suggest, our current approach to literature relates to certain religious concepts, particularly Christian ones. Or as Eagleton theorizes “Like religion, literature works primarily by emotion and experience, and was so admirably well-fitted to carry through the ideological task which religion left off”²³. Emotion and experience, elements common in Christian psychology, are vital aspects of review. As we alluded to with our discussion of “normal language,” review employs a more colloquial tone at times, and often an emotional one. Reviewers will often incorporate their emotional response in their analysis of a work. They will also cite their own life experience, weaving their individual experience into their theory. And there is a subtle religious element in how blogs and other social forums function, as a place where people can gather with a community - a digital church or sorts. Just as religion is inherently communal and socially organizing, so are our conversations on literature. Or as Eagleton argues, literature keeps “a socially turbulent class society welded together”²⁴. There is a certain social aspect to the way

²² Auerbach, Erich, and Edward W. Said. *Mimesis: The representation of reality in western literature*. Princeton University Press, 2013. Page 16.

²³ Eagleton, Terry. *Literary theory: An introduction*. U of Minnesota Press, 1996. Page 22.

²⁴ Ibid page 21

literature operates, which may not be implicitly religious, but is still relevant to contemporary review. This aspect returns us to Ellis's criteria – that the literary is language used in “a kind of way by the community²⁵.” So, under the umbrella of religion, we have three key inclinations of review– emotional appeals, use of personal experience, and community based organization.

The final aspect of review we must mention is one of group dynamics. When discussing *how* we talk about literature, we inevitably must consider *who* is talking. Literariness is not necessarily determined by one single conversation, but by different conversations held by different groups, all overlapping. Or more specifically, there is an important interplay between the intellectual and the masses. According to Eagleton “English was no more than idle gossip” well in to the 1920's, and therefore was hard to “qualify as a proper academic pursuit”²⁶. But in an effort to better qualify the discipline, academics at such institutions as Cambridge began a bold undertaking in the 1930s. According to Eagleton, they were “The architects of the new subject.” There is an inevitable interplay between the academic and masses, as each influence the way we understand literature. Now, one could say we have two exclusive approaches to literature, each developing separately. As we noted with Marcus, intellectuals will often create elite, exclusive communities in which they can freely control notions of literature. But in review, the notion of an elite community is often done away with, and “intellectuals” will develop theories in tandem with the masses. As Lentricchia argues in *Criticism and Social Change*, “Intellectuals, in their work in and on culture, involve themselves inescapably in the political work of social change and social conversation”²⁷. An especially interesting phrase is “social

²⁵ Ellis, John M. *The Theory of Literary Criticism: A Logical Analysis*. Berkeley: U of California, 1974. Print. Page

²⁶ Eagleton, Terry. *Literary theory: An introduction*. U of Minnesota Press, 1996. Page 25.

²⁷ Lentricchia, Frank. *Criticism and social change*. University of Chicago Press, 1985. Page 6.

conversation,” which could practically serve as a synonym for review. Due to the causal and community oriented nature of review, it inevitably feels both social and conversational. In review, the “intellectuals” are deliberately involving themselves in this “social conversation,” taking out the middle man and writing directly to the reader. Review will even mention its readership, or incorporate them through use of the first person plural. But the while many reviewers have a background in academia and are intellectuals in that sense, the role of the intellectual becomes complicated in review. By writing reviews and contributing to a conversation, many are taking on a role long reserved for the academic. There is an emulation of the scholar. Review has distinctly academic connotation, yet is widely available, creating a space where different kinds of voices can collide. We should acknowledge that review features different kinds of commentaries, with different levels of rigor, from a casual *Good Reads* submission, by eager fans, to an editorial in the *New York Times*. Some voices are academic, some more personal, but all are relevant for our purposes. We will see these voices blending in the following chapters.

Now that we have established some of the elements to look out for, we can see how review takes form using three case studies. In order, the chapters will look at reviews of J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series, HBO’s *Breaking Bad*, and Kendrick Lamar’s *To Pimp a Butterfly*. The reason for this order is that book review most clearly concepts to literary methods. But starting with book review, we can then trace certain literary notions, such as narrative and language, over to TV and then music. The goal of this project is to help understand review as a literary discourse – as a brand of methodology all its own. This project will focus on the various features outlined in this introduction, such as emotion, interpretation, time sensitivity, and use

of language, hoping to understand just what kind of conversation is taking place on blogs, newspapers, and comments sections.

Chapter 1: You're a Wizard Harry – Harry Potter, and Making Theoretical Claims with

Review

For most books, a good review is an instrumental part of its success, just as a bad review can kill sales. But *Harry Potter's* rise to fame feels independent of its critical acclaim, or lack thereof. By the time *Harry Potter* reached the US, its status had already been established in England, and reviews felt like they were playing catch up. Rather than determining Harry Potter's success, review has been trying to explain it. The first *New York Times* review of *Harry Potter* starts by mentioning "the beloved heroes and heroines of children's literature,²⁸" as if Harry Potter's canonical status has already been solidified. And in the *New York Times* review of the final book, the reviewer argues that *Harry Potter* "is deeply rooted in traditional literature and Hollywood sagas — from the Greek myths to Dickens and Tolkien to 'Star Wars.'²⁹" Shortly after the final book hits shelves, this review already sees the series as traditional, imbedded in literary traditions that start with Homer. Or as Andrew Black theorizes in *The Irrespirable Rise of Harry Potter*, "the typical response goes some way to explaining why Harry Potter has become truly globalized"³⁰. As we outlined in the introduction, review is often not about a score, or determining whether a work is worth consuming – in the case of works like *Harry Potter*, most have already made the choice to pick the book up. From these snippets alone, we can see an

²⁸ Michael Winerip. "'HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE' ." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 14 Feb. 1999. Web. 26 Apr. 2017

²⁹ Kakutani, Michiko. "An Epic Showdown as Harry Potter Is Initiated Into Adulthood." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 18 July 2007. Web. 26 Apr. 2017.

³⁰ Blake, Andrew. *The Irresistible Rise of Harry Potter*. London: Verso, 2002. Print. Page 90.

approach that is well aware of culture, and interested in understanding not how *good* Harry Potter is, but *what* it is.

In the New York Times review of *The Sorcerer's Stone*, *Harry Potter* is described as “children's literature” and compared to “Cinderella and Snow White.³¹” Directly after, the reviewer explains how all the heroes in these stories “begin their lives being raised by monstrously wicked, clueless adults, too stupid to see what we the readers know practically from page 1: This is a terrific person we'd love to have for a best friend.³²” As we shall see throughout the project, reviews have a habit of establishing pseudo canons early on in, or genres, in an effort to establish a certain type. On the one hand, we have the broad genre of children's literature, but by choosing specific examples, the author has created a particular type of children's lit. The reviewer is categorizing multiple works as a particular type, and then using that type to understand *Harry Potter* better.

We can see a similar approach in the New York *Times* review for the seventh book, which starts by explaining how *Harry Potter* “is deeply rooted in traditional literature and Hollywood sagas — from the Greek myths to Dickens and Tolkien to Star Wars.³³” Again, the reviewer established the category *Harry Potter* belongs to, by using other various works to make a miniature canon of sorts. *Star Wars* is included in the company of “traditional literature,” such as Dickens and Tolkien. Just as our project looks at discourse across various mediums, so do reviews themselves. As we established in the introduction, there is a way of

³¹ Michael Winerip. "HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE '." *The New York Times*

³² Ibid

³³ Kakutani, Michiko. "An Epic Showdown as Harry Potter Is Initiated Into Adulthood." *The New York Times*.][hg

conceiving of the literary that is more grounded in theory than medium, allowing review to put the novel and film in the same category. And while this chapter will focus almost exclusively on book review, it is worth addressing the *New York Times's* review of *Sorcerer's Stone* movie. Just like the book reviews, this one starts by establishing a type, using various key examples – "(J.K. Rowling) has come up with something like 'Star Wars' for a generation that never had a chance to thrill to its grandeur, but this is 'Young Sherlock Holmes' as written by C. S. Lewis from a story by Roald Dahl."³⁴ Again, we see references across mediums, as *Star Wars* is compared to the likes of C. S. Lewis and Roald Dahl, both notable novelists. And while the reviews establish difference miniature canons, there are commonalities. Not only is *Star Wars* used as the key point of reference, much like the review of the seventh book, but there is also a focus on children's stories, much like the review of the first book. These reviews not only build their own definitions of *Potter*, but also allude to broader archetypes – children's literature, or perhaps a Star Wars-esque epic.

The way the review starts, by listing works and describing their shared function, is like a microcosmic literature review. In *Doing a Literature Review*, Jeffrey Knopf defines literature review as "an attempt to summarize the existing state of knowledge about a subject and, in research proposals, to frame the proposed research's expected contribution to knowledge."³⁵ If we apply this framework to review, then these opening portions could be seen as an "attempt to summarize the existing state of knowledge,"³⁶ in an effort to "frame" what is to come. By

³⁴ "FILM REVIEW; The Sorcerer's Apprentice." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, n.d. Web. 01 May 2017.

³⁵ Knopf, Jeffrey W. "Doing a literature review." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 39.01 (2006): 127-132. Page 128.

³⁶ Knopf, Jeffrey W. "Doing a literature review." Page 128.

summarizing the kind of literature *Potter* Belongs to, the reviewers are able to not only frame their own understanding of the novel, but also put themselves in the context of a broader conversation. They are helping to “evaluate the state of knowledge”³⁷ on *Harry Potter*, making claims about where and how the book fits into to larger narrative traditions. Is *Harry Potter* Children’s literature, a kind of Hollywood Epic, or some amalgamation of the two? Because the reviewer starts their evaluation with a review of a broader literature, they put themselves in an inherently broader conversation. They are making arguments not only about the particular work, but about a particular type.

To this end, none of these reviews discuss the actual text at length. The actual language of *Harry Potter* (the pros as they appear on the page) is rarely mentioned. And when it is mentioned, it used to support a broader point, rather than explore specifics of the language. And we will see this trend continue in subsequent chapters, as other review rarely focuses on specific, technical aspects of the text. To understand this approach, we can look to *For a Theory of Literary Production*. Pierre Macherey discusses the language of a book, arguing that “Unwinding within a closed circle, this language reveals only... itself; it has only its own content and its own limits, and the 'explicit' is imprinted on each of these terms.”³⁸ This idea of language and the “explicit” is reminiscent of our conversation in the introduction, on approaches to a text. Does one focus more on the language itself, finding its fixed meaning, or focus more on outside theory and opinion. Review decidedly takes the latter path, as we have seen in our examples thus far. It adopts Macherey’s philosophy - that looking at the words

³⁷ Ibid. "Doing a literature review." Page 128.

³⁸ Macherey, Pierre. *A theory of literary production*. Vol. 66. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978. Page 704.

themselves is not productive, and that there must be reference elsewhere, either to other literary works, to theories, or to various other sources.

Not only does Macherey identify a possible problem of focusing on language, but he also offers us an alternative approach. He speaks of “the necessity of inventing forms of expression, or merely finding them: not ideal forms, or forms derived from a principle which transcends the enterprise itself, but forms which can be used immediately as the means of expression for a determinate content.”³⁹ While Macherey is discussing literary production, not analysis, his concept still applies to review. The reviews we’ve seen appear to focusing on establishing a certain form, whether it is children’s literature or contemporary epic. And these forms are not simply being invented, but as Macherey argues, found. Reviewers explore a backlog of narrative works that spans centuries, trying to discover a reoccurring trend that helps them understand what form *Harry Potter* takes. And as Macherey explains, we are finding a form that does not “transcends the enterprise itself.” The goal of these reviews is not to lose sight of “the enterprise itself,” and to write a piece exclusively about children’s literature. Rather, we want forms that can “be used immediately,” and applied directly back to the work in question. In review, we want to discover forms not only for their own sake, but for their practical applications.

But finding forms is not the only goal of review. In *An Analysis of Book Review Criteria and Motivation*, Ladislav Mucina discusses four possible goals for book review, which are

³⁹ Macherey, Pierre. *A theory of literary production*. Page 704.

“theme (topic), references, new insights, and use as a tool box.”⁴⁰ These criteria are intended for a more scientific text, but are still apply quite nicely to review. First we have theme or topic, which resembles the issue of genre or type we have encountered thus far. As for references, we have already seen reviewers making references to many other works, often for the sake of establishing from. But as we move forwards, we will see references that are applied directly to elements of the text. Then we have new insights, which makes up the bulk of the review will see – understanding something distinct and original about the text is a goal of most of our case studies. Lastly, we have the goal of creating a tool box. The notion that review provides tools is similar to “contribution to knowledge,” the goal we identified when discussing literature review. Also, we should acknowledge that most of Mucina’s criteria for review involves looking outside of the text, whether it be searching for other texts to reference, or taking what we learn about a particular work and applying it elsewhere.

Ultimately, it is important to understand that review is not done in isolation, but designed to be a part of a larger conversation. They exist not only to score a particular episode or book, but to contribute to a more general knowledge. In *Toward a Definition of Book Review Policy*, Avery Leiserson outlines her criteria for book review, and then goes on to argue that “Each (function) is important; none is a substitute for, or should be confused with, original research and advancement of knowledge.”⁴¹ Whether it be the development of a toolkit or identifying a certain type, reviews offer something beyond the score. When review is instantly

⁴⁰ Mucina, Ladislav. "An analysis of book review criteria and motivation." *Journal of Vegetation Science* (1992): 715-718.

⁴¹ Leiserson, Avery. "Toward a Definition of Book Review Policy." *American Political Science Review* 56.01 (1962): 139-141. Page 139.

accessible on line, and when readers are able to leave public comments on a review, the process becomes a conversation. Review can be read for its own sake, certainly, but it also acknowledges and interacts with a whole world of theory.

So with all of this in mind, we shall return to that New York Times review of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. As we touched on before, the review begins with the set up "so many of the beloved heroes and heroines of children's literature,⁴²" and then goes on to list iconic children's literature. After making the observation that these various stories feature remarkable children who are deeply underestimated, the reviewer starts the second paragraph with "and so it is with Harry Potter⁴³." As a result, the reviewer is not only examining *Harry Potter*, but simultaneously reinforcing a type. But then the reviewer spends the next two paragraphs summarizing the book, which fulfils none of the criteria we have laid out for review. Tough this makes sense, as our criteria ignores the goal of actually scoring a work. And while this review has no score, it is still trying to help the reader understand if they would be interested in reading it, and a simple way of doing that is to give a plot summary. Compared to the other reviews we will be looking at, this one is relatively simple, and makes no real theoretical claims. Mostly it makes value judgments, such as saying "the characters are impressively three-dimensional."⁴⁴ But the review does not ground these claims in any language in the text. It simply makes its assertions. Even in a review less focused on broader concepts or interpretation, we can see how review ignores the fixed language of a piece. Instead, we get

⁴² Michael Winerip. "'HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE'." *The New York Times*

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Ibid

value judgments, as well as personal information – “I found myself thinking back 30 years to my first days at Harvard, wondering how, coming from a blue-collar shipyard town and a public high school, I could ever compete with preppies from Exeter and Andover.”⁴⁵ As we mentioned in the introduction, part of what sets review apart from more academic theory is the fact that it is a personal process. Rather than explain their enjoyment of the book through an analysis of the pros, this reviewer cites their own life experience. But by mentioning their academic background, the author is inevitably drawing attention to their role as an intellectual. But at the same time they solidify their intellectual status, they also mention their “blue-collar shipyard” hometown and “public high school” trying to emphasize their shared humanity with the reader. They acknowledge their academic background, while also making their work feel accessible to a broad readership.

And in addition to using their own life experience, the reviewer cites that of Rowling, ending the review with a description of the author’s journey – “a teacher by training, (she) was a 30-year-old single mother living on welfare in a cold one-bedroom flat in Edinburgh when she began writing it in longhand during her baby daughter's nap times. But like Harry Potter, she had wizardry inside, and has soared beyond her modest Muggle surroundings to achieve something quite special.”⁴⁶ First, we have another example of review looking not inwards, at the specific language of the text, but instead outwards. Also, we have another instance of using personal experience to inform a rather emotional response to the text. Ultimately, this review illustrates a few aspects of review we have touched upon – it makes use of emotion and

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

personal experience, and it begins by performing a pseudo literature review, in this case of children's literature. That said, the review is also distinct from our criteria, as it does little to interpret *Harry Potter*, not does it seem to contribute to any broader discourse. Part of the reason for this could be that review had not fully developed into what it is today, given that this review was published in early 1999.

We can see many differences between this New York Time's review and the *The Deathly Hallows*, the last in the series. The first distinct difference is one of categorization. While the first review mentioned how Harry Potter "has been at the top of the adult best-seller lists,"⁴⁷ the review itself was categorized under children's literature. Meanwhile, this last review is categorized under "book of the times,"⁴⁸ the default category of adult literature. This choice reflects the content of the review, with the first comparing Harry Potter to children's literature, and the second making parallels to Dickens and Tolkien, who wrote more adult narratives. Also, in terms of formatting, the second review is a good deal longer than the first, 1135 words to 779 words. And the second review feels even longer in the way it is presented. The first review is inviting, fitting on a single computer screen due to its small margins. Also, the paragraphs are compact, sometimes a single line. Accessibility appears to be a priority. Meanwhile, the review for the last book has longer paragraphs with smaller margins, giving it a greater presence and sense of girth. The sentences are also longer and feature more punctuation, giving the latter review a more serious, academic feel.

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Kakutani, Michiko. "An Epic Showdown as Harry Potter Is Initiated Into Adulthood." *The New York Times*.][hg

And true to its more imposing format, the latter review starts with a more ambitious review of literature, spanning various centuries and mediums, placing Harry Potter “in traditional literature and Hollywood sagas — from the Greek myths to Dickens and Tolkien to ‘Star Wars.’ And true to its roots, it ends not with modernist, ‘Soprano’-esque equivocation, but with good old-fashioned closure.⁴⁹” We’ve discussed this list before, but there is much more here to unpack. Before we even look at what is included in this list, it is important to look at what is missing. This list is lacking much representation from children’s literature. This choice reflects the very title, “An Epic Showdown as Harry Potter Is Initiated Into Adulthood.”⁵⁰ This reviewer appears to be rejecting previous classifications of Harry Potter, which identify it as a children’s story. And this rejection is not only applied to the last installment in the series, but to “J. K. Rowling’s monumental, spellbinding epic.”⁵¹ Throughout the review, the reviewer refers not only to the seventh book, but to the whole series, making large scale claims. And the final paragraph is not about the seventh book, but about “The world of Harry Potter,⁵²” as the reviewer makes larger claims about the series’ place in literature rather than a value judgment of the seventh book. The reviewer appears to be claiming that we should not see Potter as a delightful children’s book, but as a canonical Epic, as culturally crucial as Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* or the *Star Wars* Saga. Also worth noting, we can see how the review will reach across mediums to make its point type, invoking the movie franchise of *Star Wars* and the TV series *The Sopranos*, right alongside iconic Western literature.

⁴⁹ Kakutani, Michiko. "An Epic Showdown as Harry Potter Is Initiated Into Adulthood." *The New York Times*. [hg

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Ibid

Reference is particularly prevalent in this review. While many reviews will reference other works early, to frame the text in question, this review continues to do so throughout. Later on in the review, we encounter this passage - “(Rowling) create(d) a narrative that effortlessly mixes up allusions to Homer, Milton, Shakespeare and Kafka, with silly kid jokes about vomit-flavored candies.”⁵³ Moves like this feel less like a book recommendation and much more like literary theory, focusing not only on a specific text, but on its relation to the broader body of Western canon. As we mentioned before, a potential criteria of review is adding to knowledge, and in this case, the reviewer is adding to our broader literary subconscious, suggesting that Harry Potter has a place amongst texts like these. Also, there is the criteria of finding or creating a form. Early on, the reviewer mentions two particular forms - traditional literature and Hollywood sagas, which they enforce through these various examples. But while the reviewer mentions the form of traditional literature, and mentions some traditional literature in this passage, they appear to be augmenting the form slightly. We have something akin to Kafka and company, but with something different. In this case, vomit-flavored candies.

This review is almost performing the duties of an academic text, taking stock of Western canon and positing certain literary forms. And the tone reflects this choice. This review never invokes the first person, and the reviewer’s own life experiences are never mentioned. Also, this review feels almost like an academic essay, in how it leads to something of a thesis – “The world of Harry Potter is a place where the mundane and the marvelous, the ordinary and the

⁵³ Ibid

surreal coexist.”⁵⁴ The review appears interested in how *Harry Potter* is simultaneously fantastical, but at the same time grounded and familiar. This duality is brought up frequently, and developed methodically throughout. This duality is evident in the types they chose – traditional literature and Hollywood sagas. The reviewer illustrates how *Harry Potter* contains elements of the two, and ultimately combines them into a brand new, unnamed type. While the review for the first book appears to be deliberating about whether or not *Harry Potter* is an enjoyable read worth picking up, the review for the last book is far more theory focused. This difference also illustrates the role of time in review. As time goes on, review can retroactively reconceive of works. Indeed, *Harry Potter* is especially tied to time, as it goes from a surprisingly successful debut in the nineties to a full blown, global phenomenon.

Moving on, the *Guardian's* review of the *Deathly Hollows* offers a contrast, never once discussing the merit of the book or any of the actual content. While the *New York Time* reviews certainly skirted around the book's subject matter, focusing on more macro concerns, the *Guardian* review decides to ignore the text almost altogether and exploring Rowling's business practices and ethics. For instance, we have the passage “Although her sales techniques do contrast sharply with arrangements in *Harry Potter's* Nintendo-free world, it is curious that Rowling should be so harshly judged for her engagement with the book trade. Didn't most eminent Victorian novelists fight just as greedily for their profits, become, in several cases, international celebrities?”⁵⁵ Like other reviews, this one also cites western literary history. The difference is that this review is not looking at the texts themselves, but at writing practice and

⁵⁴ *Ibid*

⁵⁵ Bennett, Catherine. "Review: *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* by JK Rowling." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 28 July 2007. Web. 02 May 2017.

the economics of literature. Like the *New York Times* review, this review is developing a theory about Harry Potter, but by using a different approach. This approach almost resembles a historicist one, where the Author's History and background is used to understand the work in question. But there is also an economic angle, as the reviewer uses financial incentives to understand the way the series was produced. Like before, the reviewer is trying to understand a certain form. But rather than find a form by working outwards from the text, the reviewer is finding a form by working outwards, from financial motivators. For even though the review never mentions specific aspects of the text, it does make certain claims about it, such as "Rowling's writing is not merely mediocre but contaminated by her participation in a crass celebrity culture."⁵⁶ The reviewer explains how the financial pressure to write quickly and produce vast quantities of text has caused the actual writing to be inefficient and sloppy. Also, because of Rowling's celebrity, she may write a mediocre text and still have it widely read. The reviewer uses the conditions of the author's life to develop a theory about the text. At the same time, the reviewer appears to be justifying their theory, arguing that the text is a poor source of theory, being so haphazardly put together. In this review in particular, we can see an example of the approach outlined in our introduction. Review tries to understand a work not by looking at the language itself, but through theory and an understanding of how language is used.

However, this *Guardian* review may appear to contradict an aspect of review we outlined earlier, which is that review pays more attention to the experience of the reader than the author. After all, this review focuses on Rowling and her intentions. But ultimately, the

⁵⁶ Ibid

reader is an important part of the reviewer's theory – as they argue that “her readers - adults as well as children - would gobble up as much Potter as she could bear to produce.”⁵⁷ They explain how their whole theory of financial incentives ultimately rests on the reader, and that it is the readers' insatiable hunger for *Harry Potter* that lets Rowling write in a certain, haphazard fashion. Others may argue that a reader's response is dictated by the text. But the reviewer makes the opposite argument – that the form of the text is dictated by reader Responses.

As we look to the *Washington Post* review of the final *Harry Potter* book, the reviews begin to mesh together, honing in on similar conceptions of the series. As the reviewer argues, “Rowling's debt to the great 20th-century English fantasists -- J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, E. Nesbit, Alan Garner -- made her work seem less homage than unabashedly derivative.”⁵⁸ Again, we see the importance of reference, but even more so, we see the recursion of the same references. Both Tolkien and Lewis were key references in the *New York Times* review, though used in a slightly different way. In the *New York Times* review, the reference was meant to establish what type Harry Potter is, whereas here, the references are meant to potentially criticize *Harry Potter* for being unoriginal. And then, the reviewer explains how “Tolkien continues to cast a long shadow over Harry Potter's world, along with C.S. Lewis, but the writer most evoked by “Deathly Hallows” is Charles Dickens.”⁵⁹ We get the reiteration of Tolkien and Lewis as important for understanding Potter, but then, we also get a mention of Dickens. All three reviews we have looked at for the final book mention Dickens, though with different

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ “Harry's Final Fantasy: Last Time's the Charm.” *The Washington Post*. WP Company, 22 July 2007. Web. 02 May 2017.

⁵⁹ “Harry's Final Fantasy: Last Time's the Charm.” *The Washington Post*.

conations. For instance, the *Guardian* review calls Rowling “no Dickens,” going out of their way to deny the comparison. The New York Times review makes the Dickens comparison more casually, while the Post review uses Dickens as something of a centerpiece, to emphasize how “Her (Rowling’s) magical world is grounded in small, meticulous observations.”⁶⁰ The argument is that Rowling’s magical world is founded on observations of our won world, making “her invented world seem as real as ours.”⁶¹ This theory closely resembles the argument of the New York Times review – that “The world of Harry Potter is a place where the mundane and the marvelous, the ordinary and the surreal coexist.”⁶² So not only do we see various reviews functioning as works of literary theory, but we also see a potential thread between them - a larger conversation that pervades multiple reviews.

In the *Washington Post* review, we see a resurgence of the first person and use of life experience. We can see these elements clearly in such statements as “Was it worth the wait? You bet.”⁶³ And “I read the first five books aloud to my two children.”⁶⁴ The issue of personal experience is integral to review, and is even a point of contention. After all, informality implies a broader readership. While an “academic” is certainly not discouraged from reading any of these reviews, they are not the exclusive audience. Exclusivity, or a lack there of, is a major point of contention in review. In the *Atlantic* article *Book Reviews: A Tortured History*, the author states “In the digital age, where anonymous, poorly written ‘customer reviews’ sway

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Kakutani, Michiko. "An Epic Showdown as Harry Potter Is Initiated Into Adulthood." *The New York Times*.][hg

⁶³ "Harry's Final Fantasy: Last Time's the Charm." *The Washington Post*.

⁶⁴ Ibid

readers, we need to establish relationships with our literary critics. We need to trust them as ‘experts’ hired and trained by the publications that employ them or self-educated and trained as book bloggers or ‘amateur’ reviewers with websites of their own.”⁶⁵ So while review generally encourages a relationship between the reader and critic, there is a debate over who should actually produce material. This point is especially complicated when there are so many places for one to publish online, regardless of credentials. But if review is a form of literary theory, should the conversation have some form of exclusivity. Or rather, if review is a conversation, can the conversation be derailed by uncertain or misguided voices? This is certainly not an uncommon fear. In the New York Times piece, *Richard Schickel, Movie Critic, Author and Filmmaker, Dies at 84*, the *Times* writes

“But responding to an article in The New York Times, which suggested that blogging might be making book reviewing more democratic, he (Richard Schickel) wrote in The Los Angeles Times in 2007: ‘Criticism — and its humble cousin, reviewing — is not a democratic activity. It is, or should be, an elite enterprise, ideally undertaken by individuals who bring something to the party beyond their hasty, instinctive opinions of a book (or any other cultural object).’”⁶⁶

In this statement, Schickel makes a key distinction between review and criticism, calling the former the “humble cousin” of the latter. In this statement alone, there is a sense of elitism, suggesting that review is not the equal of other criticism. He even goes so far as to suggest review and criticism should be an “elite enterprise.” This notion is similar to Marcus’s notion of an “elite community,” which we encountered in our introduction. Whereas these elite academic communities enforce a stern governance over theory, review appears to be more of a

⁶⁵ Fay, Sarah. "Book Reviews: A Tortured History." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, 25 Apr. 2012. Web. 02 May 2017.

⁶⁶ Roberts, Sam. "Richard Schickel, Movie Critic, Author and Filmmaker, Dies at 84." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 20 Feb. 2017. Web. 02 May 2017.

free for all, with no particular group controlling the conversation. While it's hard to say for sure what review "should be," its current course is certainly one away from elitism. "User comments" are inevitably an integral part of review, and as we shall see in the following chapters, where user comments are cited by the reviews themselves. Schickel also uses the word hasty, and yet, haste seems inevitable in review. When a show comes out Sunday night, we expect a review for it Monday morning. And as Schickel argues, this hastiness results in a certain level of opinion. But as we discussed in the introduction, review is not about the objective text itself, but about the subjective opinions formed by those consuming it. And in the reviews of Harry Potter we have seen thus far, opinion is integrated with the more "academic" pursuits of theory and reference.

The *Atlantic* article that condemned user comments had quite a few of its own, including the following one – "I'm just a regular guy and I find Amazon's comments from readers to be very helpful in making my decision to try a new book. Literary reviews so often seem to be more about the reviewer's agenda than about the content of the book."⁶⁷ First, we see a rearticulating of roles, as this user identifies themselves as "just a regular guy," implying that the writer is in some other position, presumably one of authority. And yet, this comment is a part of the *Atlantic* article, physically connected and visible to everyone who reads it. Due to the very format of review, as well as its intended audience, user input is inevitable. And then we have *Good Reads*, which offers anyone with an internet conception the ability to submit reviews. In these reviews as well, we can see a similar dialogue to those in the journalistic

⁶⁷ Fay, Sarah. "Book Reviews: A Tortured History." *The Atlantic*.

reviews, as reviewers focus more on the series as a whole than any particular work. One review begins with “This is just a pithy review on the *Harry Potter* series as a whole. It is not an in-depth analysis of the work in general, nor is it a review on any one particular installment.”⁶⁸

Rather than go in depth into the book itself, the reviewer makes broader claims about the series and its function is. In this case, the reviewer deduces that it “can help young people find their way,” specifying “that’s what I got out of it.”⁶⁹ We see the reviewer reaching a general thesis about the series, while fully acknowledging that their conclusion is an opinion.

Meanwhile, various other *Good Reads* reviews do not even aim for a broader claim, but instead relay the review’s emotional experience. One review ends with “Now, having finished the last line, I am flooded with emotion. This series is more than a story or words on a page, it is magic.”

⁷⁰ We can clearly see emotion at work here, more so than ever before. But we also see an aversion to “words on a page,” seeking meaning elsewhere.

From journalistic reviews to Good Reads entries, we see an approach that generally disregards the language of the text, - the “words on a page.” As we look at other reviews, we will see an aversion to other specific attributes of a work, from lyrics, to dialogue, to cinematography and chord progressions. We also see review as theory oriented, as opposed to focusing exclusively on score or quality judgments. And as we from a conception of review, we should pay particular intention to the interaction between the more casual reader and a professional critic. The casual reader is inevitably involved in the process of review, at least as a

⁶⁸ (Illustrator), J.K. Rowling Mary GrandPré. "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows (Harry Potter, #7)." *Goodreads*. N.p., n.d. Web. 02 May 2017.

⁶⁹ (Illustrator), J.K. Rowling Mary GrandPré. "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows (Harry Potter, #7)." *Goodreads*. N.p., n.d. Web. 02 May 2017.

⁷⁰ Ibid

spectator. And as we move forwards, we will see more and more instances of readers contributing, as they have on *Good Reads* and in comments sections. But from what we have seen thus far, we can begin to conceive of review as not only making scores, but making claims, functioning as sort to “cousin” to more academic criticism.

Chapter 2: I'm the One Who Knocks – Breaking Bad, Review as Cooperation, and Focusing on Narrative

TV is a relatively young phenomenon, creating a need for novel ways to discuss it. And as we confront a new form of storytelling, our most readily available tool for understanding is our literary knowledge. After all, literature involves many of the key elements of film, particularly narrative. To understand the early application of the literary to TV, we may look at the article “It was never the *New York Times* Review of Book”: TV guide, 1978-91,” which goes over the inception and growth of TV guide, and how we developed a way of discussing television. As the title would suggest, we are moving beyond *New York Times* reviews, and entering a different realm of review. But we are not leaving the literary. The article describes how “Along with Managing Editor R. C. Smith, who had taught English at Northwest and Texas A&M universities, Sandler increased the frequency of ‘background’ articles, recruiting the likes of John Updike and Alfred Kazin to write them⁷¹.” In this early instance of writing about television, TV guide is trying to find an identity - a proper way of discussing TV. And to do so it relies on literary sense, and the knowhow of great writers like John Updike, or of literary critics like Alfred Kazin. We can see clearly how, at the start of the conversation on TV, we are relying on literary knowhow. Furthermore, “The editor (of TV guide) even introduced ‘TV Bookshelf’ in 1980, a regular column with reviews of books on the television industry.”⁷² From early on, there is this intuitive sense that literary concepts can be used to understand TV, and that writing on

⁷¹ Altschuler, Glenn C., and David I. Grossvogel. *Changing Channels: America in TV Guide*. Urbana: U of Illinois, 1992. Print. Page 67.

⁷² Altschuler, Glenn C., and David I. Grossvogel. *Changing Channels: America in TV Guide*. Page 67.

TV is necessary for the medium to take form. And review, as we shall see, heavily employs the literary and writing to understand TV, decades after TV Guide's inception.

And even before television, many have used the written word to understand what is happening on the screen. In the article *From Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today*, Sergie Eisenstien theorizes "What were the novels of Dickens for his contemporaries, for his readers? There is one answer: they bore the same relation to them that the film bears to the same strata in our time"⁷³. In this particular case, a moment in literary history is being used to understand what may be happening in a moment in film. Such a conception is similar to rhetorical moves we've seen in review, such as when the *New York Times* review used a particular movie— the advent of Star Wars – to understand a moment in literary history. In Eisenstien's case, we see the inverse, as he invokes the literature of Dickens to understand cinema. The use of *Dickens* is notable, as he came up is several of our *Harry Potter* reviews. It's hard to know precisely what makes Dickens so enticing to these various writers – it could very well be coincidence. But one possible reason is that Dickens is familiar to many, and therefore a recognizable reference. The important takeaway is that those exploring stories on the screen may reference stories on the page, borrowing from literary canon.

And beyond borrowing specific examples and texts, those looking at the screen can borrow literary methodology as well. In *Limits of the Novel and Film*, George Bluestone offers a similar argument - "The rise of the film, which preempted the picturing of bodies in nature, coincides almost exactly with the rise of the modern novel which preempted the rendition of

⁷³ Eisenstein, Sergei. "Dickens, Griffith, and the film today." *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory* (1949): 195-255. Page 395.

human consciousness.”⁷⁴ Rather than reference a specific literary work, Bluestone is comparing mediums, in an effort to understand their respective functions. But unlike Eisenstein, who has literature and film bear “the same relation,” Bluestone is using the comparison to point out key differences. One need not show that film and the novel are identical to make a meaningful connection between the two. Bluestone finds enough of a connection to compare the two, and from their comparison finds a meaningful difference – in this case, a difference of focus. And Bluestone makes similar moves elsewhere, such as arguing “Where the twentieth-century novel has achieved the shock of novelty by explosions of words, the twentieth-century achieved a comparable shock by explosion of visual images.”⁷⁵ Again, Bluestone finds a similar function in both the novel and film, but identifies different outcomes. Unlike Eisenstein, who references specific literary texts, Bluestone demonstrates an approach that looks at media more broadly. Thus, we have two ways that novelistic literature can connect to film, and hopefully, to TV. First, we can compare certain works of TV to specific literary works, and second, we can compare the function of the form of the novel to the function of a TV show.

Eisenstein gives us yet another example of how books can guide our discussion of film. We can use the language and theory we apply to books to close read film - “However, let us turn to the basic montage structure, whose rudiment in Dickens work was developed into the elements of film composition in Griffith’s work.”⁷⁶ Eisenstein then goes on to close read

⁷⁴ Bluestone, George. "The Limits of the Novel and the Limits of Film." *Film Theory and Criticism* (2004). Page 415.

⁷⁵ Bluestone, George. "The Limits of the Novel and the Limits of Film." *Film Theory and Criticism* (2004). Page 415.

⁷⁶ Eisenstein, Sergei. "Dickens, Griffith, and the film today." *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory* (1949): 195-255. Page 395.

Dickens, arguing that it features a montage structure that predates film. Rather than make a comparison to a specific book or the structure of a novel, Eisenstein is looking at a specific theory. One way of doing this is finding a theory of literature and applying it to film. But Eisenstein makes the comparison in reverse, applying a film theory to the novel in an effort to better understand that particular theory. And as we look at reviews of *Breaking Bad*, we will see many reviewers adopt a literary language, focuses on ideas that are not exclusively literary, but shared between the mediums – tone, theme, and narratively.

Narratively is particularly important for understanding TV review, as this element is often the main focus. As Robert Scholes theorizes in *In Narration and Narrativity in Film*, narrative “Can exists apart from any particular method of narration or any particular narrative utterance.”⁷⁷ Or as he puts it even more succinctly, narrative “Exists apart from any particular form of discourse.”⁷⁸ Narrative transcends medium, making itself known in TV, music, and literature. Therefore, many literary theories that focus on narrative can be applied elsewhere, as the issue of narrative is not bound to “any particular form of discourse.” For instance, Eisenstein was able to compare the use of montage in film and the novel because montage is a tool of narrative, and by extension, not bound to either medium. Or as Scholes elaborates, “Before looking more closely at the process of narration, it may be useful to pause here and consider the relationship of narrative to theories of literature and literary value.”⁷⁹ Scholes goes

⁷⁷ Scholes, Robert. "Narration and Narrativity in Film and Fiction." *Semiotics and Interpretation (New Haven: Yale UP, 1982) (1982)*. Page 417.

⁷⁸ Scholes, Robert. "Narration and Narrativity in Film and Fiction." Page 417.

⁷⁹ Ibid page 418.

on to acknowledge the significant role that literary theory plays in understanding narration, even outside of the novel. While the literary theory we will see in *Breaking Bad* reviews is not always specific or advanced, they rarely mention elements of the show that are specific to television, such as acting or cinematography. And when these elements are mentioned, they are never deeply explored. So even if these reviews may not sound literary in the most academic sense, there is little to differentiate these analyses of TV from those of books.

Such views are further reflected in Seymour Chatman's *What Novels Can Do That Films Can't*, where he argues that "Modern narratology combines two powerful intellectual trends: the Anglo-American inheritance of Henry James, Percy Lubbock, E. M. Forster, and Wayne Booth; and the mingling of Russian formalists."⁸⁰ In essence, Chatman argues that our modern understanding of narrative does not exist independent of iconic authors and certain school of literary theory. In terms of specific theory, he mentions the Russian formalists, who "defined literariness as language calling attention to itself, or as a kind of message in which the emphasis is placed on the form of the utterance rather than on its referential capacity."⁸¹ This point is important to address, as the review does not fit this approach, focusing outside of the utterance itself and making broader observations. Never the less, narrative discussion inevitably invites comparison to literary texts and theories. And, as Chatman argues, "One of the most important observations to come out of narratology is that narrative itself is a deep structure quite independent of its medium."⁸² Narrative is deeply connected to the literary, but

⁸⁰ Chatman, Seymour. "What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (And Vice Versa)." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1980, pp. 121–140., www.jstor.org/stable/1343179. Page 121.

⁸¹ Ibid Page 418

⁸² Chatman, Seymour. "What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (And Vice Versa)." Page 121.

is not necessarily tethered to it. For Chatman “narrative is basically a kind of text organization,”⁸³ one which can be applied to many of works.

However, this project ultimately has a slightly different view than that of Chapman. Chapman argues that narrative “needs to be actualized: in written words, as in stories and novels; in spoken words combined with the movements of actors imitating characters against sets which imitate places, as in plays and films; in drawings; in comic strips; in dance movements⁸⁴” In the reviews we will be looking at, narratives cannot avoid written language. While narrative can be shown without the use of words, in review, the narrative is actualized through the use of writing, not through images or sound. Because review involves an audience that is spatially disconnected, operating from computer monitors or print articles around the world, we cannot use body language or certain gestures to discuss narrative. There are exceptions certainly - Good Reads reviews, which use images such as memes to convey their meaning, and video reviews, where the reviewer can be seen and heard. But in the case of the review we will be looking at, narrative is contained in writing. In some cases, one may read a review without having even seen the work itself, meaning written review is truly the only source of narrative.

While it will not be addressed in depth, we should take a moment to acknowledge video review specifically. In, *Movie Made America*, Robert Skylar argues that “No one knows what the nature of communications and information distribution would be like if visual media were used

⁸³ Ibid. Page 121

⁸⁴ Ibid. Page 121

with the frequency and dexterity of pen or typewriter.”⁸⁵ I find this statement fascinating as Skylar’s work was published in 1975. Several decades later, we do in fact know the effect of such a phenomenon, or at the least, are starting to see it. With the advent of *YouTube* and cameras built into our phones, many have the means of production for visual media, right at their fingertips. Like we stated at the start of this project, part of what makes review interesting is that a practice that was once exclusive to a few, theory writing, is now widespread. But in the case of visual media, there is a similar phenomenon. Just as many can produce writing and then share it online, one can do the same with a video. And indeed, a great deal of TV review takes this form – YouTube videos and the like. Or as Skylar envisions, thing would change radically “If American men and women could give up their roles as passive spectators before the motion pictures or television screen.”⁸⁶ This observation not only applies to the use of video review, but review in general. After all, this sort of active participation is now possible. In a single night, we may get a whole library shelf worth of material on a given episode – not only from professional film critics or theorists, but from enthusiastic spectators as well.

As for the actual breaking *Bad* reviews, let us go back to the beginning – to an *AV Club* review of the pilot of breaking bad. The review begins with “after the towering achievement of *Mad Men*,”⁸⁷ a particularly interesting start, given what we’ve observed so far. Like the reviews we’ve seen previously, this one starts by referencing another work. And in the next sentence, the reviewer explains how *Breaking Bad* falls under the realm of “serialized

⁸⁵ Sklar, Robert. "Movie-Made America: How the Movies Changed American Life." (1975). Page 317.

⁸⁶ Sklar, Robert. "Movie-Made America: How the Movies Changed American Life." (1975). Page 319.

⁸⁷ Bowman, Donna. "Breaking Bad: "Pilot"." *The A.V. Club*. N.p., 22 Jan. 2008. Web. 27 Apr. 2017.

dramas.”⁸⁸ And now we have a canonization, which comes out of the review’s initial reference. Like the book reviews we read, this review is not framed around a single work, but around a broader category that work falls into – a genre. Then we have the third sentence, which is perhaps one of the most important, in terms of understanding the review’s methodology – “I hope that the basic cable equivalent of a shitload of viewers tuned in to the premiere of *Breaking Bad* on that basis alone.”⁸⁹ In previous reviews, we have noticed a range of tones. Some invoke the first person and even cite personal experience, while others take a more attached, academic review. While this variance in style could be attributed to the personality of the reviewer, it is doubtful we would ever find a statement such as “a shitload of viewers” in a New York Times review. The AV club review is quite literary trying to be a conversation, adopting a tone one would use when discussing a show with a friend. Also, the review acknowledges the existence of other viewers. This may seem like a small point, but it is crucial as it opens up the conversation – this is not about the reviewer’s experience and theories alone, but also about everyone else’s as well.

But this notion of the conversation is not only invoked by tone, but by the format of the review. Since it is an online publication, there is a comments section below that serves as a sort of living document. The comments date back to nine years ago, and lead up to this year. As such, the ideas in the review are subject to scrutiny and can be reevaluated years later. For instance, one comment reads “The quirky Sidekick. Jesse is his name? Poorly acted + almost ruined the show for me. There's no edge to him, he's just a goof who struggles to deliver his

⁸⁸ Bowman, Donna. "Breaking Bad: "Pilot"." *The A.V. Club*.

⁸⁹ Ibid

lines. Character would've been perfect for a movie i jjust wasted 2 hours of my life on called 'Havoc'. As has been noted, Cranston was great and the show was solid overall.”⁹⁰ This comment serves as a sort of modification to the original review. The review rarely mentions acting, outside of some appreciation of – “the mesmerizing presence of Bryan Cranston.”⁹¹ In fact, Cranston’s acting is the only reference to elements unique to visual media. Every other part of the review focused on story and the writing - the “keenly observed screenplay by writer/director Vince Gilligan.”⁹² Therefore, this user comment is almost an addendum, mentioning a missing elements from the review and affirming another – the assertion that Bryan’s acting was impressive. The comments have a sense of consolidation, trying to come to a general consensus on the show. This is done by having comments reference the review, but also each other. For instance, this user comment has comments of its own, such as – “I come from the future, and brother, you have no idea.”⁹³ Specifically, this comment comes from two years in the future. By this point, the general consensus is that that Aaron Paul’s depiction of Jesse is noteworthy, and he has gone on to win the Emmy for his performance. This brings us back to the idea of consolidation – after two years, this opinion becomes seen as completely ridiculous. As times go by, the comment receives such notes as “This comment is like a fine wine. It just gets better with time” and “HAHAHAHAHAHA WOW.”⁹⁴ Other commenters go on to essentially mock this comment for how “wrong” it is. There is a way that this format of a review, where comments can continue to pile on over the years, invites a certain debate and

⁹⁰ Ibid

⁹¹ Ibid

⁹² Ibid

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ IBid

outcome. The other commonality is that the commenters mention time – traveling from the future, wine aging. As we discussed in the introduction, time is at the forefront of review. And while the commenters' language may be informal, this is a sort of critical review. Many minds come together, to reach a general opinion of a narrative work.

Looking back at the review itself, we see a focus on other narrative works. For instance, the review describes *Breaking Bad* as “*Weeds* with a tasty add-on of male menopause and existential dread.”⁹⁵ This observation is meant as a joke, but also as a genuine observation. This reference to *Weeds* is an effort to understand what kind of work *Breaking Bad* is. And user comments further explore this evaluation, such as one comment that reads “Yes, it evokes ‘*Weeds*’, but there's this wonderful gonzo attitude about the show.”⁹⁶ Between the initial review and comments such as these, there is the question of what kind of work *Breaking Bad* is. How can we categorize it? Also, notice that this comment is not outright rejecting the review's conclusion, but trying to elaborate on it. Or towards the end of the review, it is noted that “Another recent series that *Breaking Bad* evokes, tone-wise, is *The Riches* with its tension between suburban values and deviant identities.”⁹⁷ We continue to see the invocation of a broader of other texts to set a precedent/establish a genre. In essence, this review functions in similar fashion to many of the Harry Potter reviews we observed. But unlike many of those reviews, this review functions in conjunction with its comments section, which may explain the conversational tone of the review, as well as its tendency to shift into humor. And other reviews from the AV club even go so far as to use comments in their writing process. A review

⁹⁵ Ibid

⁹⁶ Ibid

⁹⁷ IBid

for the season four finale of *Breaking Bad* begins with – “After the comments started rolling in on last week’s episode.”⁹⁸ Thus we get a true discourse, where the reviewer looks at and uses comments to inform their own thought process, which in turn inspires more comments.

The term “conversation” has been used many times in this project, to describe the process of review. But nowhere does the conversation appear more literally than in TV review. For instance, we can find a similar tone and style in the IGN review of *Breaking Bad*’s season 4 finale. The review begins with the single sentence paragraph of “my goodness” followed by “It had to happen, right? We all knew it.”⁹⁹ While we have seen a personal tone in *Harry Potter* reviews, this review deliberately invokes others. We go from the first person singular to plural. By using the first person plural “we,” and by starting with a question, the reviewer is creating a conversational tone. Also, by saying “we all knew” the reviewer is establishing a certain equality with the audience. The reviewer does not assume they possess some special knowledge – rather, they assume they are on the same page as their readership. This contrast with some of the sentiments we encountered when looking at book review. Any semblance of elitism or superiority is immediately done away with. But beyond the informal tone, there is something else that sets this opening moments apart – there is no invocation of type. As we have noticed in most other reviews, the reviewer sets a precedent at the start. For instance, a *Harry Potter* review may invoke other relevant books and even movies, or a *Breaking Bad* review may reference other similar TV shows. But this review makes no reference whatsoever.

⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹ Amitin, Seth. "Breaking Bad: "Face Off" Review." *IGN*. IGN, 10 Oct. 2011. Web. 27 Apr. 2017.

This review is certainly a dark horse compared to the others, given that it makes the most mention of specific elements – brief mentions of cinematography, image, and acting. But ultimately, these elements are understated so that narrative may be the focus. References specific to the medium of TV are mostly found in the second and second to last paragraphs. In the second paragraph, we get “When Gus sat in the car, with the music swelling and the camera zooming in, his eyes looking a little teary, it was almost like saying goodbye.” In this sentence, we get visual description, description of camera movement, and the mentioning of music. The description is not highly technical, and certainly accessible to all readers, but this moment is clearly about a show, not a book. But right after this, we get the line “It was as predictable as the series has ever been” followed by the four word paragraph “And yet who cares?” While the “who cares” is not directed at this specific elements of film, there is this sense that we have moved on from the specific to broader concerns. The next paragraph discusses the series more generally, moving from the episode specifically to its place in the whole series. And ultimately, the review ends with the claim “This show has never aimed to be predictable and has sometimes deliberately gone against the idea to a fault. In one of Breaking Bad's finest hours, it did something predictable,” which help’s achieve the series’ goal of “making people weep at the death of a monster.” Like reviews we have seen before, this one ultimately focuses on the series in general rather than the specific work being reviewed. Also, we get a sort of theoretical argument, as the reviewer makes the claim that predictability can be a useful tool. Specifically, predictability becomes a useful narrative tool. Rather than being the focus themselves, the reviewer’s brief description of shots and visuals feed into a larger discussion of plot.

This notion is further reinforced by a curious passage about halfway through the review – “Good lord, I could write a review just on the expressive looks in that scene alone. It's hard to remember these are actors portraying fictional characters sometimes.” The reviewer probably could write an entire piece about the acting in this single scene. And yet, rarely do we see a review that focuses on the acting of a particular scene, or on the way the show is shot, or on the use of sound. There is this sense that the default focus of a review should be narrative. When the reviewer says “It's hard to remember these are actors,” it certainly can be, as acting has not been mentioned up till this point in the review. The focus is on these characters as agents in a plot, not men and women in makeup. Instead of writing a review about acting, the reviewer writes about the value of predictable narratives – a broad theory that could be applied across various mediums.

Next we have the *Time's* review of *Breaking Bad's* season four final. Like the other reviews, this one is quite focused on issues of narrative. For instance, it begins one of its paragraphs with “Structurally, the finale (and season 4) had echoes of season 3.”¹⁰⁰ Not only is the review interested in plot structure, but like other reviews, applies its ideas to the whole series, not just a single episode. Though there is a moment that focuses on the episode itself, when the reviewer discusses the episode's big twist, where the protagonist turns out to have positioned a young boy -

About that poisoning: I will admit it, Vince Gilligan and company faked me out well and good. (Though not all of you. I didn't specifically see lily of the valley mentioned in any comments sections, here or elsewhere, but a number of people guessed that Walt was indeed behind it, that another poison was

¹⁰⁰ Poniewozik, James. "Breaking Bad Watch: The One Who Knocks." *Time*. Time, 10 Oct. 2011. Web. 27 Apr. 2017.

involved and that there was a significance to his spinning gun landing on the potted plant. I doff my Heisenberg hat to you.)¹⁰¹

There are many things going on in this comment. First is the invocation of a conversation. Like the other reviews, the reviewer acknowledges themselves as part of a larger audience, even going so far as to acknowledge the comments sections as a direct source of their information. Here we get a glimpse of an ecosystem of thought, where people comment in various places in the internet, which in turn influences more professional publications, which in turn generate more comments. In its own informal fashion, this exchange of information resembles an academic environment, where various theorist will accredit others and expand upon the ideas of others. But unlike in academia, there is a distinct lack of prestige. In fact, the tone here is self-deprecating. The reviewer is tipping their hat – “I doff my Heisenberg hat to you” – directly to the reader, establishing an equal partnership between them and commenters. More so than ever, we can see review as a cooperative art, one designed to reach a sort of consensus, or at least consolidate knowledge.

This passage also alludes to an effort to predict. Unlike movies, TV episodes are all chunks of an incomplete narrative. Therefore, the audience participates in prediction, and evaluating these predictions becomes part of the review process. For instance, the IGN review of the episode started with “It had to happen, right? We all knew it.”¹⁰² And to conclude, the reviewer mentions how “this show has never aimed to be predictable and has sometimes deliberately gone against the idea to a fault.”¹⁰³ The IGN reviewer chooses to frame their

¹⁰¹ Poniewozik, James. "Breaking Bad Watch: The One Who Knocks." *Time*.

¹⁰² Amitin, Seth. "Breaking Bad: "Face Off" Review." *IGN*. IGN, 10 Oct. 2011. Web. 27 Apr. 2017.

¹⁰³ Amitin, Seth. "Breaking Bad: "Face Off" Review." *IGN*. IGN, 10 Oct. 2011. Web. 27 Apr. 2017.

critique with this notion of anticipation, beginning and ending with how predictable the show is. There is a great importance, even prestige, placed on the ability to anticipate where a show may go. The *Time's* writer tips their hat to those who see the big twist coming, and the IGN reviewer revolves their entire evaluation of the episode's worth on how well it navigates audience expectation. The format of a serialized show caters to prediction, since audiences are given a week between segments, left to think about the most recent episode and anticipate the next. The review adopts forms of discourse that match the medium. In all likelihood, television reviews differ for shows released by Netflix, which appear as entire seasons, removing the element of prediction.

Lastly we will look at *Slate's* review for the season four finale, which begins with something of a warning, prominently featured right before the review begins in earnest – “Caution: There are spoilers ahead! So if you haven't yet watched ‘Face Off,’ come back when you have and share your thoughts and theories.”¹⁰⁴ Right from the beginning, this review promotes conversation, inviting people to comment and share theories of their own. As we have seen with TV review in particular, there is a collaborative, theory driven approach. But the conversation is quite literal in this review, as it features two reviewers, whose names appear in bold before their respective sections – Jess and June. As a result, we get exchanges like “Are you in for the final adventure? Jess: I'm so down for the final adventure.” Using this back and forth format, the two discuss the general story arc of the show, particularly how the final moments of this episode affect the series more broadly. Like the *Time's* review, Jess and June pay particular

¹⁰⁴ Thomas, Jessica Grose and June. "Breaking Bad Season 4 Finale: "Face Off"." *Slate Magazine*. N.p., 09 Oct. 2011. Web. 01 May 2017.

attention to notions of predictability - "Though this episode delivered when it came to quality, it was the first episode in recent memory where I didn't feel like every move was unpredictable."¹⁰⁵ This consistent focus on prediction relates back to the notion of time in review. When one is predicting what will happen next episode, it automatically dates their conjecture. We can track the review to the week between one episode and the next.

Having looked at TV review, we can see the concepts approached in our first chapter take clearer form. We encounter reviews that almost appear to be in conversation, concentrating on similar notions, though reaching their own conclusions. We also see a theory driven approach, as reviews continue to focus on advancing specific arguments about a text. We also see a way that review relates to time, since it exists in a specific moment in relation to a work. And we see an approach that is not specifically about TV or about novels, but one that is strikingly similar across medium. To do so, reviews will focus on elements that are more universal, as opposed to specific. For instance, one may focus on narrative in lieu of acting. As we look at music, we will see these trends continue, as we see even more cooperative and interpretive approaches.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas, Jessica Grose and June. "Breaking Bad Season 4 Finale: "Face Off"."

Chapter 3: We Gon' Be Alright – Kendrick Lamar, and Continuing the Conversation

In the previous chapter, we looked at Chatman's article on narrative, and the array of possible forms it could take. And at the very end of this list, he mentions "even music." And with this invocation, we find ourselves coming full circle, to the issue of Bob Dylan and his controversial Nobel Prize. After transitioning from general theory, to book review and then television review, we find ourselves at the issue of pop music. And while Bob Dylan is a great example of literary merit in music, we will be looking at the works of Kendrick Lamar instead. Or rather, we will be looking at reviews of the pop artist's work. The reason to focus on Lamar in lieu of Dylan is that Lamar is recent – his body of work comes from the same century as the other works we are looking at, *Harry Potter* and *Breaking Bad*.

As we delve into review of Lamar's work, we should take inventory of our conversation thus far. How does music relate to the mediums we have previously mentioned, outside of its broad classification as "art?" First, it is important to note that we will be focusing on pop music, the type of music that we started this project with. After all, pop music is a relatively young phenomenon, like film, and therefore needs a method for discussion. And as was the case with TV theory, there is the temptation to use the centuries long backlog of literary theory to understand the medium. Or as Lawrence Kramer argues in *Dangerous Liaisons: The Literary Text in Musical Criticism*, "The field of comparative studies in music and literature is still struggling to be born, or perhaps even to be conceived. The recent interest that musicologists have so strikingly taken in literary criticism is largely methodological, which is perhaps as it should be: the literary field has developed over the past few decades into a methodological

gold mine.”¹⁰⁶ This passage introduces a few interesting points, first of which is the difficulty of linking music to literary theory. For many, no relation between the two exists, and even for those searching for one, the search is a challenge. But while Kramer may not be interested in pillaging literature’s toolbox of methodological techniques, this is certainly a tempting approach for many, as we will see in the following music reviews.

Kramer also introduces a contrast for us, between narrative and lyric “A further defining feature of textual/musical deep structures hangs on the question: lyric or narrative.”¹⁰⁷ In television review, the answer was clearer. If we have anything close to lyrics in TV, it would probably be dialogue, which mostly take a backseat to discussions on narrative. As for books, one could certainly look at the pros, but mostly reviews focused on the narrative. Still there is a distinct choice here, between two highly literary concepts. And as Kramer contests, “The literary categories of lyric and narrative offer new and productive terms for thinking about music even in the absence of specific comparisons.”¹⁰⁸ Or in short, both of these literary concepts can apply to music, and be used to better understand the medium. Indeed, pop music has a certain resemblance to lyrical poetry, inviting a focus on the lyrical aspects of a work. And In *Narrative engagement with Twentieth Century Music*, where Byrom Almen and Robert S Hatten argue that “Just as signification is possible in the absence of text or program, so might new types of narrative origination be possible instrumental genres in which a premise is presented and worked out, creating discourse out of thematic, motivic, gestural, tonal, and/or

¹⁰⁶ Kramer, Lawrence. “Dangerous Liaisons: The Literary Text in Musical Criticism.” *19th-Century Music*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1989, pp. 159–167., www.jstor.org/stable/746653. Page 159

¹⁰⁷ Kramer, Lawrence. “Dangerous Liaisons: The Literary Text in Musical Criticism.” *Page 163*.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* Page 165.

harmonic events.”¹⁰⁹ Their argument is that narrative is not only found in a written text, and instead be found in music as well. For instance, Hatten and Almen argue how certain rhythmic and tonal patterns imply narrative. And in the case of some lyrical music, narrative is more explicit, such as the music of Bob Dylan, where his lyrics convey a forward moving plot structure. This point is important as it returns to our theories on methodology over medium. As we’ve seen in various other theories and reviews, we can take ideas like narrative, usually associated with literary texts, and apply them elsewhere.

AS for the reviews themselves, we will be focusing on Kendrick Lamar and his third studio album, *To Pimp a Butterfly*. Lamar’s work is particularly useful, as it appears to embody both narrative and verse. Also, Kendrick Lamar’s work is particularly impactful, and is the focus of much debate. If we want to look at review as part of an evolving conversation, with shifting opinions, then we should look at a work that is generally influential and controversial. In the *Complex* piece, *Why Did Everyone Claim to Enjoy Kendrick Lamar's 'To Pimp a Butterfly'?*, the writer expresses their frustration at what they see as a stale conversation – “Kendrick Lamar released the “must-read” album of 2015. *What a grotesque reduction*, I thought.”¹¹⁰

Specifically, they are referring to “the irritation I feel whenever someone shares a link to an article that they refuse to describe or characterize in any terms other than ‘must-read.’”¹¹¹

Calling Lamar’s album (*To Pimp a Butterfly*) a “must read” is interesting, because such a description emphasizes the act of reading over listening. What this reading entails is unclear,

¹⁰⁹ Almén, Byron. "Narrative Engagement with Twentieth-Century Music: Possibilities and Limits Byron Almén and Robert S. Hatten." *Music and Narrative since 1900* (2013): Page 61.

¹¹⁰ Charity, Justin. "Why Did Everyone Claim to Enjoy Kendrick Lamar's 'To Pimp a Butterfly'?" *Complex*. *Complex*, 20 Oct. 2016. Web. 27 Apr. 2017.

¹¹¹ Charity, Justin. "Why Did Everyone Claim to Enjoy Kendrick Lamar's 'To Pimp a Butterfly'?" *Complex*.

but such a description seems to undermine Lamar’s exclusively musical elements and promote a focus on the readable – perhaps the lyrics. Also, this article seems to have a negative view on review, or specifically, “most major music websites” which “published their reviews of the album within three days of the leak.” As we discussed before, review is a particularly time sensitive form of writing, which some might see as hasty. In this case, the writer is weary of this haste. Published on such short notice, these reviews run the risk of being thoughtless, even promoting a superficial understanding of the album. While this project is focused on review as a productive conversation, there are those who see review as ending the conversation prematurely. This fear is important to acknowledge, on behalf of those who do not see review in such a positive light. While we have seen review engage with other reviews and commenters, this engagement can also be seen as a form of regulation, as reviews choose which comments to acknowledge in the body of the piece, and collectively promote certain themes – Dickens and predictability, for instance.

Of course, there are those who see Kendrick as catalyzing conversation – changing up a landscape of review that has become stagnant. In the Medium piece, *How Kendrick Lamar Helped Redefine Music Criticism*, the writer complains of how, “in recent years, with the reign of music blogs and easily-consumable internet culture, the pendulum has swung decidedly to the ‘catchy’ side of things.”¹¹² The writer focuses on particular modes of review, such as blogs, and how these modes of conversation impact the actual content of the conversation. We have alluded to different formats for review, such as *Goodreads* in our book section and video

¹¹² Staid, Jack. "How Kendrick Lamar Helped Redefine Music Criticism – Cuepoint – Medium." *Medium*. Cuepoint, 24 June 2015. Web. 27 Apr. 2017.

reviews in our TV section. While we have been focusing on print forms of review, in various online publications, different formats can potentially lead to different permutations of review. Also, the reviewer's focus on blogs and the "easily-consumable" consumable is reminiscent of concerns in our book section, where critics feared that review could be undermined by the oversaturation of unqualified voices. By mentioning easy access and blogs (instead of online publications with professional writers) the writer seems to be alluding to these "less qualified" voices, seeing them as the source of this pendulum swing to the catchy. Like the Complex piece, this article is concerned that the conversation in review has gone stagnant. But in this case, the author seems to be blaming the more casual commentator instead of large internet publications. Whatever the source of this perceived stagnation, the general consensus is that review should feature some variety. The conversation should never reach a consensus.

The first review we will look at is the *Pitchfork* review for Kendrick Lamar's third studio album, *To Pimp a Butterfly*. Above the review is an insignia saying "Best New Music"¹¹³ – a literal seal of approval. This classification deals with a motive of review that we have not addressed in a while, which is making evaluations. This aspect is worth touching on, as it relates to another quality of review. When one writes peer reviewed, academic theory, there is the assumption that they are writing about something worthwhile – there is a quality that makes their area of focus interesting. But review doesn't come with this assumption, so we can have a review for something the reviewer has no interest in or thinks is terrible. As a result, review can focus on the negative in a way that other discussions may not. Due to constraints of space and

¹¹³ Jenkins, Craig. "Kendrick Lamar: To Pimp a Butterfly." *Kendrick Lamar: To Pimp a Butterfly Album Review | Pitchfork*. N.p., 19 Mar. 2015. Web. 27 Apr. 2017.

scope, this project does not look at any purely negative reviews. That being said, we should acknowledge that there may be different approaches for more negative reviews. Just as format may change the nature of review, negative impressions may do the same. And while on the topic of “best new music,” we should again acknowledge the role of time in review. As mentioned in the Complex piece, often reviews are released “hastily,” to be as close to the original album as possible. As a result, these opinions and impressions may not be the same as they are years later. Later this section, we will revisit an updated version of the pitchfork review, to see just how theories can change with time. To address the effect time may have on opinions, Pitchfork differentiates between “best new music” and “best new music,” as opposed to simply having “best music.” As such, we have two types of review – one in the heat of the moment, and one in retrospect. In review, we get analysis so close to the release of a work, unpolished and spontaneous. As a result, we get responses that may not be possible years after the fact.

Like most reviews, the *Pitch Fork* review has a clear framing device, and draws focus to the narrative aspects of the album - “Kendrick Lamar’s major-label albums play out like Spike Lee films in miniature. In both artists’ worlds, the stakes are unbearably high, the characters’ motives are unclear, and morality is knotty, but there is a central force you can feel steering every moment.”¹¹⁴ This prelude is almost a consolidation of what we have seen so far, or perhaps, more of a reiteration. Much like the Harry Potter or Breaking bad reviews, the work in question is understood through its similarities to preexisting works. This reference is then used

¹¹⁴ Jenkins, Craig. "Kendrick Lamar: To Pimp a Butterfly." *Kendrick Lamar: To Pimp a Butterfly Album Review* | *Pitchfork*.

to establish what type of work we are discussing, and give us a general framing device. Another similarity to past review is the comparison across media, in this case comparing music to the structure of a film. We can see more of a focus on narrative than on the precise mechanical elements that belong to any particular medium. In fact, it is not until the third paragraph that we get the words “The music, meanwhile.” In this case, “music” means referencing other musicians, as well as briefly mentioning instruments and style. Again, we see a familiar approach, where the reviewer establishes a genre through a variety of examples – “genre-busting freakouts (The Roots’ Phrenology, Common’s Electric Circus-”¹¹⁵ In this case, the genre is almost an absence of genre - the busting of genre. Even still, we see a general type come to light, though the use of listing.

This third paragraph is supposedly about the music itself, but there is no discussion of sounds mixing, sampling, notes, or instrumentation. Far from being a critique of the music itself, the review feels like an exploration of narrative elements, similar to the book and TV reviews we have observed. For instance, let us look at that introduction again, particularly the part discussing narrative elements - “the stakes are unbearably high, the characters’ motives are unclear, and morality is knotty, but there is a central force you can feel steering every moment.”¹¹⁶ This description could just as easily describe *Breaking Bad*, or any number of works of literature. We have characters, theme, and a sense that the various “moments” in this album are connected. The way *Breaking Bad* is depicted in this moment makes it feel much more like a story than a collection of sounds.

¹¹⁵ Ibid

¹¹⁶ IBid

The Pitchfork review acknowledges that narrative is not the most immediate aspect of *To Pimp a Butterfly*, while simultaneously pushing that element as the most important - “Despite all this, he’s still toying with a narrative on the sly: Just beneath the surface lies a messianic yarn about avoiding the wiles of a sultry girl named Lucy who’s secretly a physical manifestation of the devil.”¹¹⁷ This comment begins the fourth paragraph, right after the paragraph that starts with “the music, meanwhile.” It as if the reviewer must remind us that we are not only talking about music – no, this review is about story, and about big ideas. Or specifically, this is about “narrative.” This passage describes the narrative as being beneath the surface of the album. And yet, narrative is on the very surface of this review, framing the entire analysis. What I hope to emphasize are two points – that the review has chosen a specific approach, and that this approach is similar to what we have seen in other sample reviews. If you look at passages like these, there is no indication of medium whatsoever, as was the case with many *Harry Potter* and *Breaking Bad* reviews.

And we see similar patterns of thought, across various other review sites. For instance, The *Tiny Mixtapes* review starts with a familiar framing device. Before the review itself, we have a “style” section, describing the musical genres the album belongs to, and then the “others” section, where a list of similar artist is provided.¹¹⁸ This setup is extremely similar to what we have seen before, where a variety of similar artists are used to help establish what type of piece is being discussed. The review itself starts with an observation on criticism itself – “Judging from

¹¹⁷ Ibid

¹¹⁸ Phillips [Http://www.tinymixtapes.com/writer/matthew+phillips](http://www.tinymixtapes.com/writer/matthew+phillips), Matthew. "Music Review: Kendrick Lamar - To Pimp a Butterfly." *Tiny Mix Tapes*. Interscope/Aftermath/Top Dawg [Http://www.aftermathmusic.com/](http://www.aftermathmusic.com/), 23 Mar. 2015. Web. 27 Apr. 2017.

the pages upon pages already written about Kendrick Lamar's *To Pimp a Butterfly*, you might think that critics have already exhausted the conversation within just the first week after its surprise release."¹¹⁹ One important word here is conversation, as it emphasizes how these reviews are not written in a vacuum. We've seen links between reviews before, suggesting some overlap, but here the reviewer directly addresses other criticism. And like the *Medium* and *Complex* pieces on Lamar, the reviewer seems wary of an end to the conversation, eager to continue. The bulk of the first paragraph goes deeper into other reviews of Kendrick Lamar's album, summarizing the sort of responses as well as critiquing them. The second paragraph begins with "*To Pimp a Butterfly* requires an extra commitment. Even the most casual attention to the lyrics can unveil the complexity of Lamar's critique."¹²⁰ Unlike the *Pitchfork* review, this one focuses on the lyrics. But as the reviewer mentions, the interaction is rather casual, using the lyrics as a way to open up broader conversations about the album, rather than go through them meticulously, word by word. Or as the reviewer then states "What follows is an attempt to read the album's underlying narrative."¹²¹ Even with a stronger focus on lyrics, the review is ultimately not about the words themselves, but about tracing the underlying story of *To Pimp a Butterfly*. In this sense, the review is not radically different than the *Harry Potter* and *Breaking Bad* reviews, which would quote the text or dialogue to develop their argument or make some claim about the narrative.

¹¹⁹ Phillips [Http://www.tinymixtapes.com/writer/matthew+phillips](http://www.tinymixtapes.com/writer/matthew+phillips), Matthew. "Music Review: Kendrick Lamar - To Pimp a Butterfly." *Tiny Mix Tapes*.

¹²⁰ Ibid

¹²¹ Ibid

Like plenty of other reviews, this one makes references across media, at one point stating – “This is less Faust and Robert Johnson and more Jesus in the desert, less sealed pact and more temptation.” We see the reviewer reference literary texts and writers, and more specifically, types of narrative. Like other reviews, this one choose to focus on issues of narrative and lyric, familiar to us through novels and poetry respectively. As we have suggested, these reviews could be focused on issues of narrative as that gives them a whole stockpile of literary theories to draw upon. But in all likelihood, these reviewers are equipped to discuss other aspects of the music – instrumentation, chords, and sound mixing. But their readership may not be. Having spent more time with literature than we have with pop music and TV, we are often better equipped to understand an argument about a story than about cinematography or chord progressions. But regardless of the reason, we have consistently seen reviewers focus on examples and concepts that carry across media.

Next is the Rolling Stone Review of *To Pimp a Butterfly*, which starts with the description – “Hashtag this one *Portrait of the Artist as a Manchild in the Land of Broken Promises*.”¹²² The use of “hashtag” is interesting, as hashtags are common fodder for twitter posts and user comments, though not normally associated with serious scholarly work. Starting with a hashtag gives the review a certain conversational quality, while at the same time putting it in conversation with the world of twitter hashtags and forum posts. As for the hashtag itself, it has a distinct narrative quality to it - “Manchild in the Land of Broken Promises.” And yet, the word

¹²² Tate, Greg. "Kendrick Lamar 'To Pimp a Butterfly' Album Review." *Rolling Stone*. Rolling Stone, 19 Mar. 2015. Web. 27 Apr. 2017.

“portrait” implies a more static existence – an unmoving image, as apposed to the dynamic narratives past reviews have conceived of.

The review does not focus on the progression of a narrative over time, but instead emphasizes more explicitly musical moments – “He's also made hella room for live jazz improv on this furthermucker, from the celestial keys of virtuoso pianist Robert Glasper to the horns of Terrace Martin and Kamasi Washington to Thundercat's low end.”¹²³ By “explicitly musical,” this project means elements that are not shared with other media, such as instruments and specific musical artists. But while we do not see the same attention to narrative, this review shares a casual tone with the others, with pseudo swearing such as “furthermucker.” And then, the review concludes with “*To Pimp a Butterfly* is a densely packed, dizzying rush of unfiltered rage and unapologetic romanticism, true-crime confessionals, come-to-Jesus sidebars, blunted-swing sophistication, scathing self-critique and rap-quotable riot acts.”¹²⁴ In this summary of the album, there are only two points that explicitly relate to music – “come-to-Jesus sidebars” and “rap-quotable riot acts.” Otherwise we are dealing with descriptions of feelings and concepts that could apply to a great many mediums. That being said, the reviewer is not operating in the same way as Pitchfork and Tiny mixtapes, focusing more on particular feelings and vibes than a single thesis conclusion. In fact, the way they list off various elements, as opposed to one central focus, more closely resembles the album’s format - a cluster of related but ultimately individual songs. In the end, the Rolling Stone review does not make any invocation of narrative or the literary.

¹²³ Tate, Greg. "Kendrick Lamar 'To Pimp a Butterfly' Album Review." *Rolling Stone*.

¹²⁴ Ibid

As for *Tiny Mixtapes*, its final consensus is “that the mortal man who holds it (consciousness) is constantly struggling to keep it alive,”¹²⁵ while *Pitchfork* ends by declaring the album “a celebration of the audacity to wake up each morning to try to be better, knowing it could all end in a second, for no reason at all.”¹²⁶ These reviews more closely resemble the trend we have seen, where reviews build towards a specific conception of the work, as opposed to a more general reaction (as seen in the *Rolling Stone* review). Also, we can see how reviews often reach similar conclusions. In this case, both *Tiny Mixtapes* and *Pitchfork* choose to emphasize issues of mortality as the centerpiece to the album, as opposed to other potential themes, such as race and identity. In all probability, *Tiny Mixtapes* had the *Pitchfork* review in mind, given its acknowledgment of other review at its start.

The *New Yorker* review of *To Pimp a Butterfly* starts with biographic material – “The third studio album from the hip-hop artist Kendrick Lamar arrived, as major albums tend to these days, while nobody was looking. Its appearance on iTunes late Sunday night was apparently in error.”¹²⁷ This approach resembles what we saw in the *Guardian’s* review of *Harry Potter* reviews, which focused on the business practices of Rowling. This approach is another way of understanding the album that doesn’t involve any specific musical elements. As the review points out, even though it is exploring the life of the rapper, interpretation is the priority - “To Pimp a Butterfly’ is a capacious record, and it will accommodate many

¹²⁵ ¹²⁵ Phillips [Http://www.tinymixtapes.com/writer/matthew+phillips](http://www.tinymixtapes.com/writer/matthew+phillips), Matthew. "Music Review: Kendrick Lamar - To Pimp a Butterfly." *Tiny Mix Tapes*.

¹²⁶ Jenkins, Craig. "Kendrick Lamar: To Pimp a Butterfly." *Kendrick Lamar: To Pimp a Butterfly Album Review | Pitchfork*.

¹²⁷ Crawford, Anwen. "Kendrick Lamar's Capacious New Record." *The New Yorker*. The New Yorker, 18 Mar. 2015. Web. 27 Apr. 2017.

interpretations, but it is, importantly, a record about patrimony, both personal and national.”¹²⁸ Like other reviews, this one promotes a particular interpretation, while still acknowledging the existence of “various” others. Unlike *Pitchfork* or *Tiny Mixtapes*, chooses to focus on patrimony instead of mortality, which could be a result of its different approach. For instance, we have moments such as “Lamar was born in Compton, and he triangulates his West Coast hip-hop heritage with hard funk and jazz poetry.”¹²⁹ Rather than use particular lyrics to make its argument, this review grounds its claims in aspects of Lamar’s life and identity. One could potentially make the claim that there is a narrative thread here, but ultimately, narrative is not a key element of this review. What is important though is its emphasis on interpretation over evaluation. Like all the reviews we have read so far, it is looking for meaning, not a score.

Another important aspect of the *New Yorker* piece is the issue of time. Like several other reviews, it addresses time directly, stating – “Even two years ago, ‘To Pimp a Butterfly’ might have sounded, to all but a handful of listeners, out of joint with the times, but right now, after Ferguson and Eric Garner, it sounds fitting.”¹³⁰ In similar fashion to what we’ve seen before, the reviewer references other works to frame *To Pimp a Butterfly*. Just as *Harry Potter* may read a certain way because we’ve read our fair share of children’s lit, *To Pimp a Butterfly* may sound a certain way because of what we have listened to. In addition, this passage addresses the issue of time, bluntly addressing how strong an influence time has on the way a work is perceived. As we mentioned before, the *Pitchfork* reviewer had the opportunity to address just how much of an effect time had on their interpretation. This reevaluation is

¹²⁸ Crawford, Anwen. “Kendrick Lamar’s Capacious New Record.” *The New Yorker*.

¹²⁹ Ibid

¹³⁰ Ibid

featured in a piece by the music analysis site Genius, where reviewers got the opportunity to look back on their opinions of *To Pimp a Butterfly*, almost a year after the fact. For instance, we have an observation from the original *Pitchfork* review's— "Just beneath the surface lies a messianic yarn."¹³¹ In the annotated edition, the reviewer adds "After a year with it, I feel like he was just trying to dramatize the struggle of finding yourself suddenly rich and deciding whether you're gonna swim in the cash or try and do something for your community with your money and platform."¹³² Most crucially, we have the acknowledgment that interpreting a work is a process, one that takes time and potentially years of reflection. While "haste" may not be the word, reviews are speedily written, appearing mere days after the release of the work. While an advantage of review is that it shows responses in real time, unaffected by years of public opinion, it certainly has a blind spot. Reviews often taper off after the initial release of a project, meaning that the conversation only last so long. And this is unfortunate, as theories are still being altered and fine-tuned in significant ways, as we can see with the *Pitchfork* review. In this case, the reviewer chooses to shift their focus to issues of wealth, as opposed to homing in on issues of mortality. The fact that they call the album a "messianic yarn" seems to suggest that they had not fully unraveled the album within the first few days of its release. Also, their approach has changed, as now they are deriving their theory from aspects of the artist's life, as

¹³¹ Jenkins, Craig. "Kendrick Lamar: To Pimp a Butterfly." *Kendrick Lamar: To Pimp a Butterfly Album Review | Pitchfork*. N.p., 19 Mar. 2015. Web. 27 Apr. 2017.

¹³² Jenkins, Craig. "Genius-annotated Version of "Kendrick Lamar: To Pimp a Butterfly Album Review | Pitchfork"." *Pitchfork.com*. N.p., 19 Mar. 2015. Web. 02 May 2017.

opposed to focusing on the album's narrative structure and lyrics. This new focus resembles the *New Yorker's* approach, where aspects of Lamar's life are used to interpret the album.

Later in the updated review, we get this annotated comment - "It calls itself a "blank letter," actually, in the Braille in the insert, and I still don't get what he meant by it. Ideas?"¹³³ This approach resembles many other reviews, where the writer calls upon their readers and their knowledge. And due to the format of *Genius*, this comment has received responses, detailing possible interpretations of the Braille insert. Like many reviews, this one features a cooperative element. This cooperation is important, as it offers a possible solution to our previous dilemma. While reviews from major publications are usually clustered around the initial release of a project, user reviews persist, continuing the conversation consistently over the following years. And as we wrap up our examination, this cooperative aspect of review is important to remember, as it is one of its most distinguishing elements. This kind of co-authorship, across various computer screens from around the world, is only possible due to the advent of the internet. We see works where anyone can scrawl in the margins, and those scrawling can be seen by anyone else. The way review develops theories is compelling because there is such an openness to it.

As we wrap up with this final review, we should look at one last annotation. In response to the ending segment of the album, where Kendrick Lamar speaks to a recording of a 2Pac interview, the reviewer states "The first time Pac popped up at the end of 'Mortal Man' it spooked me so bad I can't listen to that part anymore. I still remember where I was when he

¹³³ Jenkins, Craig. "Genius-annotated Version of "Kendrick Lamar: To Pimp a Butterfly Album Review

died. You can't do this to me, Kendrick."¹³⁴ In the original review, there was little first person. But here we can see behind the curtain, as this annotation unpacks all the feeling behind the single word "unnerving." Even in a review that does not invoke life experience, the first person, or much emotion, these features are present. Emotion is inevitably a part of our reaction to music, film, poetry, or a good book, and review will often go to the source and address these emotions.

In conclusion, this project would argue that review is not a series of scores, telling people what to listen to, watch, or read – rather, review appears to be about how we should think of these various works. In that sense, review functions similarly to criticism, or even more specifically, literary criticism. This is because a music review will not necessarily look like music criticism, or a TV review look like television criticism. Whereas criticism may focus on technical aspects that a common reader would be unfamiliar with, review does not. Instead, it focuses on broader claims, often enforced by narrative and lyrical observations. And unlike academic criticism, review is far more of a communal process, where almost anyone can contribute. As a result, review's priorities and tactics are different. For instance, review may focus on one's emotional reaction to a work, or may emphasize an ability to predict what will happen next. Also, the community of review is far more immediate than in other criticism. In academic criticism, cooperation is often done through reference, and while passages from another may appear, they are not actively helping to write the piece. But in review, one may comment on the very page the review is featured on. Also, reviewers can reference anyone, not just those

¹³⁴ Jenkins, Craig. "Genius-annotated Version of "Kendrick Lamar: To Pimp a Butterfly Album Review | Pitchfork"." *Pitchfork.com*. N.p., 19 Mar. 2015. Web. 02 May 2017.

with particular qualifications. But more than anything else, this project wants to paint a picture of what review looks like, and how it has distinct similarities across media. Review reads like a more informal, emotional literary review, trying to reach conclusion about a work in conjunction with others. In a way, it is like a far more accessible English classroom.

Review is worth exploring because it is an unprecedented change to the way we explore creative works. Now a conversation that was once word of mouth can be the written word, where anyone can add to the conversation on a work. To test this theory, I started a review blog at the start of this senior project, and put up reviews of various works, at a rate of about one review a week. By the end of this process, the blog had over 2,000 distinct visitors from over 50 different countries, and various back and forths with commenters about their opinions and impressions. Such a feat would be impossible before the advent of accessible, internet reviews. But due to this technology and online community, I can write a review on a work that resembles an English paper and share it with many, even receive feedback. I do not need to be peer edited, I do not even need to be any good. Now, anyone can do something reminiscent of a literary critique. While the implications and results of this technology are unclear, review is worth paying particular attention to, as more and more take on a role similar to a literary critic. Thus, it is worth understanding what review looks like.

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