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Introduction

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Introduction

Brittney Payer and Kristen Shorer

The Laurier Undergraduate Journal of the Arts' 2018 volume begins with a perhaps painfully relevant topic, as Davis Drover dives into the dangers of digital media for the operation of a healthy democracy. In his paper, "Fake News and Filter Bubbles: America's Spiral to Extremism," Drover investigates the implications of the Internet operating as a news source and, in turn, of a public whose media diet consists of partisan sites and personalized newsfeeds. Drover suggests that the fragmented and personalized nature of online platforms is leading to the deterioration of shared experience, of the ability to empathize and understand others' views, of trust in mainstream media, and, ultimately, of the political centre. In other words, Drover makes a strong argument for the role of fake news and filter bubbles in further polarizing both ends of the political spectrum and exacerbating extremism in America.

Next, the volume shifts to an entirely different media analysis with Mitchell Kooh's literary focus in "'Whither Then I Cannot Say': Epistemological Uncertainty and Tolkien's Transnational Myth." Here, Kooh focuses on J.R.R. Tolkien's incomplete legendarium to examine the boundaries of knowledge and reality in Tolkien's world through a tangled publication history and metafictional narrative. By exploring the corpus of published, posthumously published, and unpublished works, which render the exact reality of Tolkien's world uncertain, the author suggests that the creation of a shared cultural identity by Tolkien's readership, or Volk, through a collective reshaping of the narrative enables the texts to grow and breathe as much as the myths that inspired them. Kooh's paper both exemplifies admirable undergraduate research and a true passion for the subject at hand, making his work all the more captivating.

Leaving Tolkien's fantastical world of myth and magic, LUJA turns to the all-too-real realm of court politics with Katelyn Leece's "Past as Precedent: Conflicting Perspectives of Royal Prerogative and the Rights of Parliament." Leece takes a look at the repeated proroguing of parliament in Stuart England, alongside religious subversion and exploitation of the masses. Her goal is this: to evaluate the precedent set for the absolutist power of a monarch, leading to the seventeenth-century English Civil Wars and the Constitutional Crisis of 1649.

Specifically, she argues that Charles I's tumultuous reign and eventual regicide is best understood in the context of historical precedent and centuries of conflicting interpretations of the Magna Carta. Not only, then, does Leece offer insight into the past, but also a powerful lesson on the impact that precedent may have on our future.

In LUJA's fourth paper, Justin Manning introduces the reader to a concept that he himself has coined: Psychological Aphistemalgia. With this, Manning refers to a mindset and feeling characterized by the abstract wistful desire to advance to a future place or time and that, to be fully experienced, requires optimism, imagination, and perseverance. In his paper, "An Introduction to Psychological Aphistemalgia," Manning comprehensively defines his concept, investigates the potential positive effects of achieving this state, and outlines strategies for getting there. Manning's skilful introduction of a completely new concept, a challenge to even the most experienced of academics, showcases the value of undergraduate work in adding to academic conversation.

For the first time since its conception, LUJA now looks back to the medieval world with Mackenzie Mohr's "The Pound and the Hammer: An Analysis of the Effects of Finance on Edward I's Conquest of Wales and Scotland." In this paper, Mohr evaluates the impact of nations' economic states on the outcomes of Edward I's thirteenth-century conquests, which helped to shape the geopolitical state of the modern UK. By examining how economic security contributed not only to the availability of resources, but also centralization of state administration and troops' loyalty in Edward's England and in his opposing nations, Mohr makes a strong argument for a direct link between financial stability and military victory. The thorough and effective analysis challenges the long-held romantic glorification of medieval warfare to offer a more realistic view, one that could be applied to the wars of today.

With the sixth paper of this volume, "'The endless stream of men, and moving things': The Emotional Impact of the Urban Sublime in Book VII of Wordsworth's *The Prelude*," Carina Rampelt examines how the chaos of London, England, during the Industrial Revolution manifests in William Wordsworth's text. Rampelt skilfully draws contrast between Wordsworth's own perception of the urban sublime and that of major contemporaries, particularly philosophers Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke. By highlighting these differences, the author suggests Wordsworth's concept of the urban sublime is one of sensory overload in a metropolis cityscape, and the speaker's journey is one of self-restoration and reparation—one that can be echoed in today's world of technology-driven disconnect.

Next, in her paper “The Effects of Isolating Visuality in The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe,” Jace Sillberbach delivers a vivid analysis of architect Peter Eisenman’s Berlin Holocaust Memorial. Sillberbach takes the reader to the memorial site as she analyzes how its unique elements and careful construction increase feelings of isolation, bewilderment, unsteadiness, claustrophobia, and ultimately create connections between visitors and Holocaust victims. Sillberbach draws on scholars such as Marita Sturken and Dipesh Chakrabarty to argue that the immersive and disturbing sensory experience constructed by Eisenman enables visitors to engage in self-reflexive learning, collective memory formation, and perhaps, for only a moment, to truly understand the horrors of Holocaust victims. Sillberbach’s detailed analysis makes clear, not only the role of visuality in Eisenman’s memorial, but the importance of rethinking traditional memorial practices altogether.

Finally, to close this volume, Denise Springett explores how the Internet can enable resistance through the destabilization of binary identities, static identities, and (re)productive sexuality. In her paper, “Virtual Queerness: Resisting Heteronormativity in Online Spaces,” Springett argues that the ability to engage in a continuous dialogue in virtual spaces, in contrast to static print publications, meaningfully challenges the ideological frameworks supportive of heteropatriarchy. Springett effectively demonstrates the resistive potential of virtually published queer narratives through an analysis of two “coming out” videos, and explores online role-playing games as a platform for challenging heteronormative expectations through digital embodiment. This analysis highlights how, contrary to popular belief, technology can offer space for sharing and engaging in complex, contradictory, and ever-changing lived experiences, and thereby challenge the dominant narratives surrounding gender, sex, and (re)productive sexuality.

As is made clear by the diversity revealed in these introductions, each paper in this volume is entirely unique. What they do share, however, is excellence in argumentation, originality in thought, breadth in research, and skill in bringing a new perspective to academic conversation. While reading through LUJA’s fifth edition we hope that you enjoy engaging with these works and perhaps find new avenues of interest and insight to enrich your own ongoing learning experience.

