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**You're Making Ideology Weird:
An Analysis of the Contemporary Weird through a Marxist Lens**

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By

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You're Making Ideology Weird: An Analysis of the Contemporary Weird through a Marxist

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Abstract

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TITLE OF THESIS: You're Making Ideology Weird: An Analysis of the Contemporary Weird through a Marxist Lens

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Literary texts have always been a space for discussions of Marxist ideology and the manipulation the ruling class has over the working class. Many writers have created settings that oppress a protagonist. Through the theoretical writings of Karl Marx, Louis Althusser, and Antonio Gramsci, one can see how contemporary texts are using class division and revolution as a means of expressing a discomfort the authors feel towards the class struggles they observe.

One genre that has best been used to discuss ideology, in recent years, is the Weird genre. Surreal settings and absurd scenarios in works of the Weird have created an expression of class struggle that is both unique and relatable to audiences. Through the use of Yorgos Lanthimos's 2015 film, *The Lobster*, Jeff VanderMeer's 2014 novel, *Annihilation*, and Glenn Shaheen's 2018 prose-poetry collection, *Carnivalia*, the Weird is converging with Marxist concepts to break down the struggle that individualism faces against a capitalist ruling class's agenda for control.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Memoir Intro: Teacher.

In the spring of my first year teaching, fresh out of college, Oklahoma teachers went on strike. I could not even manage my classroom without screaming at the kids, and here I was standing by the Sacagawea statue in front of the Oklahoma capitol building demanding for a pay raise. I would work ten to twelve hour days and still have no idea where the hell our curriculum was heading in the following weeks.

The student demographics at my school were seventy-percent Hispanic, twenty-percent African American, and ten-percent white. I was at a school in downtown Oklahoma City trying to teach kids that had an astronomical amount less than I ever had growing up, and I was too immature to see their perspective. Not only did I not even try to see their perspective, I did not even think to meet them halfway as far as behaviors were concerned. Every battle was a battle I chose to fight.

I was beaten down by my administration. They were coming down on me hard to get my house in order, and I simply could not. The Man was getting to me, and I took that frustration out on the kids. In return, they lashed out on me. I felt repressed by my principal, and many of the policies of the district. It was not until my second year teaching that I realized I was using my place of power to repress my students. Of course I had this realization from my place as a student in grad. school.

Memoir: Student

I started my graduate studies the same year I started teaching. I struggled there as much as I did at work. I assume that back then I was “playing the game” as I understood it. I knew

that working adults were supposed to work their way up the ladder, and school was pretty much all I knew. School is the one thing I liked. The one constant that gave me comfort.

And so, it was a Tuesday night during the fall semester of my second year of my graduate studies. I was in Dr. Bolf-Beliveau's course, Cultural Theory in Literature. Now, it is a well-known fact amongst public school teachers that using any sort of informational video as an instructional tool will surely end with two dozen sets of glazed eyes and start at least four to five REM cycles. Even I understood this with my limited amount of experience teaching in a classroom.

When Dr. Bolf-Beliveau (Dr. BB for short) played the video, "Ideology: Marx, Gramsci, and Althusser," I was shocked at how attentive I became of the video's contents. First off, the video contains cheap edits that resemble that of public service videos in the nineties. The title card alone with its boring font and gray background would be enough to put my entire class of seventh graders to sleep. If this alone was not equivalent to an entire bottle of Nyquil, then surely was the dry tone of the British female voice that began narrating.

But instead I had a different response, because the first words in the film were a pair of questions that struck a chord inside me that I was not quite aware of before, "Are you brainwashed? Do you understand the world the way that government and mainstream political parties want you to understand the world?" (Potter 0:47)

In the moment of hearing the British woman's words, I let down my wall of arrogance built by years of stubbornness to realize I was brainwashed. The effectiveness of my teaching was plummeting, because I was holding on to the idea that I was in charge. That my job was to discipline my students.

That evening, I also learned the most fundamental block of understanding Marxist theory. This of course is the division of class. In the video, the narrator goes on to brilliantly summarize this essential block of Marxist theory,

There are two ways in which class can be understood, objectively and subjectively. If you are a Marxist, the assertion concerning the objective side of class membership is fairly simple. Class is defined according to one's relation to the means of production. If you own and control the means of production, you are bourgeoisie. If you do not, if you must instead work for a wage, then you are one of the proletariat (Potter 5:17).

Perhaps I had been lying to myself, thinking I held more power in society than I actually did. Teachers are paid to run a classroom, but how valued are they really in our society? Is this not why the entire state went on strike six months prior?

Memoir: Teacher

Speaking of the strike, a familiar image shown in this life-changing video perfectly represents the setting that we were in for two weeks. The video shows crowds of people in the spring sun wearing hats, comfortable leg-wear, and picket signs demanding whatever pay they feel is owed to them. This image was narrated by these words:

“Althusser has noted that [the ruling class's] frequent function is to minimize the demands of those they claim to represent, to argue for settling for less under the guise of a rhetoric of realism. And ultimately to get strikers to return to work to resume their identities of obedient workers” (Potter 14:13).

This visual portion of the video made me remember that the strike felt so good to be a part of! It was like being at a music festival. All of my friends were there. We wore comfortable clothes,

and sometimes costumes. There were even tents for free food. Not just one tent with cheap food options. I mean on a normal day we could pick between Domino's pizza and Ted's tacos.

All was fun and games until I realized that not everyone was on our side. A man drove by in a truck that had, "go back to work" written several times on the vehicle. As he drove by, he gave us the finger. What an ass! He wasn't the only person against us, though. There were plenty others, including our governor, Mary Fallin.

Not only was she resistant to our demands, but she was also not above insulting us. Fallin said something that pissed every striker off, "teachers want more, but it's kind of like having a teenage kid that wants a better car" (Griffin, 00:00:01 - 00:00:18).

During this time, I was working ten to twelve hours a day and even worked plenty on the weekends. That first year was a job and a half. This is not to mention the amount of work that great teachers do: setting up their rooms, giving meaningful feedback to all of their student's assignments, contacting parents for not just discipline but also praise, and preparing lessons that are engaging and fun. All of these things, done correctly, take time. A lot of time.

I'll be completely honest, the night I was in Dr. BB's class watching this video over Marxism; I had pretty much forgotten that I had even participated in the strike—a strike that lasted two weeks. According to the video, the fact that I had forgotten and happily went back to work was not, at all, my decision, or, rather, anyone's on my side of the debate. In fact, this decision was that of the ruling class. Governor Fallin knew that if she let us yell and scream (just like a teenager), we would go back to work, happily, and forget that this whole thing happened in the first place.

From all of these things that upset me (the disrespect of educators in Oklahoma, the lack of support by the governor, and the control that the government has over me), I am most upset

with myself for being a hypocrite. Of course I don't want the ruling class to control my decisions, but I once would stop at nothing to yell at a kid who was not following my "rules."

Memoir: Settings/ Segue to Theory

Exploring cultural theory and focusing my academic work on Marxist ideology comes from three settings that have influenced my view on class division in my post-college life: the middle school where I teach, the university I attend, and the capitol building where I protested with my friends for more funding for our schools. I never stopped thinking about class division after that night in Dr. BB's class. Marxism became my key focus in graduate school, and I spent two years honing my understanding of the theory.

With the video, Ideology: Marx, Althusser, and Gramsci, being the foundation for my understanding of Marxist ideology, I was allowed to explore a new space in my mind where Marxist theory was able to open my understanding of the world through the texts that I adored. This thesis is a journey of not only my graduate studies, but more importantly an academic narrative of how contemporary texts are using ideology to speak to working class audiences that seek individualism¹.

Karl Marx Intro.

Karl Marx is most noted for his contributions to socialism through his collaboration with Friedrich Engels. Together, they authored many works including the famed, "Communist Manifesto." The work that they accomplished together has since sparked a desire to investigate the power of ideological control in capitalist societies. When discussing ideology, it is understood that there is an eternal struggle between a ruling class and a working class. In the capitalist setting, the ruling class feeds ideologies to the working class that they follow out of

¹ *The Lobster, Annihilation, and Carnivalia* are the texts being referred to in this instance.

consent. This is considered true even if the ideas and rules they are following are not of their own liking (Barker 55).

For Marx, ideology is embedded in one's consciousness. In "[The Critique of] the German Ideology," Marx stresses his strong opinions on the condition of the German society in the early to mid-19th century. Marx and Engels's focus in this text was to steer people away from the common idea that the human consciousness shapes economic and social forces. They argue the opposite, that economic and social forces shape the human consciousness, "life is not formed by consciousness, but consciousness by life" (660). For Marx, this concept starts with the idea that when there are individuals in a society who are productively active, it is only natural that they then enter into political and social relations (659). Many Marxists will argue that the individuals in their respective societies are automatically entered into the class struggle. It is important to mention that this is the case whether the individuals agree with this system or not².

Why Marxism is Important to the Thesis

To properly apply the Marxist view of ideology to present day texts, it is important to first understand the historical context of Marx's argument. Through this examination, it seems that Marx's thoughts on religion become analogous to modern systems of ideological control. Marx's discussion over ideologies seems to hold anger against the 19th century Germans as he felt they were stunting themselves from growth by continuing to follow the ideologies of the Christian faith. In Bhikhu Parekh's book, *Marx's Theory of Ideology*, an academic work exploring the foundations of the modern study of ideology, Parekh opens with Marx's problem with religion, "religion is an ideology because it regards consciousness as conceptually and temporally prior to the material world" (Parekh 8). Religion is just one example of how Marxists

² *At the state capitol, it was easy to wonder how the government had been allowed to mistreat educators for so long. One would not think that teachers would be viewed as so low in the struggle of class division.*

observe the ways in which ideology has been regulated throughout history. Religious institutions have powers put in place used to direct and teach large groups of people who devote themselves to the beliefs being taught. Religion was more of a reality in the time of Marx and much less of a voluntary lifestyle, as it is today.

While religion still does exist, it seems that it is not the over controlling institution that it was in Marx's time. His observations, however, are still applicable to the modern day church setting. The lack of power that religion holds today does not equal as long a success for Marx. Ideological control will always be an issue as long as there are separate classes. This is why it is important to continue observing the ways in which the ruling class is adapting their means of ideological control.

Memoir: Religion to Education

Ideology is everywhere. Its abstract nature made it more and more invisible to the eye and to the mind. When in the crowd at the capitol building, we chanted. "Vote them out!" I was not exactly sure which specific individuals we needed to vote out of office, but I was passionate in my distaste towards them. I was not upset with these government workers, exactly. Life was difficult at this time. On top of my struggles with teaching, I also had my responsibilities as a graduate student to handle. This seemed as good of a time as any to revolt. I was a part of the institution, known as education, and I was completely unaware of my own hegemony as a teacher. I was also aloof to the power that ideology held in this class struggle. Honestly, with all of the time I spent at the capitol, participating in the strike, I did not even know what ideology was.

Defining Ideology

Ideology is such a malleable term even under the specific boundaries of its use in the Marxist sense. In Chris Barker's book, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, Barker breaks down the rhetorical usage of the concept of ideology. One of the terms he uses to define ideology is "mystifying." Barker's thoughts nicely converse with Marx. Ideology is a discourse that does not always represent a set of empirical conditions. Often there is sacrifice of logical ideas that are obtainable in reality for ideas that are more vague and metaphysical (Barker 94).

Marx's cry to help the people of Germany has resonated with many of the philosophers that followed him. Marx's take on ideology has been so influential, because it is not solely applicable to this time in German history in which Marx was writing. Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser are the two most profound writers on the subject of ideology. Ideology is not tied down to any specific time period or instance, which can be seen in the backgrounds of these three scholars. Gramsci's works were written in early 20th century Italy and Althusser's works were written a few decades later in France.

This is where another large Marxist concept comes into place, which is the concept of the State. The State is a recurring idea in Marxism which functions as a way to understand the tremendous power that the ruling class has over the working class. The State is a massive institution that's purpose is not only to rule the working class, but to ultimately manipulate the working class into being completely submissive to the ruling class's will. This is easily done by ensuring the working class individuals are in a position where they do not have the abilities, or even the rationality, to win the class struggle. Marx even expresses the importance that the State has to constantly adapt to stay ahead of the working class, "the social structure and the State are continually evolving out of the life-process of definite individuals" (Marx, "The German Ideology" 659). There is a focus here, not on the working class as a whole, but on the individuals

that are in the overall group, “individuals, not as they may appear in their own or other people’s imagination, but as they really are” (Marx 659). This focus on the individual is meant to make the individuals believe their place in society is of their own choice. The fact is that, in the current state of the capitalist society, the individuals in the working class are placed where the ruling class needs them for production.

Althusser and Gramsci Application

Marxist theory brings forth a lot of hope for working class individuals, including this author. However, Karl Marx, Louis Althusser, and Antonio Gramsci, all have the same problem in their works. Their teachings of revolt and their solutions for class manipulation are quite hypocritical. Throughout history, socialism has never been successful in its initial goal: class equality. This has resulted in individuals such as Francisco Franco, Benito Mussolini, and Joseph Stalin becoming dictators of their countries, due to the absence of authority in theoretical socialism.

Introduce Gramsci Hegemony

Antonio Gramsci is a Marxist theorist who wrote in the early twentieth century, and mainly focused his writing on hegemony. For Gramsci, it is more important to revolt solely against the traditional ideology that the proletariat is attempting to change. Gramsci’s work on ideology builds on this Marxist framework while focusing more on revolution and the power that ideologies have.

In his prison notebooks he wrote an excerpt titled “The Concept of Ideology” where he expresses his thoughts on the Marxist concept by first defining ideology as “ideas derived from sensations” (Gramsci, “The Concept of Ideology” 704). The meanings of the term ideology have quite a history and have changed overtime. Gramsci eloquently walks his reader through this

understanding, “Its original meaning was that of science of ideas”, and since analysis was the only method recognised and applied by science it means “analysis of ideas”, that is, “investigation of the origin of ideas” (Gramsci, “The Concept of Ideology” 704). Ideas come from the individual as discussed by Marx, but the shared ideas of individuals are where ideologies have their most power and can become dangerous if manipulated. This is where class struggle comes into play.

Gramsci’s solution to class struggle is the idea of the counter hegemony, which starts with a revolution. In his essay entitled “The Revolution Against ‘Capital’,” Gramsci breaks down the Marxist idea of ‘Capital’ and the efficient mindset of the revolutionary by primarily stating that revolution is “based more on ideology than actual events” (Gramsci, “Revolution Against ‘Capital’”). According to Gramsci, in the essay, “The Development of the Revolution,” “the proletariat revolution is imposed not prepopsed” (Gramsci, “The Development of the Revolution”). Gramsci further expresses the ways in which the biologist can be defined as a revolutionary in his terms, by expressing his insistence on the importance of the working class as a social force:

“only the working class can save human society from the abyss of barbarity and economic collapse towards which it is pushed by the emboldened and maddened forces of the owning class, and it can do so organizing itself in a dominant class to impose its own dictatorship in the politico-industrial field” (Gramsci, “Development of the Revolution”).

For Gramsci, the individuals in the working class, must base their revolutionary process in the intimacy of their productive life in order for their revolution to be successful, rather than being empty promises and ultimately remembered as only a myth (Gramsci, “Development of the

Revolution”). In his discussion of revolution, Gramsci’s solution of the counter-hegemony seems to be structurally similar to the initial capitalist institution, but rather focuses on an opposing set of ideologies.

Introduce Althusser

Louis Althusser is another author whose work has impacted the theory of the Marxist concept of ideology. This is primarily due to his observation and coinage of the Ideological State Apparatuses. In his essay titled, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Althusser brings into question the ruling class and by what means exactly do they ensure labor power. He goes on to say that wages are one means of insurance, but they are not enough. There is another force that is much stronger which is put into place to regulate the working classes’ labor power. This is where the State Apparatus comes into play. Marx and Engels wrote extensively on the State and State power. Althusser is branching off on their ideas that the State is not enough that it needs an extension, the State Apparatus. Althusser says that in Marx’s time, the church was the main State Apparatus that regulated the working class’s ideology, but now the new ruling State Apparatus is the public school system. This brings up a quite chilling Althusserian concept which perhaps that school is not focused on teaching subject related curriculum as much as it is following the rules. Althusser has many thoughts on this, and it is not a criticism of the education system, as much as it is an observation in what seems to be the importance in rule following:

But besides these techniques and knowledges, and in learning them, children at school also learn the ‘rules’ of good behaviour, i.e. the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labour, according to the job he is ‘destined’ for: rules of morality, civic and professional conscience, which actually means rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of the order established by class domination.

They also learn to ‘speak proper French’, to ‘handle’ the workers correctly, i.e. actually (for the future capitalists and their servants) to ‘order them about’ properly, i.e. (ideally) to ‘speak to them’ in the right way, etc. (Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” 1287).

This work environment that Althusser is describing, and the emphasis on molding the youth into having capitalist behaviors is one of the main points that Marxism is trying to reveal. The working class may think that their teachers’ purpose is to teach the various core subjects of English/Language Arts, History, Geography, Science, and Math, but the public school system is put in place to exemplify order, and to teach young kids how to follow authority. The section where Althusser mentions the teaching of ‘proper French’ and ‘handling workers’ is very interesting, because these concepts are usually masked so that the reproductive capitalistic nature is hidden.

Althusser further defines Ideological State Apparatuses in a way that progresses the conversation of ideology. Althusser distinguishes the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) from the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA). The RSAs use violent force to ensure a means of production. Althusser states that this was the original function for the State in the time of Marx, “the State is explicitly conceived as a repressive apparatus” (Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” 1289). Althusser defines the ISAs in this way, “I shall call Ideological State Apparatuses a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions” (Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” 1291). He then goes on to propose an empirical list of examples for these types of apparatuses by stating that they are not in any particular order and as such need to be analyzed. This list includes:

“The religious ISA (the system of the different churches), the educational ISA (the system of the different public and private ‘schools’), the family ISA, the legal ISA, the political ISA (the political system, including the different parties), the trade-union ISA, the communications ISA (press, radio and television, etc.), and the cultural ISA (literature, the arts, sports, etc.)” (Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” 1291)

It is quite confusing to identify different institutions into these categories of State Apparatuses.

However, to summarize, a RSA inflicts violence and an ISA focuses on the enforcement of ideological frameworks. All of the ISA examples, such as the legal system and schools, enforce ideologies in a non-violent manner. In this way, the working class who are being forced to follow these ideologies are doing so consensually.

Settings in this Thesis

There are three texts, in this thesis, that are applied to the Marxist theory of ideology: *The Lobster*, *Annihilation*, and *Carnivalia*. All three of these texts are written by authors who have been celebrated for their works being either Weird or genre-bending. These three texts also explore how the story’s settings are manipulated by the ideologies of the people ruling them.

Introduction to The Lobster

The Lobster, directed by Yorgos Lanthimos, allows for a complete analysis of the Marxist theory of ideology from the perspective of all three Marxists previously discussed. The main character, David, experiences a rough transition after his wife leaves him. According to the law, he must be sent to a hotel to find a new partner, because being single is illegal. The hotel serves as a perfect setting for the application of how hegemony is structured. The manager and her husband run the hotel together, and they take the place of the ruling class. They push their ideologies, which are based around finding a partner, through various means of propaganda,

routine, and punishment. The guests have only a limited amount of time to find their partner or they will be turned into an animal of their own choosing. Althusser's concept of the Ideological State Apparatus is perfectly represented in this text through the manipulation by the ruling class.

Once David breaks free from the hotel, his journey to the woods sets up a great application to Gramsci's ideas concerning revolution and counter-hegemony. The leader of the loners inhabiting the woods has a strong distaste for the rules of the outside world. She and the other loners have all escaped from the hotel. David and the others are quite pleased by their leader's new set of rules, until David falls in love with a woman who is nearsighted like him. This creates trouble, because the Loner Leader does not allow companionship of any sort in her domain. David finds his desires blur the lines that define the ideologies of both of these societies. He wonders how he can be truly free in this world.

The Lobster builds a framework for understanding how settings can be drastically altered by the ideologies of the people who rule the setting's society. Every decision made by a character in *The Lobster* is based on the ideology of finding a partner. All of Lanthimos's signature writing techniques that define him as a Greek Weird filmmaker also allow for the absurdist scenario of being single that David is representing.

Introduction to Annihilation

The novel, *Annihilation*, by Jeff Vandermeer is a piece that expresses the burden that a revolutionist takes on when they begin to oppose their hegemonic society. The main character, the biologist, is established early on, in the novel, to have an introverted personality that keeps her self-isolated from others with exception of her husband. The biologist is much more interested in nature and the joy that scientific discovery brings her. When she is offered the

opportunity to explore the phenomena of an alien biome that has formed in Florida called Area X, she does not hesitate.

This text is a prime example of a revolution, because the biologist, who already has no interest or ties in her existing social life, finds comfort in Area X to the point of becoming entirely submerged in its atmosphere physically and ideologically. Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses appear to fit the ways in which the Southern Reach (the company that is leading the biologist's expedition) controls their employees. The Southern Reach is not as subtle in this manipulation as the hotel in *The Lobster*. In fact, the Southern Reach hypnotizes the expeditionists to follow their commands. The director of the company, and the leader of the expedition, goes into the area with the idea of total control over her team. This control is lost when an act of nature gives the biologist a chance to revolt. A plant sprays spores on her and she loses the ability to be hypnotized. Being able to see what is really going on with her team allows her to understand the Southern Reach's purpose for going into Area X. This also gives the biologist a chance to make a decision for herself that is not guided by the company that hired her.

The ideologies of Area X function in the same ways that the woods do in *The Lobster*. There are new rules opposing the main character's traditional social setting, which seem appealing to the character. However, there are new rules and guidelines that Area X has established. Vandermeer's work has also been defined as New Weird, due to his abstract settings and plots. Such a title makes one ponder the possibilities of a new classification of texts that apply to the anti-capitalist tendencies of the Marxist theory, which also use absurdism in their settings to observe more theoretical ideas.

Introduction to Carnivalia

The final text in this argument is the prose-poetry collection titled, *Carnivalia*, written by Glenn Shaheen. Shaheen's collection consists of more than forty prose-poems. Several of which challenge the ideals of the traditional American life. Shaheen also has many pieces which focus on the class division that takes place within the education system. These stories shed a light on the teacher-student class struggle that is quite realistic and has not really been explored in more popular mediums of entertainment. Shaheen's work also develops a discourse over the literary canon through the use of several of the pieces having Shakespeare titles. These pieces are thematic in their narratives, and seemingly have nothing to do with Shakespeare plays they are named after.

Shaheen is a poet, and with his place in the genre of prose-poetry, he is expressing himself through an art that is not well appreciated within the literary community. Prose-poetry is a genre that has had difficulty being accepted as a canonized genre due to the rules that it breaks by combining the traditional prose style with poetic elements. Prose-poetry is very brief with its length and accepts the challenge of telling a story typically under a thousand words. Since canonization is such an exclusive process, it should be no surprise that with its untraditional limitations that prose-poetry has had trouble getting into the canon.

Shaheen has become successful in making a piece of art that not only shares the anti-capitalist themes of *The Lobster* and *Annihilation*. In the act of writing in the genre of prose-poetry, Shaheen shows his audience through his actions of writing rather than just speaking about such themes in his narratives. Shaheen's use of genre groups him in with Lanthimos and VanderMeer by pushing the boundaries of what defines the work in terms of expectation and literary criticism.

Conclusion: So What?

With these three texts being a film, a book, and a collection of prose-poetry, in this order there seems to be a gradual narrowing from more well-known forms of art to lesser known forms of art. With film being the most valued form of art, there is also a narrowing of hypocrisy from most to least. As the chapters in this thesis progress, a journey of intellectual skepticism is revealed. This is done to further the discussion of education's place in the Marxist theory of ideology through the discourse embedded in contemporary texts. What matters the most about this application of the theory is not that it is Marx, per say, but rather that it is anti-capitalist.

In these three texts, one can see characters striving for individualism in worlds that do not support their personal desires. Marxist theory is the only theory that seemed to observe the same type of rules that these three texts explore. Not only does this application show the observation of the rules, but also contains characters actively participating in revolution against the systems that created them. With this theory, there seems to be room for a further analysis on how authors and texts are functioning in the conversation concerning the themes in the stories themselves. Althusser makes it clear that his biggest concern, in modern capitalism, is the ideological state apparatus of education. In the public school setting, there is a class struggle between teachers and students. Whether or not this is that well-known of an issue, there are other unknown concerns that are existent in education. This is explored through the exclusivity of canonization. In education, the canon, and respect for certain genres, is a repressive entity.

Chapter 2

The Lobster, Please, with an Extra Side of Marxist Ideology!

The theory of Marxism contains concepts best used in observation to understand the issues concerning capitalism. Ideology seems to lay a foundational understanding of class struggle. The ruling class's methodical approach towards the working class involves the very manipulation of their beliefs and morals. Any sort of revolution then forms a divide. This divide creates two worlds, two settings that are ideologically opposing. The opposition of these settings causes quite the dilemma for individualism. In Yorgos Lanthimos's film, *The Lobster*, this dilemma for individual thought is shown through the journey of David as he lives in two separate societies attempting to fit in where he feels most comfortable.

About the Director

The films of the writer and director Yorgos Lanthimos are uniquely distinguishable in the ways that they explore social topics. Lanthimos's recent popularity with the Oscar winning film *The Favourite* has shown the power of his absurdist storytelling. One reason for Lanthimos's popularity is the way that his stories create space for individual interpretation. Quite often in these films, Lanthimos demands the viewer to reflect on their own place in society. The films in Lanthimos's filmography that most utilize absurd scenarios in their thematic metaphor are: *Dogtooth*, *Alps*, *The Lobster*, and *Killing of the Sacred Deer*. The one film out of this list that seems the most fit to be applied to the Marxist theory of ideology is Lanthimos's 2015 film, *The Lobster*.

The world of *The Lobster* contains intense enforcement of social rules that inhibit the characters' personal interests. This is accomplished through the film's premise: Individuals who are caught being single must be sent to a hotel to find a partner, and if a partner is not found

within forty-five days, the individual is turned into an animal of their own choosing. In a 2015 interview with *Screen International*, shortly after the theatrical release of *The Lobster*,

Lanthimos was asked if he seeks out absurd scenarios. His response to the question was:

Not per se. I find situations absurd and I try to reveal them or I just find situations interesting and they turn out to be thought of as absurd. By exploring something in an exaggerated way it makes it seem absurd, or reveals the absurdity of the truth of it.

There's no search for absurdity, it's just part of what we observe and find. It's the way we ask questions and entertain ourselves. (Lanthimos, *Screen International*)

Lanthimos is more interested in how people, in reality, deal with certain social issues. He makes it clear that the absurdity in his films is thematically purposeful, rather than being weird for weird's sake. To fully grasp the unique tone of *The Lobster*, it is important to look at one of Lanthimos's other films to understand his writing style.

A quick summary of Lanthimos's 2009 film, *Dogtooth*, makes for a great example of his writing style. *Dogtooth* tells the story of a father and his spouse who keep their three children isolated in their home, separated from the outside world. The father lies to the children by telling them if they leave the house they will be killed by monsters. He forces dozens of other false ideologies upon them while controlling every bit of information they take in. Thematically speaking, this film is about parenting and the struggle of regulating certain information, in an attempt to keep the children safe. Lanthimos takes this common idea and uses the father's absurd actions to build a strange world that seems to have the same problems in the viewer's reality.

Dogtooth's setting is the closest example comparable to the strange nature of the settings in *The Lobster*. In the same interview with *Screen International*, Lanthimos explains the basic concepts for writing, *The Lobster*, "We're exploring the need for people to be in couples and the pressures

associated with conforming to that standard. But we go to an extreme” (Lanthimos, *Screen International*). Going to the extreme is the best way to express how Lanthimos’s filmography tackles social themes.

One of Lanthimos’s stylistic directing techniques is the way in which he has his actors and actresses recite dialogue. Dialogue is delivered in a sort of matter-of-fact way, completely devoid of the individual’s emotions. Colin Farrell plays the protagonist, David. Farrell is usually type-casted as the attractive, insanely fit, heart-throb, and sometimes even the attractive charming villain. So, it is quite interesting that, for his role in *The Lobster*, he has gained a noticeable amount of weight. The weight added to the never-broken deadpan expression sets his character to appear absolutely miserable throughout a majority of the film.

With such absurd settings and characters who are completely withholding of emotions, it makes one only more curious to Lanthimos’s writing process. Lanthimos expressed that he and his writing partner are quite methodic in their screenwriting process, “Efthymis [Filippou, frequent writing collaborator] and I just started discussing. We built it in increments. It was more of a process than a vision. We started with relationships and couples and single people and that led to *The Lobster*” (Lanthimos, *Screen International*). Every beat in the film seems to hold a purpose in making a statement towards Lanthimos’s thesis concerning the social pressures of relationships. Every character represents a different part of the journey to find a partner and to find romance. Farrell’s performance expresses the hardships of dating for a middle aged man. At first glance, this absurd scenario that David and his many acquaintances are put into seems so different from reality. When examined further, the settings start to become a reflection of the ideological struggles individuals encounter on a daily basis. *The Lobster* contains many locations

that David visits where various rules are heavily enforced. This rule enforcement is the main source of conflict from the beginning to the end of the film.

Text Summary

At the start of *The Lobster*, David's wife breaks up with him, and he is immediately escorted by two workers to the hotel. The hotel is revealed to be an institution where single people are sent in order to find a suitable partner. David arrives at the hotel, is processed, and meets the establishment's leader, the Hotel Manager, played by Olivia Colman. The arrival process includes David reading a leaflet of the hotel's rules. This is how he learns that each visitor has forty-five days to find a partner at the hotel, or they will be turned into an animal of their choosing. If the visitors wish to extend their stay, they can obtain extra days to their sentence for capturing loners (those who have escaped the hotel) during the nightly hunts in the woods located directly outside the premises. The Hotel Manager, herself, visits David to ensure that he understands the rules. The deadpan direction from Lanthimos leads to an awkward conversation between David and the Hotel Manager. Once sitting down next to David's bed, the Hotel Manager talks in a staccato cadence with no changing expression on her face, "now, have you thought of what animal you would like to be if left alone?"

David replies in the same manner, "yes, a lobster."

"Why a lobster?" She inquires.

"Because lobsters live to be over a hundred years, are blue blooded like aristocrats, and stay fertile all their lives. I also like the sea very much. I waterski and swim quite much, since I was a teenager." (*The Lobster* 09:09-9:38).

Once at the hotel, David has trouble finding a love connection with the single women at the resort. David also struggles at hunting loners. The anxiety developed by his limited amount

of time left at the hotel leads David to take drastic measures. David fakes being heartless to match with a woman who is utterly apathetic. To test their bond, she murders his brother, who is in the form of a dog. When David cries at this, the Heartless Woman heads to tell the Hotel Manager that he has been lying. On her way to the Hotel Manager's room, David, with the help of a maid working at the hotel, knocks out the Heartless Woman. They, then, take her to the laboratory and transform her into an animal that is left unknown to the audience.

David escapes the hotel to live in the society inhabiting the woods. Once he arrives he finds that the Loner Leader, performed by Léa Seydoux, the woman in charge of the society living in the woods, has as many rules as the hotel. The major contrast, to the hotel, is that her rules are not focused on finding a partner. Rather, individuals are punished if they flirt, date, or have any sexual intimacy with one another. At first the change of scenery sits well with David, but when he meets the Nearsighted Woman, played by Rachel Weiss, his intentions of dating her conflict with the rules of the woods. They fall in love and sneak around the woods to make love and flirt with each other. They create a secret language with hand movements, so they can communicate where to meet without the Loner Leader knowing of their affairs.

The Loner Leader develops a team to buy supplies from the city. The loners pretend to be in couples as to not alert the authorities. The team goes to visit the Loner Leader's parents after the supplies are retrieved. At the parents' house, the Nearsighted Woman and David begin passionately making out while the Loner Leader's parents play guitar. Through observing this, the Loner Leader realizes that they have been dating, undermining her authority. In retaliation, she tells the Nearsighted Woman that she will pay for her to have corrective eye surgery. This is a lie, however, and the procedure purposefully blinds the Nearsighted Woman. When David ultimately discovers the Nearsighted Woman is blind, he becomes devastated. David is

nearsighted, and this trait is something that he is set on finding in his future partner. Now that the Nearsighted woman is no longer nearsighted, he fears that their love is in trouble. David has experienced a false connection with the heartless woman, and this event gives David a great amount of anxiety. This leads them to plan a mysterious trip to the city. When they arrive at a restaurant, they are both very saddened by something unknown to the audience. David asks the waiter for a steak knife and heads to the bathroom with it. In the bathroom he holds the knife a few inches from his face, contemplating blinding himself. The screen goes black before the audience sees whether or not he makes the decision to follow through.

Literature Review

Beyond reviews from film critics, not much theory has been applied to the film. That being said, there are three articles that highlight what work has been written over this film. In the journal, *Studies in European Cinema*, Sarah Cooper compares David's romantic predicament to that of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Rubina Ramjin, in an article for the *Journal of Religion and Film*, argues the similarities of ideological teachings in *The Lobster* to that of the Christian religion. Kenan Behzat Sharpe is seemingly the only person to apply Marxist theory to *The Lobster*, through the application of the film's content to Greece politics. While these texts offer many new and exciting lenses from which to view this film, there are several aspects to all three of these pieces that build a foundation for what has already been written about the film's use of setting.

In the article, "Narcissus and The Lobster (Yorgos Lanthimos, 2015)," Sarah Cooper compares *The Lobster's* David to Narcissus in *Metamorphoses*. This argument comes from Narcissus's neglect of committing to a partner, which eventually leads to him falling in love with his own reflection and becoming a flower. Cooper states, "while the walls of the hotel in *The*

Lobster are bedecked with still-life paintings of flowers, the punishment for remaining single is not to be turned into a flower, like Narcissus, but, rather, an animal” (164). From here, Cooper explores how David struggles finding a female partner who has the same defining trait as him. This argument discusses David’s narcissism, which is not a primary focus of the film. This is certainly a trait of David, and many of the characters in the hotel, due to the fact that the hotel is a repressive state. Its restriction brings out a competitive drive in these characters, even if they are not usually competitive.

For the *Journal of Religion and Film*, Rubina Ramjin wrote an article arguing the following, concerning *The Lobster’s* setting: “the dualistic nature of this world is highly dogmatic” (4). Ramjin uses all of the rules that appear in the hotel and the woods as the basis for this argument. One of the more compelling points of the article is how some Christian churches believe that instruments should not be allowed in worship. The way in which these Christians regulate this rule of not using instruments in worship is similar to the way that the characters in *The Lobster* regulate their seemingly obscure rules. Applying this film to the structure of religion leans this film further into the realm of Marx. In Marx's time religion was the repressive state that was of most concern to individual thought. In modern times religion is not as powerful, in terms of ideological control, as it once was. Ramjin’s article presents a need for this film to be fully applied to Marxism. Marxist writers have a lot to give this film in terms of its discussion on repressive states.

Kenan Behzat Sharpe makes an argument that *The Lobster* is a political allegory for the 2015 Greek bailout referendum. Sharpe criticizes the writing surrounding this film, due to the surface-level interpretation of the film’s take on romantic relationships. Sharpe also cites Lanthimos stating that his intention was not meant to be political or meant to comment on the

politics of Greece. Sharpe's key point in this argument is that "through absurdist exaggeration the film helps render visible a social logic which everywhere confronts us with two equally disastrous options between which we are compelled to choose" (Sharpe). The duality of the societal rules in this world, and the rules of the loners, is the foundation that makes this film a prime example of Marxist ideology. Sharpe's argument uses *The Lobster* as a platform to discuss the politics of Greece that were unfolding around the same time of the film's release.

In terms of the application of Marxist theory, this film does more than comment on one country's social struggle. *The Lobster* utilizes its three settings to represent the struggle that is imposed upon an individual by the contradicting ideologies that come from the various communities in one's life.

Three Places

In *The Lobster*, the settings that the characters visit are quite repressive. Due to the set of rules that each location demands, these settings are as complex as the characters. There are three core settings in the film: the hotel, the city, and the woods. The hotel is a place where single people are sent to find partners. The city represents the life that couples get to enjoy together. The woods are where the loners who have escaped the hotel stay and have committed to a life of staying single.

Hotel- Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses

The first setting where David is exposed to a controlled set of societal rules is the hotel. The hotel is only enforcing the rules that are already in place in the world where David lives. The hotel has the same policies concerning companionship as does David's home where his wife leaves him. Just as the wife finds a new partner before separating with David, a majority of people in this community live comfortably within the romantic guidelines set by their

government. The major difference between the hotel and the outside world is that the hotel is designed to ensure that single people find partners. This is done through a set of regulations and, of course, the ultimatum of being turned into an animal.

The inner working of the hotel's ideological agenda is best applied to the work of the Marxist theorist, Louis Althusser. Althusser strips down the means of control that the ruling class uses into these parts: the State, Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) and the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs.) Within the hotel all of these parts can be observed. The State can be observed as the government controlled society that is always present in the film's settings. The ISAs are the means in which the State enforces their ideologies. In this case, the hotel functions as an ISA. Now, the presence of the RSAs is one that is not quite as clearly represented, because the ruling class tends to blur the line between the violent force used of the RSAs and the purposeful thought regulation of the ISAs. In the setting of the hotel the ISA focuses all of its energy on enforcing this one ideology: individuals must not be single.

The power given to the Hotel Manager fits quite nicely when studying Althusser's notion of the ISA. Althusser defines this concept quite thoroughly in his essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." Althusser starts discussing the State by saying, "The State is a 'machine' of repression which enables the ruling classes (in the nineteenth century the bourgeois class and the 'class' of big landowners) to ensure their domination over the working class" (Althusser 1289). In *The Lobster*, the world in which the whole film takes place works as the State. The enforced ideologies of the world repress those who stand in for the working class, which in the hotel are represented by the hotel guests. The Hotel Manager is the sole enforcer of this institution, and therefore, she represents the ruling class. This ruling class figure is best

applied to Althusser's idea of the state apparatus. Althusser goes into much more detail in what this term means:

This term means: not only the specialized apparatus (in the narrow sense) whose existence and necessity I have recognized in relation to the requirements of legal practice, i.e. the police, the courts, the prisons; but also the army, which (the proletariat has paid for this experience with its blood) intervenes directly as a supplementary repressive force in the last instance, when the police and its specialized auxiliary corps are 'outrun by events'; and above this ensemble, the head of State, the government and the administration (Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" 1289).

The Hotel Manager fits this role of a State Apparatus as defined by Althusser. She and her staff are a repressive force, such as the police, courts, prisons, and even the government. The motivation of the state is that of an ideological position. Crime, as it is presented in the empirical world, as opposed to the world of the film, seems to be enforced by similar entities through the justification that the crimes are harmful and deserving of punishment. That being said, in the film, it seems the issues of crime, as the audience may know it, are not addressed due to a focus on policing those who are not in a relationship.

Althusser proposes the modern application of Marx's argument on capitalist control and claims that the modern leading ISA is no longer religion, but in fact, education. Since the education system is mandatory, this is the best way to spread, what Althusser calls, "a certain amount of 'know how' wrapped in the ruling ideology" (1296). Just as schools teach "good behavior," the hotel in *The Lobster* teaches single adults why it is important to have a partner. The government in this world (the State) implements the hotel (the ISA) to ensure a reproduction of the ruling class's ideology. The Hotel Manager makes the rules of this establishment very

clear. Early on in David's arrival, it is made clear to him that two is better than one. After he first meets with the Hotel Manager, David is forced to wear a mechanism attached to his belt that holds one of his hands behind his back. He is forced to do this for one whole day, making it difficult to do everyday tasks. This is a preliminary action to express to the newcomers what is expected of them and the importance that the establishment presses on finding a partner. One of the more interesting parts about this punishment, or restriction, placed on these people, is not the ridiculous act itself, but rather the characters' reactions to having their hands bound behind their back. David maintains the same emotionless demeanor through all of the hotel's activities. This submission is David's acknowledged consent to follow these rules. Even if David wanted to ignore the point that the staff is making by binding his hand, other limitations all over the facility enforce the importance of finding a partner. For example, single guests can only play sports that require one player, such as golf and squash. Tennis and volleyball are only designated for couples. Everywhere David turns, the hotel is forcing him to think in terms of finding a partner.

The hotel's ideology is also taught to the hotel guests through propagandist performances. One of these performances is practiced by the guests. The various guests attend dances, in which they are encouraged to mingle with others. This time, and other down time, is to be spent flirting with each other and attempting to find a love connection. The second type of performance is done by the hotel's staff. The guests attend mandatory classes that teach what could go wrong if one stays single. One class has three hotel employees demonstrating various scenarios in which a partner would be useful. The first scenario involves a man sitting at a dinner table alone eating. Shortly after he pretends to choke on his food and die. This is then followed up with the same actor eating in the same way, except a woman is at a table with him. This time when he chokes, the girl comes around and practices the Heimlich maneuver on him, saving his

life. The second scenario the staff plays out involves a woman walking alone when a man grabs her and pretends to rape her. This scene is followed up with the same actor and actress assuming their positions except the woman has a partner and when the attacker sees the partner, he does not pursue her. These classes are quite deceptive, because they teach that being in couples is the only way to ward off danger, which simply is not true. The guests may or may not agree with the messages, but the point that the ruling class makes in these sessions is to consistently push the thought that being single is wrong.

One of the more disturbing ways that this is enforced is the strict no masturbating policy at the hotel. One character is caught masturbating and as a punishment his hand is burned in a toaster. He admits that he was masturbating to a photograph of a topless woman riding a horse. To this, the Hotel Manager replies, “If I were in your shoes, I would not be ogling the naked woman but the horse. I’m sure that horse was once a weak and cowardly man just like you” (27:49-27:56). This punishment is where one can observe how easily the ruling class can turn their ideological enforcement to a repressive one. Althusser states the following about ISAs and RSAs: “What distinguishes the ISAs from the [RSAs] is the following basic difference: the Repressive State Apparatus functions ‘by violence,’ whereas the Ideological State Apparatuses *function by ideology*” (Althusser 1292). The focus of burning this man’s hand is to continue the repetitious teaching while adding violence. Hurting the man for masturbating is a repressive act. It uses violence, but the act is also ideological, because it is ultimately meant to teach the man that the only sexual pleasure he should have is from a monogamous partner. If the “no masturbating” policy was not drastic enough, the guests are also regularly teased through sexual stimulation. The Maid, played by Ariane Lebed, regularly visits David where she makes him lower his pants, lie on his back with his legs hanging over the bed, and rubs her rear against his

genitals to arouse him. Before he can orgasm, she quits. Both, the no masturbating policy and the sexual teasing are done to encourage the guests to find a partner quickly if not just to have a sexual release.

This intense enforcement of the ideology that one must not be alone is hammered into the guests constantly, to the point where the guests practice their own ideology. Althusser would agree that the hotel guests, which function as the working class, follow the rules of the hotel not only out of fear of punishment, but also out of wanting to find a partner. This want that the characters have, proves that they have consented to believing the ideology being forced upon them. The ruling class can only hope that their regulation of the working class will lead to the working class regulating one another. One rule that is not forced by the hotel management, but is an ideology enforced by the guests themselves, is that couples should be made if each individual has the same defining trait. David's defining trait is that he is nearsighted. David has two friends, Limping Man and Lising Man, whose traits are directly stated in their names. While at the hotel, these three have several conversations concerning the ideologies of the hotel and their anticipated futures. These involve being happily coupled up with someone of a similar trait as themselves. There are a few women that the three friends flirt with who are credited as Heartless Woman who is hateful and apathetic to everything, Biscuit Woman who is always eating biscuits, Nosebleed Woman who gets chronic nosebleeds, and Nosebleed Woman's Best Friend who has beautiful blonde hair.

Two of the characters, David and Limping Man, decide to fake their defining traits to find a partner. With their days running out, fear of becoming an animal, turns them to some fairly desperate acts. David fakes being apathetic to pair up with the Heartless Woman, and Limping Man fakes having frequent nosebleeds to pair up with Nosebleed Woman. Things go fairly well

for David and his partner until she suspects he is lying and tests his apathy, which ends in his brother's demise. As far as any of the guests are concerned, it is completely normal to begin a relationship based on one defining trait. In fact, the characters even contribute their own regulation on one another by only picking partners who they share a defining trait with. This can be seen when the Heartless Woman goes to tell the Hotel Manager of David's fraud. Almost all of the hotel guests desperately want to be in a relationship, but despite the obscure punishment, they still hold to the ideology of the defining trait.

Althusser's work on the control of the State is merely an observation of the way a ruling class regulates the reproduction of the working class. In *The Lobster*, the hotel is a setting designed to enforce the coupling of pairs for singles who could not find a match in the outside world. This establishment is the second chance to follow the law. The ISAs that are used through the hotel ensure the working class's understanding of what is expected from them. Fear and violence, through various punishments, fuel this as well. Through Althusser, it is evident that the hotel represents the struggles of the ruling class and the working class. With this application, Antonio Gramsci can then be applied through his work on hegemony to expand how ideology is used in the other settings. `

City- Hegemony

The city closest to the hotel is the setting that the characters visit the least, and this makes one even more curious to what extent hegemony's function in the world surrounding the hotel and the woods. In *The Lobster*, it is quite noticeable that the many rules presented are regulated by certain figures, such as the Hotel Manager and the Loner Leader. These leaders are an extension of the State. Moving further in this discussion of ideology, Antonio Gramsci broadens the understanding on how a ruling class designs structures with rules for the working class. In

Chris Barker's book, "Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice," there is a chapter concerning the many ways ideology has been observed by theorists, and Antonio Gramsci is one of the most noted theorists Barker's chapter. In this text, Gramsci is mentioned for his work on hegemony, Barker says, "For Gramsci, hegemony implies a situation where a 'historical bloc' of ruling class factions exercise social authority and leadership over the subordinate classes through a combination of force and, more importantly, consent" (59). Gramsci's idea of hegemony aligns with the previously discussed ideas of Marxist ideology as it pertains to Marx and Althusser.

Gramsci states that "the function of 'hegemony'" which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of "direct domination" or command exercised through the State and 'judicial' government" (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* 145). There is a scene after David has already entered the loners, where the Loner Leader takes a small group including David and the Nearsighted Woman to the city to get supplies. While they are at a mall, David witnesses a security guard interrogating a woman without a partner in sight. The officer looks at her shoes and fingernails, and verbally expresses that the woman has no dirt in either of those areas. The audience knows that this helps rule her out of being a loner, because she does not appear to have left the woods anytime recently. After the woman is let go, because she proves her husband is on a business trip, the officer approaches David who appears to be alone. The security guard asks him for his certification to show he is in a relationship. Briefly after this encounter starts, the Nearsighted Woman comes and convinces the guard that she and David are in a relationship. The entire mall scene seems set in reality, at first. In the background of every shot, all of the shoppers are in couples. It is assumed that couples do everything together to the point that business trips or even shopping in different stores seems to be a rarity. These security guards monitoring the shoppers also work in place as a state apparatus, because they are

enforcing the rules. Another scene that takes place in the city is at the Loner Leader's parents' house. Loner Leader's parents are an ideal couple. They practice and play guitar together. They even want the loners to stay the night, but the Loner Leader forbids this to continue the facade to her parents that she is in a relationship.

The Woods- Counter-Hegemony

In *The Lobster* when the hotel guests no longer want to follow the hotel's rules, they often escape to the woods. The loners in the woods become a great example of another Gramscian idea known as counter-hegemony. In Walter Adamson's book, *Hegemony and Revolution*, Adamson discusses that Gramsci's solution to hegemony is the idea of counter-hegemony. Adamson states, "implicit in Gramsci's conception of an autonomous political party as the centerpiece of an emerging counter-hegemony is a particular conception of the relation between state and civil society" (Adamson 215). In *The Lobster* many characters gather together in the woods free from having to find a partner in a certain amount of time. Newcomers may not realize that the rebels in the woods have, in fact, established a society comparable to the hotel. Gramsci would identify the formation of this group as an act of counter-hegemony. Adamson continues on with this idea, "On the one hand, civil society must somehow be distinguishable from the State so that it can be independently conquered; otherwise the tactic of creating an alternative hegemony would make little sense" (Adamson 215). The Loner Leader establishes her authority through the focus of opposing romantic partnership by means of strict rules that prevent her followers from dating one another.

Life as a loner becomes problematic when the Loner Leader turns out to be as much an authoritarian as the Hotel Manager. David finds out that the loners have just as many rules as the hotel, which start when he first meets the Loner Leader, and she says, "you can be a loner until

the day you die. There is no time limit” (58:24). This rule directly opposes the hotel’s limit of forty-five days. All of the Loner Leader’s rules directly combat the rules in the hotel. They involve no flirting or the person who commits the act will have their lips slashed with a razor, which they call the red kiss. The Nearsighted Woman mentions the punishment she is most afraid of is referred to as the red intercourse. The loners are not allowed to have sex, flirt, kiss, or even dance together. The Loner Leader even has each of her followers dig their own grave in the woods as a way of swearing their loyalty to her cause. Just like the punishments in the hotel, the Loner Leader regulates how the loners follow her strict beliefs on staying single. This encourages the people to listen to their new leader, but one problem occurs. These individuals have all gathered together, but they do not necessarily hold the same individual belief systems. Joining the loners is the only option outside of the hotel and living in the city. This counter-hegemony seems very strong in multiple instances, but it is doomed to fail and makes little to no progress in expanding their beliefs and issues with the society they are from. Adamson has something to say about this as well:

A more plausible explanation emerges when one recognizes that the two senses of hegemony -- its opposition to domination and its opposition to the economic-corporative -- correspond to two possible images of the state/society relation. To the extent that Gramsci was thinking of hegemony as a supersession of the economic-corporative, he was thinking of an isolated civil society and of the state as an object to be gained by a rising class; he could thus slip easily into referring to political society as “the state proper.” To the extent, however, that he was thinking of hegemony in contrast to domination, he had in mind how existing bourgeois states actually function, viz., as linkages of political and civil society (Adamson 217).

As described in this passage, the hotel functions more as the State and the woods function as a society. The problems the states will inhibit counter hegemony from being successful, are what inhibit the loners from being successful. They do not communicate with or even try to impact the world around them. Instead they have created another even more tyrannical society. It seems that the idea of revolution is to obtain freedoms that are being withheld from the individual. In this case only the Loner Leader is obtaining a version of freedom that is strictly based on her preferences. Socialism may seem like a means best suited for individual lifestyles in theory, but it becomes so easy for a party to establish dominance over the working class and manipulate them. It seems discouraging and impossible to escape capitalist control.

The Loner Leader's society of loners is one act of revolution against the powers that be. However, the loners are led in a storming of the hotel where the Loner Leader aims to humiliate the Hotel Manager. Gramsci mentions this idea of countering an idea through the example of those who pose as anti-Machiavellian to fight the ideas of Machiavelli. Gramsci concludes that, "in actual fact, one immediate result is achieved, in that the unity based on traditional ideology is broken; until this happens, it is impossible for the new forces to arrive at a consciousness of their own independent personality" (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* 335). This is perfectly seen in the opposition of the woods and the hotel. When the loners storm the hotel, two missions are accomplished. The first is that David goes to the yacht where Limping Man and Nosebleed Woman are staying, and David tells Nosebleed Woman that her partner has been lying about his nosebleeds. The second is that the Loner Leader goes to the hotel room where the Hotel Manager and her partner are staying. The Loner Leader asks the partner how much he loves the Hotel Manager, and after a series of questions he admits he would prefer to be alone. The Loner Leader hands him a gun and tells him to shoot his wife. With no hesitation the Hotel Manager's partner

does as he is told. When he pulls the trigger, he discovers that the gun is unloaded. This proves that no one with any individual interest will be completely satisfied under either ruling, because they are both focused on keeping the working class from doing certain things defined by ideology. A counter-hegemony is well exemplified by Loner Leader, but for individuals like David, who want their own individual way of finding a partner, there is no vacancy.

Conclusion

The Marxist concept of ideology through the works of Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci apply well to Lanthimos's *The Lobster*. Lanthimos is well known for crafting worlds that are reflective of the real world which allows for an analysis of empirical concepts. In *The Lobster*, relationships are a key focus. Since this film contains an absurdist setting, the audience gets to view the pressures of dating and the burden of loneliness in a way that is as familiar as it is bizarre. The way in which relationships are enforced allows for the perfect application of Marxist Ideology. Marx's writing on ideology offers a solid framework for observing how the ruling class controls societies. Gramsci expands on this by proposing revolution and a deconstruction of the oppressive ruling class, and Althusser places the ruling class's regulations into categories of ideological control and control through fear. Just as Gramsci and Althusser expand on one's understanding of class division in a capitalist society, Lanthimos's *The Lobster* offers a precise representation of how the ruling class manipulates the working class.

When discussing both Gramsci and Althusser, the idea of these ideologies being followed, consensually, is a common thread. In a capitalist system, the ruling class has way more power than just resources. This class even has the power to control how the working class thinks. With that being displayed, it is clearly shown that David becomes the eyes in which the audience views both the hegemony of the society and the authoritarian rulings of both the hotel and the

woods. Rules are constantly being stated in both of these settings and punishments are viciously handed out to those who stray from these mandates. This can be easily translated to the Marxist notion of ideology through the philosophies of Althusser and Gramsci. This makes one question how many original ideas they actually have. If the ruling class has as much control as they do in *The Lobster*, in what ways are people in reality being unknowingly manipulated? Another question that comes to mind is how one might break from this hegemony. Even Gramsci's solution was flawed as it seemed to just duplicate the authoritarian society. There is still a lot more research that needs to be done on ideology if there is to be a solution to the manipulative nature of capitalism. Even the ideology of abusing power is embedded in our minds. Ideology may be the answer to many of our society's problems.

Analyzing *The Lobster*, and other films of this nature, keeps a conscious mind on the workings of hegemony. This analysis of *The Lobster's* settings as ISAs lays a foundation for the revolutionist's journey in the capitalist world. In Jeff VanderMeer's *Annihilation*, the biologist, just like David, must manage her own individual desires while interacting in two different settings that threaten her through the use and understanding of ideology.

Chapter 3

Sprouting Forth the *Annihilation* of Ideological Hegemonies

While David is seemingly angered by the ideological control in the settings he inhabits, he is still quite complacent to the ruling class's demand of his actions. Revolution is discussed in *The Lobster* through the implied backstory of the Loner Leader and her pack of loners who live in the woods. This act of rebellion, however, is not discussed in length or shown in any particular scene. Jeff VanderMeer takes this idea of revolt and mixes it into the Weird genre. Through *Annihilation*, the reader can view the steps one must commit to, internally, to successfully become a revolutionary.

About the Writer

The novelist Jeff VanderMeer has received critical acclaim in the past decade, due to the popularity of his novel *Annihilation* and the significance his writing has in the New Weird genre (Rothman). New Weird describes the way VanderMeer deviates from traditional storytelling scenarios to absurd predicaments that explore the realm of impossibility. The following are several books that exemplify VanderMeer's New Weird style: *Shriek: An Afterword*, *Finch*, *Borne*, and *The Southern Reach Trilogy*. VanderMeer's 2014 book, *Annihilation*, and the first book from *The Southern Reach Trilogy*, exhibits revolution in a way that transcends basic application of Marxist ideology.

VanderMeer is primarily considered a science fiction writer. This classification seems suited by the way his stories are inspired by elements of nature. Since *Annihilation's* central setting, Area X, is an ecological phenomenon, it is interesting to learn VanderMeer's thought process when developing this story. With biology and ecology at the center of this novel's

thematic crux, it is not surprising that VanderMeer was inspired by the science of climate change. VanderMeer stated the following in a video recorded by *The Atlantic*:

The setting of *Annihilation* is the hiking trail I do at St. Marks, with uncanny elements thrown in. The Gulf Oil Spill was a pivotal part of coming up with Area X, because while it was going on, we really didn't know if it would ever end. Some experts were saying there might be oil still spilling twenty years from now. It was a constant spillage in your head. (00:33- 00:58)

VanderMeer's concern regarding the impact that the oil spill may have on his favorite hiking trail in Florida presents two interesting ideas that fuel *Annihilation*. One is the pristine state that Area X becomes, reversing the damage inflicted by the human race. The second is the idea of the unknown enemy. Both of these ideas work together to deconstruct the ways climate change impacts the natural world. VanderMeer expands on this notion of the unknown enemy through the various uncanny discoveries made by the twelfth expedition.

Jeff VanderMeer has obtained the title of a New Weird writer. This has to do with his attraction to strange plot scenarios. He has also been the editor for two short fiction anthologies: *The Weird* and *The New Weird*. In Joshua Rothman's essay for *The New Yorker*, titled "The Weird Thoreau," Rothman briefly discusses the classification of what makes VanderMeer's writing weird. Rothman describes the plot of one of VanderMeer's earlier books, *Finch*, to explain how weird relates to VanderMeer's writing. In *Finch*, "mushroom people ("gray caps") are people-shaped, and they can seem like characters in an ordinary detective novel" (Rothman). What defines VanderMeer's writing as weird, in the case of this novel, is the invention of the gray caps. These characters are biologically mushrooms, so their obscure features subvert the

audience's expectations of reading a detective novel. In *Annihilation* Area X becomes the key source of weird elements as the characters discover more of the location.

Text Summary

Annihilation begins with a description of the setting known as Area X. Inside Area X, a tower and a lighthouse are separated by acres of land varying from different biomes, such as: a forest, a marsh, a swamp, and an ocean shore. The narrator states that she is a collaborator in the twelfth expedition to explore the mysterious nature of Area X. The agency that employs this expedition is known as the Southern Reach. The expedition consists of all women with experience in four specific fields: a biologist, a surveyor, an anthropologist, and a psychologist. The narrator reveals herself to be the biologist while also expressing that her interest in joining the mission has solely to do with her desire to research the biological phenomenon of Area X.

The Southern Reach dictates every aspect of the expedition. When sending crews to research this otherworldly habitat, the Southern Reach institutes a long list of strict rules for the crews to follow. Some of these rules are for pure manipulation and control over the crews while also functioning to express how little the Southern Reach knows about the dangers of Area X, "when Area X first appeared, there was vagueness and confusion, and it is still true that out in the world not many people know it exists" (VanderMeer 94). For example, the crew members carry black boxes that are supposed to flash red when danger is near. For multiple reasons, including that several of the crew's missions ended in psychological breakdowns of suicide and murder, the Southern Reach makes ideological precautions in the training for their expeditions. The desperation for the Southern Reach to gain control causes the company to resort to many kinds of conditioning, which is mainly shown in the hypnosis of the individuals going into Area

X. While the mysteries of Area X make the Southern Reach feel out of control, they are enough to make the biologist curious to join the twelfth expedition.

Once the team is in Area X, they start to notice elements of the uncanny when they arrive at the tower. The biologist feels confirmed in her notion of the structure being a tower when they notice a staircase inside leading downward. Vines line the walls in writing that say, "*where lies the strangling fruit that came from the hand of the sinner I shall bring forth the seeds of the dead to share the worms that...*" (VanderMeer 23). A creature known as the crawler appears to have written this. The biologist leans in to get a better look at the writing, and the spores burst from the vines onto her face. She decides to not tell anyone on the expedition about the spores until she can better assess the side effects. Once she leaves the tower, the psychologist greets them by saying, "*paralysis is not a cogent analysis*" (VanderMeer 27). This phrase sends the other members of the expedition into a hypnotic state, and the biologist realizes that the spores have made her immune to the psychologist's hypnosis.

The following day, the biologist wakes up to find that only the surveyor is left in the camp. The surveyor and the biologist travel back to the tower to see if they can find out the location of the psychologist and the anthropologist. The biologist sees the crawler on the staircase still writing the same phrases repeatedly. The sight of this causes the biologist to think back to when she was a kid and spent most of her time in the backyard observing the wildlife that inhabited her pool. This was her escape from her parents who fought in the house. From an early age the biologist used her love of wildlife to isolate herself from the rest of the world. Her introverted personality is further expanded on when she discusses her relationship with her late husband. Her husband was a part of the expedition before her, and everyone in the eleventh expedition died. However, sometime after the news of his death, her husband reappears at her

house. The husband is not quite himself and has fractured memories of his past. The husband's body eventually dies six months after his return. The biologist reveals that before her husband's expedition into Area X they were having issues in their relationship. This mainly stems from her husband being an extrovert. He likes to go to events and mingle with others while the biologist is content on taking walks without her husband. On these walks she explores various trails and observes the wildlife.

After the biologist reveals these parts of her past, she and the surveyor realize that the psychologist left them in the night. When they walk back to the tower, to see if the rest of their team is there, they find the anthropologist dead with her black box laying beside her, crushed. The biologist and the surveyor head back to camp to reassess their mission. The surveyor notices that all of their equipment and supplies are old and worn down, sending the message that the Southern Reach is lying about how many expeditions they have sent into Area X. At this point, the biologist decides to travel to the lighthouse alone. At the lighthouse she finds a stack of journals lying on the ground in the upstairs room. The psychologist interrupts her discovery of the journals. The biologist has an oppositional relationship with the psychologist which is further revealed in the therapy sessions they had together during their preparation for the expedition. After the psychologist gets frustrated with the biologist's rebellious remarks, the psychologist screams the word, "annihilation." In this moment, the psychologist learns that the biologist is no longer susceptible to hypnotism, because this phrase should have made her induce suicide. It is revealed that the psychologist is the director of the Southern Reach and has planted herself into the twelfth expedition to monitor the crew. The psychologist tells the biologist that she could see her coming from far away, because she is glowing. The biologist interrogates the psychologist, but only learns very little information. The psychologist admits two important pieces of

information: she killed the anthropologist and black boxes serve no other function than to keep the crew members calm. The biologist learns to what extent the Southern Reach has been keeping secrets about the exploration of Area X. The psychologist dies shortly after this conversation from an injury she gained while jumping from the top of the lighthouse avoiding an attack from the crawler, just before the biologist arrived. After the psychologist's death the biologist is ambushed by the surveyor, and the biologist shoots and kills her.

The biologist reads her husband's journal and learns that he dedicated his entries to her. The biologist takes the journal and walks down the staircase where she encounters the crawler. This encounter causes her to have a seizure-like experience that almost kills her. The crawler is then compared to a colossal starfish that the biologist discovered on one of her nightly walks without her husband. The biologist's passion for the discovery of life forms allows her fear of the creature to subside. After the encounter with the crawler, the biologist travels to the shore in search of whatever is left of her husband inside the realm of Area X.

Feminism and Marxism

Annihilation is written from the perspective of the biologist, who identifies as a woman, and the crew she enters Area X with are all women. VanderMeer gives the biologist traits that are often associated with masculinity, such as rebellious behavior, a lack of need for companionship, and the desire to work alone. There is certainly a place for the application of feminist-Marxist theory to this novel. The director of the Southern Reach (the psychologist) and the biologist feud against one another through a battle of ideologies in the hectic world of Area X. Frigga Haug writes about the significance that feminist theory has in Marxism in her article, "Marxism-Feminism." Haug argues that ideals feminism fights for works, in of itself, as a Marxist revolutionary act. Feminism is applied to Marxism, in this article, the same way that

ecothory is applied to Marxism in Lance Newman's article. Haug states that one should view, "gender relations as relations of production" (Haug 257). She then follows this by addressing one of Marx and Engel's positions that, "male domination over the female gender constitutes the first instance of historical class relations" (Haug 257). The separation of gender is compared to that of class division, and Haug even discusses class division in the home setting with the unequal expectations that divide the husband and the wife figures in this setting. Even though *Annihilation* empowers the female characters, the application of feminist-Marxism does not quite line up with the argument of revolution being applied to the biologist. This argument is centered on the ideological battle between the natural world and the corporate world. *Annihilation* only mentions a handful of male characters, and in this novel, alone, there is no direct revolution against the patriarchy.

Literature Review

Much of the literary analysis written over *Annihilation* is centered around ecocriticism. This seems to be an obvious application as VanderMeer, himself, has claimed how important an influence climate change was to his writing of *Annihilation*. Siobhan Carroll discusses the uncanny elements in VanderMeer's novel, and how these elements define his place in the New Weird Genre. Joshua Rothman's *The New Yorker* article discusses the use of Area X as a hyperobject through the works of Timothy Morton. Finola Anne Pendergast continues the conversation with Morton's hyperobject through the application of nonhumans in *Annihilation*. All of these authors seem to be having a collaborative discourse with one another, concerning ecothory in *Annihilation*, through their individual works.

In Siobhan Carroll "The Ecological Uncanny: On the 'Southern Reach' Trilogy," Carroll expresses the impact that the elements of Area X have on the characters in the novel. Carroll

states that *Annihilation* “is preoccupied with the way that external environments and beings manipulate our internal selves” (Carroll). The article argues that the elements in Area X help express larger ideas about ecology being discussed in the novel. Carroll also cites Timothy Morton’s “The Ecological Uncanny” as one of the key works in ecocriticism for this application. Through the mention of this work, Area X furthers the application of climate change through Sigmund Freud’s concept of the uncanny. Freud defines the uncanny as a deep psychological fear that causes one to feel unsettled, and Carroll uses the concept of ghosts and doppelgangers as examples. Carroll’s article helps set a basic framework for how ecotheory applies to *Annihilation*.

Joshua Rothman’s article, “The Weird Thoreau,” uses Timothy Morton’s concept of the hyperobject to expand the application of ecocriticism to *Annihilation*. Rothman explains Morton’s hyperobjects as concepts whose functions work at a much larger scale. In the case of VanderMeer, climate change is the key hyperobject used during his writing process. Rothman states that “Area X is a hyperobject; so, by extension, is nature itself” (Rothman). Nature works as a hyperobject, because it is a concept that is difficult to understand as a singular image. Hyperobjects, therefore, can be concerning when they start to change, because of their vast presence.

For Finola Anne Pendergast, in her article, “Revising Nonhuman Ethics in Jeff VanderMeer’s *Annihilation*,” the idea of the hyperobject is taken a step further with how nonhumans are viewed in *Annihilation*. Pendergast also uses Morton’s hyperobjects in this article’s argument. Area X’s abilities are unknown to the characters in the novel, and so are the dangers it could possess. This makes Area X’s wildlife a lot more interesting in the idea of their true potential. In the novel the biologist has a passion for the animals and views them in a

humane way. Pendergast discusses that “leading theorists of the nonhuman have themselves suggested that their arguments ought to instill particular ethical attitudes and practices in their readers” (Pendergast 340). Pendergast’s statement directly aligns with how VanderMeer wants his readers to interact with his novel.

The peer-reviewed articles written over *Annihilation* are consistent in their application of Morton’s ecocriticism, and the attention to VanderMeer’s work as a New Weird writer. The settings of *Annihilation* are metaphoric hyperobjects put in place to help the reader understand a greater point involving the natural world. Area X contains animals, plants, and ecosystems that combat the logic of the Southern Reach and the outside world. The settings in *Annihilation* provide ideological guidelines for the biologist to analyze and eventually influence her revolt from the Southern Reach’s control.

Places

The Southern Reach and Area X are the two settings in this novel that enforce rules of an ideological nature. The Southern Reach functions as a capitalist company that manipulates its employees through strict policies. The expedition members are put through intense training to groom them for the Southern Reach’s use. On the contrary, Area X seems to function on a logic that is foreign to capitalism or any society organized by humans. The biologist seeks the possibility of freedom, from her capitalist overlords, in the nature-based ideologies of the alien Area X. It is within herself that the biologist manages to let her individualism guide her through these two settings.

Southern Reach

In *Annihilation* the Southern Reach’s control is so powerful that its presence is apparent even outside of the walls of the company’s building. The setting of the Southern Reach allows

for a discourse of class struggle based on the ideological control that the Southern Reach uses on the crew members before they are allowed to explore Area X. The twelfth expedition gives into this manipulation by agreeing to work democratically through their differences as advised by their training from the Southern Reach. Because the Southern Reach is a private institution that uses rules to regulate their employees, Louis Althusser would argue that the ideological control of the state is the key to understanding the function of a capitalist society. The biologist states that their training involved information being shared through mysterious means. To keep the crews calm, the Southern Reach informs them of the fatal nature the expedition may have, “experience told our supervisors that few, if any of us, would be coming back” (VanderMeer 95). Even if the crew members do not personally believe in being casualties for this institution's personal gain, some personal desire has made them choose to participate in this mission.

In *Annihilation* the crew must follow a strict set of rules due to the mysterious nature of Area X, supposedly to avoid danger. The following are rules given to the twelfth expedition: they are to eat off the land and may carry certain canned goods, watches and compasses are forbidden, all technology is forbidden (including cell phones), they are required to wear the black boxes, and the guns issued to them are to remain locked in a designated box if not being used (VanderMeer 4). The Southern Reach functions as what Marx classifies as the State, and Althusser classifies as an Ideological State Apparatus. In “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Althusser clarifies that what he refers to as the State Apparatus is indeed Marx's State, which include the following institution as examples: the police, the courts, the prisons, the military and the head of the state, and the administration and the government (Althusser 1290). The administration at the Southern Reach does its best to ensure the reproduction of their core values. Therefore the Southern Reach works as a State Apparatus, but more specifically an ISA.

Since Althusser observes the education system as the new leading ISA, he rhetorically inquires, “What do children learn at school?” (Althusser 1287). School is not as focused on teaching subject-related curriculum as much as it is following the rules or what Althusser refers to as ‘know how’. Althusser makes an observation in the importance rule following has in the ruling class’s agenda:

But besides these techniques and knowledges, and in learning them, children at school also learn the ‘rules’ of good behaviour, i.e. the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labour, according to the job he is ‘destined’ for: rules of morality, civic and professional conscience, which actually means rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of the order established by class domination. They also learn to ‘speak proper French’, to ‘handle’ the workers correctly, i.e. actually (for the future capitalists and their servants) to ‘order them about’ properly, i.e. (ideally) to ‘speak to them’ in the right way, etc.. (Althusser 1287)

This work environment that Althusser is describing, and the emphasis on molding the youth into having capitalist behaviors is one of the main points that Marxism helps reveal. When Althusser mentions the teaching of “proper French” and “handling workers,” it aligns with the way in which the twelfth expedition is trained. Althusser’s writing and the function of the Southern Reach both reveal a mask that is applied to keep the reproductive capitalistic nature hidden. The Southern Reach not only has wages, state power and the ideological state apparatus on its side, but it also has its working class self-regulating each other. One of the more interesting examples of rule-following that happens in *Annihilation* is the rule that the biologist faithfully follows by not saying any of the member’s names, “we were strongly discouraged from using names: We

were meant to be focused on our purpose, and ‘anything personal should be left behind.’” (VanderMeer 9).

Self-regulation of the crew is ensured through the placebo of the black boxes, the mandatory journal writing, and the planting of the Southern Reach’s director as the leader of the twelfth expedition. It is believed that the reason for technology being forbidden was that it would not work in Area X, or the environment might be negatively affected by the technology. During the biologist’s interrogation of the psychologist, she asks her, “what do the black boxes measure?” and the psychologist reveals a quite shocking answer, which is, “Nothing. They don’t measure anything. It’s just a psychological ploy to keep the expedition calm; no red light, no danger” (VanderMeer 129). The placebo effect put in place with the black boxes is a lie to keep the working crew calm and not to be expecting of the dangers that surround them. Each member of the crew is also required to carry a journal to record any changes in their mental and physical states. The biologist clarifies that they were not allowed to share what they wrote, because “too much shared information could skew our observations” (VanderMeer 8). On the subject of sharing information, Marx says, “The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life” (Marx “The German Ideology” 659). The best way for these ideas to produce is through the “mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc., of a people” (Marx 660). Marx’s view on the manipulation of information from the ruling class to the working class is perfectly displayed by the actions of the psychologist. When it is revealed that the psychologist is the leader of the Southern Reach who has been planted in the crew, the Southern Reach’s true intentions become revealed. The Southern Reach does not want their crew members getting too personal with one another,

because they do not want them banding together against the Southern Reach's purpose.

Therefore, when hypnosis no longer works on the biologist she already starts to revolt against her superiors. The biologist has been transformed in a way that ideological suggestion, whether through hypnosis or not, no longer affects her mentality. Unfortunately for the biologist, it is not enough to only have the knowledge that they are being hypnotized. When she tries to express her immunity to the surveyor, the surveyor refuses to believe the biologist when she tells her that she has become immune to the hypnosis.

The journals, and other implemented rules used to enforce separated thoughts of the crew members has to do with control, and mainly control from the secretly placed psychologist. The crew is lied to about almost every single aspect of their training and understanding of Area X. The biologist is constantly struggling with the control of her superiors based on her own internal logic of the situation. VanderMeer portrays this through the novel being written as the biologist's journal. This allows the internal conflicts to be more relatable, because the idea of any working class individual feeling manipulated by their place of work is a universal feeling. For the biologist, it is a struggle to feel like an individual in this capitalist way of life. The biologist even confronts the psychologist about the Southern Reach's agenda by asking the psychologist, "what did you hide from us?" The psychologist replies with, "too general a question" (VanderMeer 129). This applies to Marxism in that the ruling class is deeply rooted in the control of the working class. Gramsci expands on this by discussing the ruling class's historical manipulation of social ideologies, "to the extent that ideologies are historically necessary they have a validity which is "psychological"; they "organise" human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc." (Gramsci, "The Concept of Ideology" 707). The ruling class's manipulation is too complicated to explain all of the details in

which they lie to the working class to maintain their reproduction. The Southern Reach as a repressive State works as a great contrast to the uncanny world of Area X and the ways in which the biologist is changed in this setting.

Area X

The mysteries that lie in the setting of Area X represent the struggle between the ecological thought and capitalist hegemony. Timothy Morton's essay, "The Ecological Thought," is an observation of the rhetoric behind the preservation of nature and the actions being taken to reverse the Earth's current state. Morton states, "modern economic structures have drastically affected the environment. Yet they have had an equally damaging effect on thinking itself" (2623). VanderMeer mentions his own personal conflict with the subject, in his interview with *The Atlantic* when he describes the distress of his favorite hiking trail being damaged by the Gulf Oil Spill, as "a constant drip in your head" (1:01). What Morton and VanderMeer are both expressing in their works is that the reversal of climate change is both an ideological and a physical problem. The only way to properly fight the enemy of nature is to rewire an understanding of human desires and the way societies could run with the thought of nature's wellbeing. Morton collides ecocriticism with Marxism when he says this about ecological thought, "it's more than just global warming, it has to do with capitalism and what might exist after capitalism" (2621). Ecocriticism works nicely for the Marxist concept of revolution, and in this same way so does the biologist. The biologist's fascination with the natural world, her curiosity in Area X, and her introverted nature seem to be her most useful tool in breaking away from her capitalist dilemma.

Area X's pristine state and the uncanny elements that lie therein have created a societal hierarchy that is incomprehensible to the capitalist workings of human society. For example,

when the biologist first sees the tower she says she can see it breathing. The discovery of the crawler is one major suggestion that humans are being transformed in Area X. Other suggestions of this assertion are found in the biologist's mentioning of a dolphin having human eyes and a boar having lightning in its eyes. The biologist uses these strange incidents to express that the "lighthouse was a symbol of old order" (VanderMeer 115). Returning to Rothman's article in *The New Yorker*, Rothman expands on this structure of Area X, "ecology serves as a metaphor for the networked world- a world that's too big to comprehend, too pervasive to evade, and too hypnotic to resist" (Rothman). With the biologist siding with the natural world, the novel is expressing how much industry and nature directly oppose each other. Lance Newman wrote an article titled, "Marxism and Ecocriticism," that combines the ideas of class division and the ideas of the ecologically conscious. Just as the biologist revolts against her oppressor, Newman states that, "most ecocritics see themselves as agitators for such a revolution" (Newman 3). The following expresses the importance that this type of revolution has on society:

Marxism, like ecocriticism, is, or should be, thinking in service to a politics of world emancipation. And when it focuses on the limits of human creativity, it does so, or should, in order to imagine more realistically how people can take control of their own history, of their relations with each other and nature. (Newman 14)

In Area X the Southern Reach is trying to make sense of this new world, possibly to manipulate its powers. However, the biologist fights for the preservation of this area and for the preservation of her mind against the Southern Reach's ideological control.

Siobhan Carroll discusses Area X as an enemy to the capitalist world in his essay, "The Ecological Uncanny: On the "Southern Reach" Trilogy," "Area X offers an ideological break from the existing capitalist world" (Carroll). Carroll goes deeper into an application of ecological

theory in the novel by stating this about Area X, “human action impacts natural systems, sometimes in terrifyingly unpredictable ways, but this does not translate into power over the ecology that characters are attempting to study” (Carroll). The rest of the crew confronts these struggles of manipulation from their superiors and the strange influences of the alien habitat. It is the biologist, who in her years of independent social training, has gained control of herself with the ability to manage her place in this ideological conundrum.

The article by Finola Anne Pendergast titled, “Revising Nonhuman Ethics,” asserts *Annihilation* as a work of “ecologically minded science fiction” (336). Pendergast also states that the images of horror in the novel express “disingenuous optimism about the sacrifices necessitated by acceptance of environmental ethics, while still communicating the ethical necessity of those sacrifices” (336). This is the reference of Area X as a hyper object comparable to global warming. Pendergast uses this comparison to express the placement of horror in the novel, “the horror springs from a sense that an animated nonhuman world would compromise human autonomy and value” (Pendergast 348). This idea leads to the point that “Area X’s ability to induce suicide plays on the fear that environmentalism will require us to stop valuing our individual lives and goals” (Pendergast 348). In Pendergast’s opinion, this plays into the workings of ideology in capitalism in that the novel seems to persuade readers to accept environmental ethics, because they are no more restricting than the capitalist embedded ideologies that already exist (Pendergast 349). The human to nonhuman interactions that the biologist finds comfort and pleasure in are what save her from the manipulation of the world as she knew it. However, while Area X may break down the ideologies of capitalism, the biologist may encounter an ominous future in her new environment:

Area X's material disruption of the Southern Reach's social control cannot give the biologist complete autonomy—in any system, she will be subject to powerful external influences—but it does give her enough breathing room to make an ethical choice about the system to which she would rather be subject, given the hierarchy of values each seems to enact. (Pendergast 351)

The hegemony that is displayed in *Annihilation* has been greatly discussed so far concerning the Southern Reach's control over their crews. Another Marxist idea that was expanded on in great detail by Antonio Gramsci is that of revolution.

The biologist, from quite early on in the novel, expresses her rebellious nature. During her training sessions with the psychologist, the biologist reveals that she volunteered little personal information and responded quite sarcastically to the psychologist's questions. This is just the beginning of the many ways in which the biologist's behaviors apply to Gramsci's ideas of counter-hegemony. In his essay entitled "The Revolution Against 'Capital'," Gramsci breaks down the Marxist idea of the "Capital" and the efficient mindset of the revolutionary by primarily stating that revolution is "based more on ideology than actual events" (Gramsci, "The Revolution Against the Capital"). The biologist has this awareness pretty early in her observations of the psychologist's use of hypnosis, "it was one thing to think you might be receiving hypnotic suggestion and quite another to experience it as an observer. What level of control could she exert over us" (VanderMeer 33). The biologist becomes a prime example of Gramsci's ideal revolutionary. For Gramsci, "revolutionaries will themselves create the conditions needed for a *full and complete* fulfilment of their ideal and they will do so in less time than capitalism would have." (Gramsci, "Revolution Against the Capital"). The biologist's revolt starts when the spores are released onto her.

The biologist does directly revolt against the Southern Reach, but the origins of her nature and her actions are much more complicated than just having distaste for the hegemonic control her superiors press upon her. According to Gramsci, in the essay, “The Development of the Revolution,” “the proletariat revolution is imposed not prepopsed” (Gramsci). Gramsci further expresses the ways in which the biologist can be defined as a revolutionary in his terms, by expressing his insistence on the importance of the working class as a social force:

Only the working class can save human society from the abyss of barbarity and economic collapse towards which it is pushed by the emboldened and maddened forces of the owning class, and it can do so organizing itself in a dominant class to impose its own dictatorship in the politico-industrial field” (Gramsci, “Development of the Revolution”).

For Gramsci, the individuals in the working class, must base their revolutionary process in the intimacy of their productive life in order for their revolution to be successful, rather than being empty promises and ultimately remembered as only a myth (Gramsci, “Development of the Revolution”). The biologist heeds Gramsci’s warnings with not only her own natural will, but also the power of the spores that thrived in the alien biome of Area X.

The biologist uses her introverted personality as a tool to counter her hegemonic conflict. The biologist reveals information about her childhood and her extroverted parents’ opposition to what she refers to as her “chronic introversion” (VanderMeer 45). Tade Thompson actually goes into a critical analysis of introversion, as displayed by the biologist in *Annihilation*, in his essay, “Introversion in Jeff VanderMeer’s *Annihilation*.” Thompson applies this subject perfectly to the character of the biologist, while also offering some good knowledge about the dynamics of the relationship between the introvert and the extrovert, “the introversion-extroversion factor has to do with the degree to which we are oriented inwards to the self or outwards to the world.

Extroversion corresponds to sociability and assertiveness, while introverts tend to be quiet, cautious and prone to solitude” (Thompson). As a child, the biologist began to observe her backyard pool, which lacked proper maintenance therefore developing its own ecosystem. The biologist discusses the ways she used to hide in the backyard keeping a distance from her parents, “inside the house, my parents did whatever banal, messy things people in the human world usually did, some of it loudly. But I could easily lose myself in the microworld of the pool” (VanderMeer 45). This lack of meeting her parent’s expectations for more human interaction creates a divide between the two parties. Her parents begin to worry about her so they resort to lecturing her, which she, of course, resents. The biologist also takes her parents' attempt to control her personality as an opposition. The biologist fought the hegemony of her parents successfully at a young age, because she internally managed their differences and her own personal strengths. The biologist found that studying biology gave her the ideological stimulation that she desired. This divide between her and her parents was of no worry to her, “They had their lives, and I had mine” (VanderMeer 45).

The introversion of the biologist is explored further in the novel through her relationship with her husband. Thompson continues his exploration of personality types, by saying, “it’s currently believed that introverts have higher baseline cortical activation than extroverts, leading to the latter needing more stimulation from the external world, and the former being, well, content to imagine and observe” (Thompson). He goes on to clarify that “introversion is not a lack of social skills, and extroversion isn’t an abundance of social skills” (Thompson). Her parents were not the only extroverts that she had a relationship with. Her husband was also very outgoing, but this relationship differs in that her compassion for her husband is much greater than that for her parents. There is an intimately emotionally and physical connection between the

two. The biologist reveals that her husband was a crew member for the eleventh expedition into Area X. Her husband was missing for some time in Area X and he returned completely different than the way he was before. Area X altered his brain which results in him dying of cancer very shortly after exiting Area X. The biologist states the struggle of interacting with her fractured husband, "I was trying to reclaim remnants of the man I remembered, the one who, so unlike me, was outgoing and impetuous and always wanted to be of use" (VanderMeer 57). Their attraction to each other's personality began to grow a distance between them before the husband went to Area X: "Our relationship had been thready for a while, in part because he was gregarious and I preferred solitude" (77). Their relationship in general is discussed by the biologist in quite a cold tone, "I loved him but didn't need him" (VanderMeer 156). While their relationship was important to the biologist, she expresses the happiness she got from isolation, "but fun for me was sneaking off to peer into a nearby tidal pool, to grasp the intricacies of the creatures that live there" (VanderMeer 156). This lack of interest in social interaction for the biologist does not make her antisocial or even fearful of social interaction. In fact, it seems to be the opposite. The biologist is quite comfortable in her own head. She does not rely on anyone for comfort or understanding.

Althusser writes about revolution in his essay, "Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon." In this essay, Althusser discusses the revolutionary mindset, "the whole Marxist tradition has refused to say that it is 'man' who makes history. Why? Because practically, i.e. in the facts, this expression is exploited by bourgeois ideology which uses it to fight, i.e. to kill another, true, expression, one vital for the proletariat: it is the masses who make history" (Althusser, "Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon"). History is written about the people who survive and not a concept of nature. The biologist is carving her own path, and while the forces of Area X are

consuming planet Earth slowly, she seems to be the only person who can handle dangerous transformations that the area has inflicted on previous crews, including her husband. This was possible through the biologist's revolution against her parents and society at an early age. This was possible through her fascination and compassion of the natural world and biological functions. Then finally, this was made possible by Area X, an opposing force to the capitalist society of Earth's human, and its spores which granted the biologist with the ability to see through the Southern Reach's lies of trickery. The biologist transcended the hegemony of her world, "So many lies, so little ability to face the truth. Area X broke minds, I felt, even though it hadn't yet broken mine" (VanderMeer 119).

Conclusion

Ideologies are an unstoppable force. At least historically, it seems that a ruling class will always rise to manipulate a working class for the means of production. Because of this, it seems through the biologist's actions that the best way to manage in a capitalist society is to find the set of ideologies that the individual buys into. Giving into the mysterious nature of Area X is not the only way that the biologist fights capitalism. Even though she is introverted, she chooses to have a relationship with her husband when she chooses not to have one with her parents. Ultimately she chooses to immerse herself in the wonders of nature and therefore becomes more resistant to capitalism. The biologist talks about her abilities to overcome times of difficulty, "perhaps my only real expertise, my only talent, is to endure beyond the endurable" (VanderMeer 182). All of the biologist's actions lead to her being accepted by Area X which offered her ideological freedom. The biologist's revolt proves that the individual, that is rebelling, must be primed in order to give in to their revolution. Through her isolated nature and the help of Area X, she was able to break deeper ideological issues. Towards the end of the novel it is noted, "before she

died, the psychologist said I had *changed sides*” (VanderMeer 192). Now, the biologist denies this assertion, expressing that she is not sure if there are sides, but she has changed. She transformed from a human living in a capitalist society to whatever Area X wants her to be.

Annihilation allows the reader to witness how ecology is used as an ideology in society. The Southern Reach wants to protect people from knowing what the area is capable of, even when they do not completely understand it either. Lance Newman discusses how education is most affected by this social issue, “ecocriticism, then, is a movement based in university literature departments, but one that is ambitious to reach beyond them, in order to accomplish a most serious and important goal: transformation of human relations with nature” (Newman 2). Ecocriticism is only one example of the ideological debates that happen in academia. The institution of education can work in the same hegemonic way that appears in the world of *The Lobster* and at the Southern Reach in *Annihilation*. One author, Glenn Shaheen has used his work in the prose-poem genre to fight against the hegemony of canon in literature programs and prose poetry as a genre. This is most fascinating in the way that Shaheen’s actions of writing work in the same capacity as the mere stories that Lanthimos and VanderMeer have only written.

Chapter 4

Fire the Canon! A Deconstruction of Genre with *Carnivalia*

The Lobster and *Annihilation* both tell stories of a singular character taking on the hegemony that is oppressing them. The examples of Lanthimos's David and VanderMeer's the biologist create a narrative of rebellion through the use of the characters' individualism. Many other texts discuss anti-capitalist ideals in a similar fashion. From these works one can assume the writer's own personal viewpoints. With both Lanthimos and VanderMeer, their writing process exemplifies their own headspace on certain social issues, such as romantic partnership and climate change. One problem that occurs here is the barrier between the lessons taught in the texts and the actions of the writers themselves. Glenn Shaheen is one writer, of both poetry and prose-poetry, who brings these two elements together.

Glenn Shaheen's writing applies to the Marxist theory of ideology, but more so in the actions Shaheen makes by writing rather than just the stories he tells. This application is not as simple as with *The Lobster* and *Annihilation*. David's struggles are the struggles of Marxist class division. He is not sure where he fits into his surroundings. On the other hand, the biologist is very comfortable with her own ideologies and uses this confidence to manipulate her surroundings. This internal peace is what allows her to successfully work as an agent of rebellion. The biggest obstacle that occurs when applying the Marxist theory of ideology to Shaheen is that the application is based on personal relationships to the capitalist world.

Shaheen's form makes his prose-poetry collection, *Carnivalia*, unique to this application process. Lanthimos uses absurdist scenarios and dry delivery of dialogue to show how banal class struggle has become to the working class individuals being manipulated. VanderMeer utilizes Area X as a place that defies all human understanding of how societies work. Glenn

Shaheen's *Carnivalia* creates a hybrid space to not only tell stories of the same anticapitalist viewpoint, but also to show new means of revolution through the form of prose-poetry.

Shaheen's *Carnivalia* deepens the analysis of ideology in contemporary texts. Shaheen, as a writer, shares the same problems as David with finding where he fits in both with the genre of prose-poetry and the social interactions discussed in his pieces. Prose-poetry, in the context of *Carnivalia*, is like Area X, a place yet unexplored and full of endless possibilities for revolting against the modern hegemony of genre.

About the Writer

Shaheen's poetry and prose-poetry are fairly nuanced and not as well-known as *The Lobster* or *Annihilation*. In 2011, his poetry collection, *Predatory* won the Agnes Lynch Starrett Poetry Prize and was also a finalist for the Norma Farber First Book Award (Shaheen, *Carnivalia*, "About the Author"). Shaheen's writing is classified as both poetry and prose-poetry, and the following are his published collections: *Predatory*, *Unchecked Savagery*, *Energy Corridor*, and *Carnivalia*. The collection of Shaheen's that most symbolizes a revolution in the form of a counter- hegemony, through its use of genre breaking fiction, is the 2018 prose-poetry collection, *Carinvalia*.

Since Shaheen is primarily a poet, his approach to writing is much more based on themes and emotions. Some of his prose-poems do have the appearance of traditional prose, but very much follow the rules of poetry. Shaheen commented on his writing process in a feature with the *Poetry Society of America* where he said, "I do want to bring readers closer to the poem by inserting scenes and images that create a particular emotional state" (Shaheen, *Poetry Society of America*). These scenes that Shaheen refers to have a resemblance to prose, which is the reason he makes this distinction. Shaheen's characters and conflicts are far more internal than they are

external. Shaheen does not want readers focusing on the events in his stories but more the emotional narrative the pieces are portraying as a whole.

Glenn Shaheen's writing style is best defined inside the broad perimeters in the spectrum that is poetry. His pieces are typically one to two pages long, and are centered on thematic concepts. Shaheen's prose-poems in *Carnivalia* have the aesthetic of block-shaped paragraphs. Even his poetry has this shape with line breaks in often unexpected places. While the pieces do resemble prose narratives, they more-so follow the guidelines of poetry. This can be seen in the way that Shaheen uses rhyming, internal rhyming, meter, assonance, and repetition. Shaheen also embraces techniques such as sentence fragments and run-on sentences. These techniques are often viewed as grammatical errors, but through the genre of poetry, the writer can explore themes in ways that better expresses the thematic message.

Glenn Shaheen's poetry collection *Predatory* is very similar to *Carnivalia*. There are thirty-nine poems in this collection, and they share an overarching theme. Shaheen discussed his intentions for this collection in an interview for the blog, *Jumping the Candlestick*:

It's an analysis of the way we Americans have come in the past decade to let a fear of destruction consume us, the destruction of our nation, the destruction of our society, or the destruction of love. This fear is an obvious fallacy. It's conceited to think that any of these things would be destroyed in our lifetimes (Shaheen, *Jumping the Candlestick*).

Of course there are several examples in this collection that examine this theme Shaheen is addressing, but one that stands out is a line in, "The Page on which the Spine is Broken," that states, "A cyclone is on the horizon, above/ the edge of the earth and the wind/ pushes it here. The wind that carries our seeds." (Shaheen, *Predatory* 20). Shaheen often juxtaposes destructive imagery with statements of a hopeful tone. In this poem, there is a bit of Shaheen's stylistic line

breaking, and a poem like “Space Phenomenon” starts to show Shaheen’s transition from poetry to prose-poetry. The stanzas in “Space Phenomenon” stretch out longer than traditional poetry and appear as four paragraphs instead of stanzas. The experimental uses of these devices showcase what is so unique about Glenn Shaheen’s writing. Shaheen’s *Carnivalia* is an exemplary piece of Shaheen’s skills as a writer.

Text Summary

Carnivalia is a short collection of forty-eight prose pieces which all comment on capitalism and education. Shaheen uses a unique tone that is both critical of these institutions while also concerned with how individualism is being negatively affected by the current status of these institutions. In this collection, prose-poetry can be defined as a piece that is one to two pages long and contains poetic elements concerning narrative. Yet these pieces resemble paragraphs often found in prose. Characters and plot structure are used more for an emotional purpose rather than to meet the guideline of a short story. Shaheen carries the theme of class struggle and the struggle of individualism throughout this collection. Throughout this collection, the narrator is rarely given an identity, and because of this, it seems as though one character can grow into another. Although there are 48 prose-poems in this collection, only a sorted few are important to this argument. These selected pieces can be divided into two categories: pieces that seem to have a discourse with the literary world, and pieces that comment on the education system.

Shaheen explores the ideas of product and media in a capitalist society as well. We find through these pieces that class struggle is a key motivator in the propaganda being pushed in society. Shaheen also pushes his characters by analyzing the struggles they have concerning class. The prose-poetry of *Carnivalia* contains capitalist motifs all throughout the collection that

seem to be an overarching narrative in the ways that the pieces have a discussion about capitalism with one another. How literature is viewed in the world of literary critics becomes an underlying hegemonic obstacle that Shaheen is trying to overcome. The pieces that use form to converse with the hegemony of the literary world are “The Future Suicides,” “The Group,” “The Voices,” “Carnivalia,” and “Civilization.”

In “The Future Suicides,” two characters, Terry and Jada, start a grunge band whose name is that of the piece. Their bonding begins during a meeting at a group therapy session after both of them have attempted to kill themselves. When they begin to look for a drummer, an ideology for their group begins to form in the process to gain a drummer. Not only does the flyer suggest the musical style they are looking for, but it also asks the question, “Attempted or seriously contemplated killing yourself? Call Jada and Terry!³” (Shaheen, *Carnivalia* 6). The two gain Darwa as their drummer, and shortly after this Jada commits suicide. Not too long after Jada’s death, Darwa follows suit. The story ends with Terry committing suicide. However, his motive is more out of an obligation to his friend’s commitment to this ideology rather than his emotional state. The line that The Future Suicides were, “An idea more than a people. A nation amidst the current. Stark cries in the waning light” (Shaheen, *Carnivalia* 7).

In “The Group,” the narrator is at a convention center with a group of close friends. They intend on going to a tournament for the card game, Magic: The Gathering. The group is dressed for the occasion with tattered jeans and death metal t-shirts, however they get lost in the convention center when people begin asking them if they are part of The Group. Misled by the idea that they were going to the right place, they find themselves in a religious event where the preacher is describing the horrors of a woman killed in a freak car accident. The preacher uses

³ When Shaheen uses prose, the quotation will not use /to symbolize a line break. This will be the opposite for quoting Shaheen’s poetry that do contain traditional lines and stanzas.

this example to push the idea that Jesus is omnipresent. He claims that since “Spirit in the Sky” was playing at the time of her death, Jesus was present in that woman’s life. The narrator finds themselves in a quandary when the dissonance from this particular group’s ideologies makes them feel uncomfortable, “we wanted to make fun of it, the manipulation of death, but we were stuck, we were a part of The Group now” (Shaheen, *Carnivalia* 32).

There are plenty of experimental pieces in this collection and three examples that exemplify prose-poetry’s full potential are: “The Voices,” “Carnivalia,” and “Civilization.” Shaheen’s “The Voices,” describes the horrors that seem to follow an abundance of wildfires in an unnamed community. An older lady writhes in the street preaching the end times, and the sky begins to produce harmful rain. Shaheen uses one run-on sentence after the other to spread this dread. “Dark grey clouds are pressed together over us, and streaks like red veins run between them, the whole blanket pulled from east to west, the sun hidden” (Shaheen, *Carnivalia* 62). In the eponymous piece, “Carnivalia,” there is a list of phrases that begin with the word “the” and end with a word and then a period. The narrative in this piece is hidden in the puzzle piece phrases placed in sequence. The poem, “Civilization,” does the same thing, but instead uses the word “you” at the beginning of every phrase.

The following pieces create discussions of class struggle in the education system: “Kissimmee Middle School,” “Born Again,” and “Nice Twitter.” “Kissimmee Middle School” is perhaps the most instrumental piece in the collection that exhibits the aspects of the public school classroom, and the dangers that there lie in. The narrator carries a tone of fatigue from a long day at work when he states, “My students yell at me, one throws a chair across the room. This makes them sound like the villains, but I am a bad teacher, just out of college with no

classroom experience” (Shaheen, *Carnivalia* 71). The narrator finds himself in a relationship with a coworker where he is not comfortable with her, which leads to a dislike of the woman.

In “Born Again,” a college professor has a thirty-eight year-old student who wants the literary texts in the class to be censored, because he says he is a Christian. Through his perspective, the student finds many of the details in the texts to be problematic. As a result, the student then complains to the dean. The narrator goes on to analyze the idea of public safety at the college through safety video for active shooters that all of the university's staff is required to watch. The teacher expresses his fear of active shooters, “I don’t mean to live in fear, but I always look at my students and wonder which one could do it, which one could be a live shooter” (Shaheen, *Carnivalia* 23). The teacher also dreams of his student burning the word, “God,” in his front lawn.

This same theme continues in the piece, “Nice Twitter.” The narrator begins with, “I was applying for jobs so I had to make my Twitter feed nice” (Shaheen, *Carnivalia* 11). The narrator addresses that inappropriate language is something that needs to be taken out, but more importantly he is concerned about the sharing of his political views regarding Palestine. He even mentions his struggles with his racial identity when he was a teenager, “It was a couple of months after 9/11 and none of my friends liked it when I mentioned being Arab anymore, they thought I was just trying to get pity points” (Shaheen, *Carnivalia* 12). The narrator’s history with his race affecting his social status has impacted him to reflect on whether his Twitter feed is appropriate for getting a job

To continue this discussion of education in these prose-poems, there are six pieces in the collection named after Shakespeare plays, which are: “King Lear,” “Coriolanus,” “Hamlet,” “Macbeth,” “Measure for Measure,” and “The Tempest.” These pieces are used in this argument

to project the powerful hegemony the canon has had in the education system. All of these pieces have seemingly nothing to do with the narratives portrayed in the Shakespeare plays they are named after. However, the pieces follow the same stylistic format as the pieces previously discussed.

Literature Review

At this moment there is no accessible literary criticism of Shaheen's *Carnivalia*⁴. There are several reviews of Shaheen's previous works and interviews where he discusses his first few collections and the genre of prose-poetry. With Michel Delville's book, *The American Prose Poem: Poetic Form and the Boundaries of Genre*, Delville explains the history and guidelines of prose-poetry. This book sets a framework in which to understand the potential of prose-poetry as a legitimate genre and the obstacles that writers like Shaheen have had to overcome. Shaheen explains in an interview with the prose-poetry website, *NANO Fiction* (where he was an editor), that he likes to receive submissions that follow the site's guidelines. These guidelines seem to fit perfectly into what Delville also defines as prose-poetry. In another interview with *Fly Away blogs*, Shaheen also explains the struggles that *NANO Fiction* had with the IRS for claims that they were a publisher of pornography. This claim stems from the sexual themes of the works being published. With these works, there is a clear journey being tracked of prose-poetry struggling to be appreciated. Understanding this past is the best way to predict this genre's future.

Michel Delville wrote extensively about what defines the prose-poem and the history thereof in his book, *The American Prose Poem: Poetic Form and the Boundaries of Genre*. Delville also uses many writers' works as examples of prose-poetry's historical context. The

⁴ The Summer of 2020 is when this section was written.

nineteenth century poet Charles Baudelaire is mentioned, because he was one of the first writers to publish in the genre. Delville shares Charles Baudelaire's thoughts on the, "first definition of the genre as "the miracle of a poetic prose, musical though rhythmless and rhymeless, flexible yet rugged enough to identify with the lyrical impulses of the soul, the ebbs and flows of reverie, the pangs of conscience"" (Delville 1). These pieces are poems that look like prose and prose that flows like poetry. This combination alters the reader's expectations of this literature, because they are forced to rethink their understanding of how they know literature to be.

At one time, Glenn Shaheen was an editor for the website, *NANO Fiction*. This site produces work of flash fiction, which will be referred to as prose-poetry. In an excerpt on the website titled, "Ask Our Editors: Glenn Shaheen," Shaheen is asked what type of submissions he favors, and he expresses that the pieces that follow their guidelines are the ones that he prefers. Shaheen states, "we have a form rejection that we have to use way too much that says we don't publish line breaks, stories of longer than 300 words, and on and on" (Shaheen, "Ask Our Editors"). This response is quite similar to the guidelines that Delville uses to establish the genre of prose-poetry. Shaheen goes on to discuss how some writers submit shorter parts of longer pieces so that they can get their work published. To these types of pieces, Shaheen has this thoughtful response, "some strong, yes, and some we'll proudly publish, but I'd love to see a greater percentage of standalone stories, just out of respect for the genre" (Shaheen, "Ask Our Editors"). From this interview, it is apparent that Shaheen was using his position as an editor to explore the possibility of prose-poetry through the exploration of the guideline's limitations.

In an interview with *Fly Away Blog*, Shaheen further tells of his experiences as an editor for *NANO Fiction* and the obstacles the website has had to overcome. During this interview, Shaheen is asked about *NANO Fiction* reapplying for a 501(c) 3 status to receive the benefits of

a nonprofit organization. The reason for their first rejection was that the IRS claim their website was a distributor of pornography. Shaheen responded to this statement by saying:

I feel that I should preface all of this by saying that we are reapplying for 501(c)3 status, and I, therefore, don't want to make the IRS look ridiculous, even though accusing any literary or art publication of pornography is very much ridiculous, which they may or may not have done. (Shaheen, "Interview with Editor Glenn Shaheen").

Delville discusses, in a broad sense, how prose-poetry is not taken seriously by critics. The event involving NANO Fiction and the IRS shows a much more isolated incident in which prose-poetry struggles at proving its legitimacy as a genre.

Having a basic understanding of what prose-poetry and its history help set up how *Carnivalia* battles a couple of different hegemonies in two settings. These settings are not stages for characters to play out a plot like in *The Lobster* and *Annihilation*. These settings are in the real world and are of an ideological presence.

Places

Carnivalia contains dozens of settings spanning through all of the prose-poems, and unlike *The Lobster* and *Annihilation*, the settings, concerning *Carnivalia*, that create a discourse with the manipulative ways of ideology are the literary world and the educational system. Creatively speaking, prose-poetry has had a difficult history in being taken seriously as a legitimate genre by literary critics. In this same sort of way, the institution of the canon that is used in the education system's literature programs has also developed guidelines that inhibit certain authors and genres to not be studied in schools. *Carnivalia's* prose-poems provide a counter-hegemonic approach to the limitation of both the creative space and the educational canon.

Literary World

Relating to the capitalist ideologies that are a source of conflict, Marx has stated that the point of the ruling class, as it concerns the control of the working class, is to “alter, along with their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking” (Marx, “German Ideology” 660). The characters in Shaheen pieces seem to be disturbed by their knowledge of these truths yet they fall into the cycle of working for the capitalist system that they ideologically oppose. In the last couple of decades, there has been a continual discourse in literature programs concerning the works of the canon and how fixed this system of texts has become. There seems to be no true resolve to this issue, even though many writers are consistently trying to destroy the ideologies that surround canonization and genre. Prose-poetry is one genre that has been controversial in its attempt to be viewed as a legitimate literary genre.

As a genre, prose-poetry has faced many challenges in being taken seriously as a genre. Many of Shaheen’s pieces are structured similarly to stories that are often read in literature programs. There are characters with clear conflicts that end up being resolved in one way or another. Glenn Shaheen addresses the ways in which social groups of various kinds seem to quite naturally develop ideologies and enforce them within through the apparatus of self-regulation in both “The Future Suicides” and “The Group.” Shaheen expresses, through these characters, which individuals are susceptible to making very critical decisions based on the people in their social groups that they care about greatly. Shaheen also discusses religion in “The Group” which aligns with Marx’s views on the subject. Shaheen displays two different groups in this story, both serving as zealots for their own individual causes. The narrator’s group seems to be the complete opposite of the religious group, because they have clothes that contain disturbing

imagery and play fantasy games. However, the two groups are shown to be similar due to their passion for their group and the ideologies that the group promotes.

A large portion of *Carnivalia* is inhabited by very experimental prose pieces. In “The Voices,” Shaheen ties his clauses and phrases with the repetitious “and.” This word, “and,” seems to express how worse the situation is getting as the events stack upon one another. In the collection’s eponymous piece, Shaheen uses the opposite approach by listing dozens of sentence fragments in one bulk of a paragraph. For the most part in this piece, Shaheen uses the word, “the” followed by another word. Here is the beginning of the piece for a reference, “The calendar. The omega. The glory. The glass. The content. The filth. The mouse. The answer. The marathon. The monitor. The wires. The envelope. The absence. The dancer. The liar” (Shaheen, *Carnivalia* 58). Upon first glance of this piece, it appears to be just a pile of words, but Shaheen is using all of his talents as a poet to experiment with how language can be utilized thematically on the page. There is certainly a narrative in this piece, and the readers have to make their own individual interpretation which may even change upon multiple viewings by a single person. When you look closer into this piece there are hints to poetic meter and rhyme. Of course the repetition of “the” gives the piece a fine resemblance of meter. But more importantly, there are hints to rhyme. In the segment above, “glass” and “mouse” work as assonance. At the same time, “wires” and “liar” rhyme. The piece demands for every word to be read, because every word is purposeful in both the purpose of the narrative and the purpose of poetry.

“Civilization” is another piece that uses this similar strategy of repetition. It is very similar, but it uses the pronoun “you” in every fragment followed by a different action. Jason Strudler wrote *Between Prose and Poetry: Malevich’s Literary Forms* which analyzed the prose poetry of Kazimir Malevich, who was primarily a painter. Strudler discusses the poem Malevich

wrote called, “Every Evening,” where the phrase ‘every evening’ is used before a variety of phrases repeated thirteen times through the poem. Strudler states that “it features unambiguous poetic lines and distinctly poetic rhythm and repetition. With its lack of rhyme and meter taken into context, the text’s classification as free verse is unlikely to be disputed” (Strudler). This use of repetition as the bridge that connects poetry to prose is the same technique that Shaheen uses quite frequently in *Carnivalia*.

Delville states that, “throughout the twentieth century, the prose poem has often been used as a means of questioning and redefining the methods, aims, and ideological significance habitually attributed to both poetry and prose” (Delville 17). Glenn Shaheen, himself, would most likely agree with this statement as the approach one takes when writing a prose-poem. In an interview with *Flyway Blogs*, Shaheen was asked to share his thoughts on the genre of flash fiction (which I have been referring to as prose-poetry). He responded, “I think the extreme restrictions of flash fiction force writers to work in an entirely different way than if they were creating a story” (Shaheen, “Interview with Editor Glenn Shaheen”). The methods for which writers are crafting these experimental narratives is quite unorthodox to those pieces that are in the established canon. Therefore, there is a controversy in the recognition of prose-poetry as a genre. Shaheen argues for the establishment of this genre as a legitimate literary genre:

For flash fiction, it’s such a different creature than fiction – can you say you place attention to character in a piece that is 250 words? Not in the same way that you would in a 5,000 word piece. Same thing with detail, or setting. You’re frequently picking the minor tools that you want to amplify briefly. I’d almost call it a genre on its own.

(Shaheen, “Interview with Editor Glenn Shaheen”)

The works of Shaheen, Baudelaire, Ruefle, Goldberg, Galeano, and many other prose-poetry writers are not valued the same as other writers who write in other genres. Richard Ohmann lists the various terms used in the rhetoric that fuels the exclusivity of this literary system, “they also have standing in critical discourse, along with allied terms unlikely to serve as course titles: *good writing, great literature, serious fiction, literature* itself” (Ohmann 1686). It would seem that such terms as *bad writing*, and *bad literature* would be destructive to the creative process of fiction writers. These terms can ruin young writers’ perceptions of various works that they may have never read. These phrases that come from prestigious figures in various institutions are a dangerous apparatus pursuing ideologies of cultural isolation. The way in which form is used is being applied to what is seen as literature is also present in education.

Educational System

Through the works of Althusser, it is revealed that the education system is manipulated by the ruling class as a means to control the ideologies of the working class. This profound argument states that the purpose of public school is not so that students can be given the opportunity to learn the subjects of reading, mathematics, science, and history. Althusser argues that the education system is designed to teach students how to properly follow rules making the school’s sole purpose to ensure “a reproduction to its submission to the rules” (Althusser 1287). Viewing education through a Marxist lens is Althusser’s key focus in his argument, but Marxists have held this topic in their discussions clear back to Marx. Marx wrote a counter to the Christian theorist, Ludwig Feuerbach, in his work, “Theses on Feuerbach.” This was an argument against Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Christianity*. Marx is very critical of the way in which Feuerbach preaches the Christian ideology as a truth. To this, Marx replies, “Man must prove the truth, *i.e.*, the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking, in practice.” In

order to prove the “truth” that Marx is referring to, one must have tangible evidence through scientific and social interactions. To Marx, one’s education must be taken seriously. This, of course, is in support of the idea that individuals should be the driving force for society rather than a ruling class. Marx goes on to say that “it is men who change circumstances and that the educator must himself be educated.” Marx also criticizes these men for being responsible for dividing society into the ruling and working class. With the idea of curriculum being used in the education system, Marx was fearful of the class division that is engaged through the use of Christian teachings. He continues as he claims that Feuerbach does not see any practical value in abstract thinking. Instead, Feuerbach places all of his moral values on the basis of sensuous contemplation (Marx, Theses on Feuerbach). To Marx, it is a heinous act to use the institution of education to manipulate individuals’ personal belief systems in order to gain dominance over them.

There are three pieces in *Carnivalia* where the setting is a classroom: “Kissimmee Middle School,” “Born Again,” and “Nice Twitter.” Shaheen is pushing how one views ideology one step further by exploring the classroom setting. In “Kissimmee Middle School,” the feelings that this narrator is struggling through are very complicated. Shaheen states what the other teachers’ suggestions are to the narrator. It is quite interesting to wonder what the response of a well-seasoned teacher would be, and Shaheen tells us this, “the other teachers tell me to just get in the kids’ faces and scream to control them.” The socialist ideas of sharing knowledge in this scene have been compromised. The students have not given into the ideologies of the public school system; rather they have actively opposed the education system resorting to violence towards their superior. The narrator takes a bit of responsibility when he claims to be a bad teacher himself. Yet, what constitutes a good or bad teacher? His training and college education

should have more than suited him for this experience. What this teacher learns is that the school system in its current state has hardened the other teachers in his building. The teachers that should be guiding him are telling him to resort to violent outbursts. Therefore, the teachers are now functioning as an ISA for the school. Their sole purpose is no longer to teach the students the core subjects of math, science, writing, and history. Their key focus, now, is to ensure the students behave a certain way and follow the classroom rules that the teacher chooses to enforce.

The book, *Marxism and Education*, comments on this:

‘How to’ has replaced ‘why to’ in a technicist curriculum based on ‘delivery’ of a quietist and overwhelmingly conservative set of ‘standards’ for student teachers. Teachers are now, by and large, trained in skills rather than educated to examine the ‘whys’ and the ‘why nots’ and the contexts of curriculum, pedagogy, educational purposes, and structures and the effects these have on reproducing Capitalist economy, society, and politics. (Rasiński 168).

Through this observation, it becomes apparent that this Althusserian idea of teaching rules instead of concepts is one of the most dangerous elements that is impacting modern education.

One Marxist theorist who has greatly expanded on the socialist’s goals for education is Mikhail Bakunin. Bakunin is a proclaimed social anarchist who while being inspired by Marx in his theory, broke away from Marxism focusing more on Anarchism. Bakunin’s “On Education” agrees with Marx “It is natural that he who knows more will dominate him who knows less.” Bakunin argues that the large group of the proletariat, which he refers to as slaves, outnumber the few rulers of society, yet the class struggle continues leaving the working class on the bottom. The teacher in “Kissimmee Middle School” is struggling with the idea of dominating the students. The moral dilemma gets the teacher in more trouble when the students take advantage

of his refusal to enter the Master-Slave dialectic. This is a sign of weakness to the students and they begin to challenge the teacher's place as their leader. Bakunin speaks on behalf of the socialist party and their goals with the educational system when he says, "We, on the other hand, seek the final and the utter abolition of classes; we seek a unification of society and equality of social and economic provision for every individual on this earth" (Bakunin, "On Education"). In the classroom, it is interesting to view the teacher as the ruling class, and therefore separate from the student, who, in this scenario, is considered to be the working class. In the case of "Kissimmee Middle School," the teacher would benefit from this abolition of classes, and the students could too. However, just like Gramsci states, the students have already consented to this system. They understand how the class dynamics work in the classroom. With the chair being thrown, this is a violent act of revolution.

Shaheen discusses the concept of ideology in the classroom as well with his piece, "Born Again." Bakunin says this about the atmosphere of the school setting, "We will create in the sphere of education an atmosphere of true co-operation." In "Born Again," the student is actively challenging the teacher as the seventh graders in "Kissimmee Middle School" did. There is no cooperation at all in either of these pieces. The teacher wore thin from work in both pieces. In "Born Again" it begins with "It had been a long and brutal semester," and in "Kissimmee Middle School," we hear the teacher say that it is his first year and he is a bad teacher (Shaheen, *Carnivalia* 23). The narrator in both of these pieces is compromised by the way they are being treated and the lack of support they have at their individual places of work. The students, on the other hand, are obviously not cooperating. In fact, they are defiant in opposing the teacher, because of the position of power that they are holding. They find something about this position to be threatening and therefore react defensively to the teacher's instructions.

Bakunin goes on to argue that the school is inherently a system designed to keep the proletariat down and to enforce the bourgeois mentality. Bakunin compares this class struggle to a foot race, “thus far the bourgeoisie has raced along the track of civilisation at a quicker rate than the proletariat, not because they are intellectually more powerful than the latter indeed one might properly argue the contrary case” (Bakunin, “On Education”). This division of class is so embedded into society that even the bourgeois are divided themselves. This separation is of the bourgeois and the petit bourgeois. The key difference is the amount of money and power that one group has over the other. With “Born Again” we see the distribution of power quite different between the dean and the narrator. In “Kissimmee Middle School” this difference is seen between the more experienced teachers and the narrator. This distance makes the narrator feel alienated and powerless in his attempt to teach.

Shaheen’s “Nice Twitter” explores the internal struggle of a person screening their social media while looking for jobs. This act of screening one’s self follows Bakunin in the ways that the employers of these jobs view people differently if they have certain political views. In this case, this denial is racist. Of course, the state ensures that these ideologies are in check. They do not want any individual in a class that they do not belong in following the jaded guidelines of the ruling class. Bakunin directly combats this idea by saying, “here class differences do not frighten us. A sincere and true teacher yearns for that perfect school which would transform the greatest number of citizens into completely developed men. The proletariat yearns for the same” (Bakunin “On Education”). In the Shaheen pieces analyzed so far, and many others in *Carnivalia*, the working class is always represented. There is a yearning in these narrators for equality and individualism. Shaheen addresses the people who are not interested in capitalist

ideologies and who want to have alternative ways to make ends-meet while being happy with their place in life.

The communist writer, Nikolai Bukharin, wrote the “The ABC of Communism,” sharing his views on the future of education in a socialist society. He attacks the ruling class by saying, “they are infected with enthusiasm for all bourgeois virtues; they are inspired with esteem for wealth, renown, titles and order.” This goes back to Althusser’s idea that the point of school is not to teach subjects, but rather to teach the rules of good behavior. Shaheen’s characters, who are teachers, lament Althusser’s truth. They do not want to continue on in the school system where they continue to reproduce a master-slave mentality through the use of hatred and violence. They are ambitious learners themselves, and they want to share their love of learning. However, the ideological state apparatus that the state demands teachers be obstructs all of these characters and their moral compass.

The Marxist theorist, Anatoly Lunacharsky, offers a solution to this problem of class difference in the classroom. In 1918, Lunacharsky wrote, “To Those Who Teach,” in response to the direction in which the Socialist Party was to take education in this newly formed society. Lunacharsky states, “Let us build together a parliament of enlightenment, a vast government committee for the education of the people. With friendly efforts let us build together a commission instead of a minister--a commission which will not hinder and command but which will make the work easier and aid all healthy initiative.” In this statement, I would guess that Shaheen’s characters would enjoy a world where education was led by a committee rather than one individual. Perhaps if students saw their superiors working together and sharing in the work, then maybe they would begin to follow suit. Maybe the throwing of chairs in the classroom and

running to the dean in an attempt to get the professor fired would come to an end and learning could finally come back to the classroom.

The idea of the canon is a social construct deeply embedded in literary education that is as seemingly immovable as class division. Richard Ohmann wrote a very detailed essay concerning the canon in this excerpt, “*From The Shaping of the Canon: U.S. Fiction, 1960-1975.*” Ohman begins with discussing the various names famously used for the canon throughout the years, such as “The English Novel, The Modern American Novel, and American Literature” (Ohmann 1686). These titles for the canon have no true meaning without their significant standing in the education system. The educators that organize curriculum and choose authors to lift up in their programs continue the cycle of the closed canon. Authors that do not meet the likeness of the authors already in the established canon find it difficult to be entered into this canon.

The most important way that Shaheen continues his playful discourse with genre in the canon is through the purposeful use of Shakespeare play titles as the titles of his prose-poetry. The pieces being referred to are: “King Lear,” “Coriolanus,” “Hamlet,” “Macbeth,” “Measure for Measure,” and “The Tempest.” All of these pieces have seemingly nothing to do with the original play. In “Hamlet” for instance, there are resemblances of the father and son themes, but it is much more morbid. It even resembles that of a David Lynch film rather than Shakespeare. In “The Tempest,” one could argue the metaphoric storm being held back is the sexuality of the teenagers that their helicopter guardians are trying to control. This piece’s narrative still feels so distant from *The Tempest*. Now, “Macbeth” is a very interesting piece. Every sentence begins with ‘Macbeth,’ except for the few that begin with ‘Lady Macbeth.’ This story does not center on a power hungry couple willing to murder. In fact, these two characters are punk rockers that

spend their days making trouble in their community. With all of these pieces, as do all of Shaheen's works, there is a purpose for every tiny detail. The titles are purposeful in diverting one's expectations.

Conclusion

Whether or not Marxism and socialism work in social practice is irrelevant in this argument. Education and the curriculum therein, is an institution that needs to be far removed from the capitalist agenda. All of the Marxist theorists in this chapter argue for this. Education is a place for sharing knowledge and growth. In the capitalist setting, it is more important to teach rules rather than concepts. Glenn Shaheen shows these ideas in much more personable scenes with his prose-poetry. We are given the ability to view the struggles of the modern day classroom through the concerns of both the teacher and the student. Teachers are told that they need to gain control of their classroom, and this can mean a number of things ranging from redirection strategies to discipline charts to verbal threats. The scene in "Kissimmee Middle School" shows a kid throwing a chair across the room. The setting of the classroom in the current state is a breeding ground for violence driven by the focus of reproducing rules versus reproducing the overall distribution of knowledge-based concepts. Glenn Shaheen is also showing his readers the ways in which the opening of the literary canon is an act that must take place in a society's schools. He shows this through the breaking of expectations in his Shakespeare pieces and through his use of rule breaking in grammar and typical narrative devices. Perhaps naming six of his prose-poetry pieces Shakespeare plays is Shaheen's tongue-in-cheek way of planting this genre into the literary canon.

Marxism and Education argues for this idea that Marxism is most suited for the social interactions in a classroom:

It is widely understood in academia nowadays that Marxism is returning as the most effective theoretical body of ideas providing the most accurate analysis of the current crisis of the capitalist system, a crisis that is not only economic but is also cultural, social, political, ecological and in the last analysis, a crisis that affects all aspects of human life.

(Rasiński 3)

This goes against what the experienced teachers tell the narrator in “Kissimmee Middle School.” The teacher’s position of power should be used to assist students and share experiences, knowledge, and sympathy. This is what makes Shaheen’s work so utterly unique when applying Marxist ideology. Shaheen uses his form to back up what messages his works are expressing.

With Lanthimos, some critics claim his writing as Greek Weird. With VanderMeer, he has helped fit his writing into the category of New Weird. This observation brings Shaheen up for questioning. As of now there is not much written about him, and his writing is classified as poetry, prose, prose-poetry, flash fiction, and all of the above. However, Shaheen’s writing is also Weird. There are not many other writers who live by their written word. Shaheen uses his genre, or rather breaking of genre as evidence of his own rebellion of traditional expectations of literature and the canon. Therefore, it is this author’s suggestion that Shaheen’s *Carnivalia* is Genre Weird.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The Journey of These Three Texts

The journey of these three texts coincides with my own journey concerning my discovery and observations of ideology. The strike at the capitol was a forceful awakening into the ways ideology was impacting me and my students. With the help of grad. school, I was able to identify the ways that I was performing as an ISA at the middle school I worked at. Now in the years after these events, I use the knowledge gained from these three settings to close the gap of class division between my role as the teacher and my students. In many ways, my journey with the ideologies in education has mirrored that of the three protagonists discussed in this thesis.

David, the biologist, and Glenn Shaheen all express a need to be individuals. There is an internal conflict in all of these characters to make decisions that are not morally compromising to their own inner beliefs, especially if it means defying the ruling class in their society. David learns this lesson in *The Lobster* by exploring the hotel and the woods to learn that neither of these settings encourages the ideological beliefs that he does. In this specific case, David wants to find a partner on his own time. When David mourns for the Nearsighted Woman's loss of sight, he is showing to the audience that the significance of defining traits is the one shred of ideology that has been imprinted on him by the city and the hotel's persistent ISAs.

On the other hand, the biologist in *Annihilation* has a much clearer understanding of her own individual identity. From years of living with her fighting parents, she found comfort in being alone with nature. This introverted personality brings some emotional distance to her relationship with her husband. Her connection with nature is the one thing that makes her happy to be alone. This lifetime of priming makes the biologist suited for a clean revolt against the

institution of the Southern Reach. It is apparent that in order to fully become a revolutionary, one must turn against the ruling class's ideologies completely. The biologist does this by willingly immersing herself into the seemingly chaotic world of Area X. The biologist is a perfect example for how individualism can successfully counter the capitalist hegemony.

Carnivalia is a living example of what a writer in real life can do to exemplify one's anticapitalistic beliefs. Shaheen uses both the form of prose-poetry and the themes of his stories to create a discourse of injustices in American society through various ways in which he has witnessed unfairness in class division. This argument focuses more on the class division that takes place in public school classrooms and college classes⁵. Shaheen explores the teacher's struggles in being an ISA while also dealing with the working class struggles that American teachers endure. One of the ways in which teachers (more specifically English teachers) have some control over ideology is what sort of texts they choose to teach and what authors they pick to expose their students to. Shaheen's discourse of canon created by his Shakespeare pieces open a window for which new understandings of traditional texts (written by mainly white males) can be witnessed in different ways by authors who are not rightfully represented in the "traditional canon."

This journey via texts is a blueprint for identifying the ideological control that the ruling class has and ultimately finding one's own individual identity within such social limitations. David, the biologist, and Shaheen all find ways to revolt against their oppressors in order to fulfill their own individual desires. These stories use the Weird to express the absurdity of ideological control. Unfortunately, it is such a hidden agenda, by the ruling class, that it takes a hotel that forces people to date each other, an alien biome that consumes individuals who enter it,

⁵ *Remember my first year teaching, and the hell that reigned that year. Oh god, and don't forget the walkout.*

and a poet who writes with no distinction between prose and poetry, to realize the capitalist control that runs one's society.

Utilizing the Marxist theory of ideology allows for a cohesive analysis of three texts that are drastically different in both form and narrative. *The Lobster* builds a framework for understanding how a character can be conflicted by ideologies in differing ways in various settings. *Annihilation* takes this idea further by analyzing the psychology behind the revolutionist's decision to rebel. *Carnivalia* explores all of these ideas in its many pieces. By Shaheen writing in the genre of prose-poetry, he is acting out against the ideological "norms" that unfairly neglect certain types of literature. When exploring the theory of ideology through a film, a novel, and a prose-poetry collection, what occurs is an observational convergence of author and text. This is seen in the ways that the author is truly expressing themselves through their actions of writing rather than by narrative alone.

Genre

Genre is one of the most important ties that bring these texts together, outside of the discussions concerning ideology and individualism. Lanthimos, VanderMeer, and Shaheen use the genre of Weird to expose their audiences to ideology in obscure ways that seem far-fetched at first, but are closer to the truth than one might expect. It has been discussed that Lanthimos is considered to be a Greek Weird filmmaker, because of absurd scenarios and the ways that he directs his actors to talk in an apathetic tone. Jeff VanderMeer is also identified as a New Weird writer for the means by which he merges nature with other literary genres⁶. In the argument concerning Glenn Shaheen's place in the labeling of Weird genres, this author dubbed *Carnivalia* a work of the Genre Weird, for how the text pushes the boundaries of prose and

⁶ i.e. the graycaps in *Finch* and the mysteries of Area X in *Annihilation*.

poetry. In their own individual rights, they all deserve the proud title of Weird. However, they are also similar in a way that does not concern literary genre per se. All three of these pieces expose the manipulation that capitalist ideology has on the working class. Weird can also describe the way that these texts were selected to complement each other. Their collective statement is formed by them all being contemporary texts that speak out against capitalist ideology. It is quite powerful that this message is so prevalent in many different mediums of literature. This makes one wonder what genre these texts are now considered to be. Titles seem to also work as a means of hegemony. They set guidelines that exclude. So, by fitting all three of these authors and their texts together what we end up with is a wide open space for Weird to be expressed by many voices that feel strongly about the injustices of class division.

White Malecentric: Memoir

My complaints concerning the teacher walkout and my first year teaching feel insignificant compared to other people's struggles. From my years of experience working with a diverse array of middle schoolers, I worry how empathetic my readers should be of my lamentations.

"Whoop doo! A white man yelled and screamed until he got a pay raise. Feel sorry for the white man!" A voice inside screams at me through countless rereadings of my work.

Hypocrisy! But is this not an endless cycle for a textbook overthinker. Even from the night that I was first introduced to Marxist ideology, I realized that there are many issues with socialism in practice. Class equality is a great idea to pursue, but using social ideologies to manipulate the oppressed is not exactly what socialism seems to be on paper. Often it is too tempting for people in power to establish a dictatorship, due to the distribution of wealth or rather poverty. Therefore, one must be conscious that their own hypocrisy does not negatively

affect the people around them. As a teacher, I knew after taking Dr. BB's class that I needed to be more conscious about not abusing my own place of power.

In many ways learning this theory reinforced much of my own intellectual skepticism. My relationship with Lanthimos, VanderMeer, and Shaheen, that takes the form of an inner dialogue, has forced me to be wary of the possibility that they may be responsible for hypocrisies as well. With the four of us being men, I wonder what makes men feel this way so strongly about capitalism and class division. I look up to these writers, because they are concerned with the same injustices as me: being forced to live a way that I do not want to. Glenn Shaheen is sort of the hero of my argument, because I think of how he writes about the teacher in "Kissimmee Middle School." This character is not ashamed to admit their own flaws as a teacher. They also do not mind exposing bad teachers that yell at kids and promote young teachers to follow suit.

Opening the Analysis

This argument is mainly from a predominantly male white-centric point of view, and this author finds an importance in opening this analysis even further through the view of diverse authors. Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), the Queer community, and women also fit into this conversation concerning anti-capitalist narratives in the Weird genre. These works seem to all share a thematic bond in both their stories and the artist's individualistic style of craft. This spirit can be observed in several different contemporary films, novels, and prose-poetry collections.

In the last five years, several independent films have used elements of the Weird to express the many ways in which individuals experience class division. Three of these films have

been directed by men⁷ of color and have received critical acclaim. Jordan Peele's 2017 film, *Get Out* uses the audience's preconceived notions towards horror films to have a discussion concerning racism. The Weird is used when the Armitage family medically transfers the consciousness of rich white people into the bodies of African American people. Boots Riley's 2018 film, *Sorry to Bother You*, shows a reverse concept of Peele's by showing African American workers at a telemarketing agency only being successful in their job when using their "white voice" in phone calls. This film gets Weird with the introduction of the equisapiens (an altered human-horse hybrid) who are made to work more efficiently for the corporation WorryFree. Finally, Bong Joon Ho's 2019 film, *Parasite*, is divided into two worlds: the underground rundown setting where the Kims (a struggling working class family) live, the luxurious world of the high class Parks where several workers tend to their every whim. *Parasite* uses both the Kims' manipulation of the Parks, and Moon-Gwang's harboring of her husband in the underground of the Park's house, as absurd, yet Weird, narrative devices to speak on the struggle between classes.

Many novelists have also been writing about similar themes in the genre of Weird. Ann VanderMeer has collaborated with her husband, Jeff VanderMeer, to make several anthologies of Weird short stories for the last thirteen years or so. Dexter Palmer's 2016 novel, *Version Control*, uses time travel as a means of exploring tragedy and romance. N.K. Jemison's 2020 novel, *The City We Became*, is a Weird novel in that the five boroughs of New York come to life as people. The boroughs must save the city of New York from an ancient force that is attacking the city from the ocean surrounding. Two examples of similar works that are considered to be Queer are:

⁷ This author is not familiar with many contemporary independent filmmakers who are both women and work in the realm of Weird. Therefore, the film section is the only section that contains all male examples.

Lidia Yuknavitch's 2017 novel, *The Book of Joan* and Carmen Maria Machado's 2017 short story collection, *Her Body and other Parties*. *The Book of Joan* discusses class division alongside struggles of gender identity in a society that inhabits a space station. Machado's collection utilizes the surreal horror to discuss trauma and gender inequality in queer characters and female characters.

In the realm of prose-poetry, many writers are doing the same caliber work that Shaheen has with the blending of genres. The genre of these collections is the main source of what makes these following pieces Weird. Mary Ruefle's 2008⁸ collection, *The Most of It*, is her first book of prose. This collection discusses many of her personal experiences through surreal narratives. Beckian Fritz Goldberg's 2013 collection, *Egypt from Space*, leans a little farther on the elements of poetry to express many narratives focusing on both the surreal and the erotic. Claudia Rankine's 2014 collection *Citizen*, uses all of the elements of prose-poetry without using any title for her pieces, making one seemingly continuous story. Focusing on race relations, Rankine mainly uses the pronoun "you" in her pieces to bring home the themes of injustice that occur in the African American community.

Initial analyses of writers who are not white men prove that anti-capitalism in the genre of Weird is not tied to only one group of people. The experiences of class struggle, proven by these works, narrow the theme of ideological class struggles to the internal fight that one has in order to express their own individualism. These texts by a diverse array of people confirm that the ruling class's ideological control aims to stunt the individuals that make up the working class. Through different text this window of observation can be widened to understand the many

⁸ Technically, Ruefle's collection was published two years before the decade being used to define these pieces as "contemporary." *The Most of It* is too similar to *Carnivalia* that it has to be mentioned in this argument.

different ways that people experience similar oppressive struggles. The analysis of diverse Weird writers is worth further analysis, possibly even another thesis in itself.

Final Thought: Memoir

I used to yell at kids. During my first semester, I screamed at a boy for erasing something off of my whiteboard. Right in front of the whole class. I knew he did it, but the entire class had his back and refused to snitch. I made them all stay late before lunch, so I could force at least one person to confess who erased the words. I, too, thought this is what you did as a teacher. An older teacher told me that I had to be a “happy bitch” to the kids in order for them to respect me. This abuse of power is unhealthy and should not be allowed in schools, or anywhere. So, maybe this is why I look up to these three writers. They think about their own place in society, and use absurd, yet unique, ways to express the fucked up class division that happens in this world.

I have been on a journey with the theory of ideology, even before I knew exactly what it was. The three settings that I have experienced the oppressive force of this capitalist concept are: the Oklahoma City capitol building, the middle school classroom, and the university I attended as a student. I suppose that through all of these places that have dwelled in throughout my post-graduate life; I was trying to find a way in which Socialism Works. A way I could be happy being in the working class. Being a teacher is the only way that I can make a playing field that is level for all of my students to be successful. In my classroom, my selection of works can open a kid's understanding to the diverse amount of authors in the world. In my classroom, a divide between the teacher and the students should only be in the maturity that the teacher has to help guide the students to a wide range of what literature has done and can do.

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