WHAT IS LIFE?

AN EXAMINATION OF NIHILISTS WITHIN LIBERTARIAN WESTERN MODERN LITERATURE AND FILM

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Morissa Schwartz

Drew University

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ABSTRACT

The Role of Nihilistic Libertarian Values in Literature and Film

An Illustration of Modern Society

The decline of community and religion, combined with the subsequent rise of individuality and technology, has greatly affected literature and film as they are vehicles for societal critique. This text will explore these changes through popular works written from a nihilistic and libertarian point of view, including novel and film adaptations of *A Clockwork Orange, No Country for Old Men, Requiem for a Dream, Fight Club, American Psycho, Fahrenheit 451, and Kickass*. This will begin with an academic definition of libertarianism and nihilism and how the two schools of thought have shaped modern literature. The thesis will then use those definitions to assume that there is no meaning essentially bound to man's existence in the ways that organized religion and community espouse. Building upon that fact, literary characters then create their own meaning through other avenues. The text will then explore the implications of this creative approach to meaning through the following topics: consumerism, drugs, violence, art and education, relationships, work, and the fight against adversity. The text will conclude with observations on the future of this philosophy in literature, paying explicit attention to how these methods of thinking will affect future generations.

Introduction

Is it even possible to be a nihilistic libertarian? Are the two philosophies inclined to oppose each other? Many have asked these questions whenever this topic is addressed. However, it must be proven that it is possible, and the proof of this must come from the many examples of nihilists with libertarian tendencies that are to be found in popular culture.

In the following pages, I will explore how authors have crafted nihilistic characters that reflect society's libertarian views. I will ask questions of the authors, the characters in their novels and films, and of modern society's current worldview. Seven works of western culture, all popularized in the Unites States and the UK, will be analyzed here. Each story was originally published between the 1950s and 2010s, and each of them were adapted to film within the same period, creating visual aid to the philosophical expressions of the characters.

The first section will be dedicated to *A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess (1961), where the protagonist Alex finds his meaning in life through violence and music. I will explore how Alex discovers that it is better to have the choice to be virtuous than to be forced into virtue. Famously, Stanley Kubrick's film adaptation (1971) contains a vastly contradictory ending, complete with a vastly contrary worldview, and I will explore the implications of Kubrick's approach to the plot and its themes.

The second section will explore *No Country for Old Men* by Cormac McCarthy (2005), which explores a nihilist's unique set of rules that are almost completely divorced from the cultural expectations of America. By examining each premise within the nihilist's moral code, observations on inherent greed can be made, which shows us the ways in which

an overarching purpose to life can be derived from greed. The Coen brothers' film adaptation (2007) remains true to the novel; however, it is important to show how the film further examines the cultural shifts of the 80s and how it applies to the thematic progression of both works.

The third section concerns the novel *Requiem for a Dream* by Hubert Selby (1978), plus its more visceral filmic counterpart, directed by Darren Aronofsky (2000). In this disturbing story, each of its troubled characters find their meanings through drug use. What makes this story interesting to examine is that every character varies in age, race, and gender, so we get a great sense of how diverse experiences tie the problems of drug addiction together into one cohesive argument that involves nihilism.

The fourth section discusses *Fight Club* by Chuck Palahniuk (1997), which is a case study against consumerism that does not attempt to present an idealistic alternative. This is another work where the protagonist begins by finding meaning in violence, but that same character eventually loses that meaning as he descends deeper into madness. David Fincher's cinematic approach to the story (1999) is similar to Stanley Kubrick's approach in *A Clockwork Orange*, but his contrary view on the story introduces a small sense of optimism to the story's conclusion. As is the case in the first section, these changes will be explored throughout this section.

The fifth section will explore *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury (1953), which seeks to prove that the dystopian society created by the author attempts to coerce its characters to become nihilistic, thus guaranteeing societal stability. However, we find that characters in this work find meaning through books or technology, which is ultimately an act of defiance that uses books and technology as a means to expression. Its earliest film

adaptation, François Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451* (1966), will serve as the visual counterpart to Bradbury's most beloved novel. There are several film adaptations of this novel available, upon which I have chosen the earliest, directed by Francois Truffaut – a famed director within the French New Wave. This will offer an interesting opportunity to examine the way that striking film techniques successfully bring out the novel's intended themes. many of which were popularized by Truffaut.

The sixth section will discuss *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Elis (1991), as well as Mary Harron's adaptation (2000). The protagonist Patrick Bateman finds his meaning through obscene wealth and the "lifestyle" that subsequently follows it. Despite this meaning, there is a repressed side of Bateman that resists against such meaning. The frustration that comes with that resistance expresses itself in behaviors so disturbing that it is difficult to think of another 20th century story that compares in its levels of brutality. Recurring themes throughout these works include greed, excess, and violence, as they appeared during the late 80s – a time in which America was poised to achieve social and economic victory over the collapsing Soviet Union. Unlike *No Country for Old Men, American Psycho* lays the causes of nihilism right at the feet of the American Dream, because characters like Bateman have realized that dream and dragged its consequences towards their logical conclusions.

The penultimate section analyzes a very recent work that goes beyond text, as well as pessimism. The graphic novel and its corresponding film *Kickass* (2010), is a fantastic case study in positively-charged nihilism and how one can use it to achieve meaning that can only come as they help others in need.

Unlike most conventional works, many of the characters in the books and films I have chosen do not 'grow' or learn from the events that have led them to the end, which is why many of these stories are characterized as nihilistic works. This has quickly become a common trend among many modern films, books, and television shows. If it is true that these characters do not grow in a conventional sense, it cannot be assumed that they do not have a code of ethics – because most of them do. It cannot be argued that they did not change at all, because many have in some way or another. Most importantly, it cannot be argued that they do not find meaning in some way - because they all did. Most of these works are satirical in tone. Each author attempts to apply dark humor to soften the extremity of the material, whether the humor is supposed to define the primary aspects of the tone or not.

Something else to consider are localization differences between the original version of the novel and the version published in a different area of the world. For example, *A Clockwork Orange* contains different text and different approaches to that text in the US version, which are not present in its original British publication.

Finally, the conclusion will reestablish the basic premises of my thesis, summarize key points, and add in any relevant points which will tie the information together into something definitive.

Previous research on this topic is limited. There are many works of fiction that deal with libertarian and nihilistic questions, views, and themes. Academic literature also officially dissects libertarian and nihilistic questions, views, and themes. However, there are few that address both, and even fewer that do it in the persuasive manner I intend to create here. Above all, the text is meant to show how these nihilistic characters find

authentic and legitimate meaning in their lives through libertarian means. I will be relying on authors and film critics external to the works discussed, such as Ayn Rand and Jean-Luc Godard, as well as authors and filmmakers directly addressed by the text, such as Chuck Palahniuk and Mary Harron. Because both categories of sources have their subject matter experts, the citations used will largely be derived from external analysis or internal opinion on their work.

Throughout the decades of cultural transformation that drew people towards individualism, away from religion and community, it is easy to assume that we are regressing into anarchism, if not outright chaos. The antithesis to this idea is even though many of these nihilistic characters can be quite anarchic, it is not necessary for a libertarian society to follow suit. Without a meaning dictated to a person from institutions such as religions or nation-states, we are left to create our own meaning in ways that refrains from abject destruction. Many of us may choose to do otherwise; the characters represented in the works I explore do just that. But if we are to follow the author's intent, as its shown in the ways that their characters develop, we discover that the story becomes a cautionary tale. Such cautionary tales possess the power to lead each reader away from the mistakes made by the characters, as well as the power to think more critically about the effects such mistakes have on society, and vice versa.

A Personal Disclaimer

Personally, I am not inclined to label or classify individuals. I am aware that many would insist that that belief makes me a libertarian, as contradictory a statement as that is. It is important to stress the fact that I believe that individuals should be free to pursue their interests with minimal interference by others, so long as no one is being harmed. I live by this belief every day. I do not like the idea of a boss dictating my day or being trapped in an office for eight hours a day. Therefore, I own my own businesses and work at home. I pursue many hobbies. I like to control every aspect of my life. I attribute my lifestyle, at least in part, to my generation. I grew up with the internet, which many still compare to the Wild West, nearly thirty years after its introduction to the public. There are few rules online, which are consistently broken by disreputable characters. However, people have used the Internet to explore their individuality and celebrate others' differences. This proves that as much as the Internet has developed a reputation for dividing us, it has also brought many of us together, allowing individuals and the cultures that help define them to connect with other individuals and cultures from around the world. The popular culture that currently exists in the West, which has become more and more libertarian over the years, is a great reflection of this.

My formative years were an amalgamation of many different educational experiences. I attended a private school, then a Catholic school (I am half Jewish), then I was homeschooled before finally entering a biomedical science academy. These various educational experiences allowed me to see nearly every educational method for what it was, which later resulting my belief that no one method is completely disreputable or completely effective. In going from a secular educational background to a highly religious

environment, from no institutional experience at all to a science academy, I found myself constantly re-examining the process behind everything there was to be learned, whether it was arithmetic or ethics. In the Catholic school, we were encouraged to pray daily and find our meaning through God. Several years later, the entire educational framework changed. Religion was never discussed, and we instead focused strictly on the rational approach to intellectual certainty. Everything needed proof to be considered valid or persuasive arguments, either for or against. Upon graduation and entry into a post-secondary liberal arts institution, I was encouraged to find my own meaning for the first time in my young life. One would think that this sort of freedom would be liberating, but it only served to put the fear of the unknown and the uncertain in me. With no meaning dictated to my life in ways that permanently defined the way I perceived the world, I found life meaningless. Many would have classified me then as a classic nihilist. There is some credence to that classification. I certainly will not deny that the negative aspects of nihilist ideology were thoughts that I entertained for a time: *If nothing contains any inherent meaning, then why should any of us do anything?* However, I would also be doing my own personal growth within the philosophy of nihilism if I did not also come to a more positive outlook of it: *If nothing has any inherent meaning, then it follows that I can do anything.* I always had the freedom to follow my dreams and do what I wanted to do, but it took some hardship to finally learn that there was no reason to be afraid and follow the status quo based on that fear.

My advisors told me I should start applying for internships. Instead, I started a company and started hiring interns. In our early 20s, my friends began renting city apartments, while I purchased a 2-acre home in the most rural area of NJ I could find. I

broke a Guinness World Record for creating the World's Longest Chain of Bracelets, sang on national television, and published my first books because the fear of outright failure meant very little in comparison to the level of disappointment I would feel if I failed to at least take a chance. There was nothing to hold me back other than myself. No one else could dictate the meaning to life for me, so I could accomplish and do whatever I wanted. I know many others in my generation who embraced similar lifestyles, once they realized that they did not need to live the life they thought they had to. One such friend travels the world and works from his computer. He is free to live and do as he wants because of the online business on his computer, despite being told to stay in his hometown and get a job there, on location, like everyone else.

In Vonnegut's last novel, *Timequake,* he said, "Listen: We are here on Earth to fart around. Don't let anybody tell you any different!" George Carlin echoed this same sentiment in one of his last specials. This thought process is hilarious, to be sure – but it also has its transcendent qualities. The refusal to take anything too seriously gives us the perspective we need to think critically and create our own conclusions to humanity's most persistent existential problems. Most people with a conscience and integrity will choose to do good after thinking critically from an individualist viewpoint. This is perhaps the most prominent example of cognitive and confirmation bias I bring into this literary review, and as such, I stress that this fact must be kept in mind throughout the entirety of the text.

I noticed when telling others about my topic, I was often met with confusion. It was not necessarily because my topic is so difficult to follow, but because of how I pronounce the word *nihilism.* I pronounce it nee-hil-ism, while many people I have come across

pronounce it nie-lism. Both are correct[1], which is the perfect embodiment of what this word means, which is that it doesn't matter. We can all choose to say the word however we want, because in the end, it doesn't make a difference.

Nihilists are typically viewed in a negative light. However, my personal experience has informed me that nihilism can be used as a vehicle for libertarians to create their own meanings in ways that resist outright negative categorization. To say otherwise is to say that negative behavior is the sole effect of nihilism – QED - while refusing to recognize the possibility, let alone the actual evidence, that nihilism can produce effects that are the very opposite of negative. By examining nihilistic characters within these seven examples of modern literature and film coming out of the West, we can prove that whatever bias I may have regarding my personal experience can be overshadowed by the fact that characters and other individuals alive today have reached the same conclusion as I have – giving credence to the virtuous capabilities of nihilism and libertarianism alike.

[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJeQpdk-5lQ

The History of Libertarianism and Nihilism

Modern libertarianism and nihilism are relatively new terms used in academic discourse, but their ideas can be traced back thousands of years. The following pages will explore the foundations of these ideas, then follow through with a historical analysis of its development as an ideology. Its conclusion will pay considerable attention to modern famous figures who are classified as libertarians, nihilists, or both.

What is Libertarianism?

The classic definition of libertarianism is "an extreme laissez-faire political philosophy advocating only minimal state intervention in the lives of citizens (Boaz, Britannica)." However, one critique of Trey Parker and Matt Stone's *South Park: Bigger, Longer, and Uncut* named the film one of the greatest libertarian films of all time (Liberty, http://missliberty.com/south-park-bigger-longer-and-uncut-1999/). At this point, the lines become far less distinct. While the film supports individual liberties, the creators are also smart enough to address both sides of the argument surrounding censorship by cultural institutions on an equal footing. Robert S. Taylor's view in *Self-Ownership and the Limits of Libertarianism* becomes a more favorable definition to use in a 21st century context, where he simply states that libertarians are pro self-ownership (Samuel Taylor). Self-ownership is the true essential quality of a libertarian; they believe they should not be restricted or controlled by anyone else, especially not the government.

Britannica describes libertarianism as "a political philosophy that takes individual liberty to be the primary political value. It may be understood as a form of liberalism." The definition goes further towards that of Taylor's if it is tied to Britannica's definition of liberalism: "Liberalism seeks to define and justify the legitimate powers of government in terms of certain natural or God-given individual rights. These rights include the rights to life, liberty, private property, freedom of speech and association, freedom of worship, government by consent, equality under the law, and moral autonomy." (Boaz, Britannica) Each of these concerns will be further explored throughout this text. The sole duty of the government, according to libertarians, is to protect the rights of the individual, as they are tied into natural or God-given principles. Essentially, libertarians believe that unless

individuals are infringing upon the rights of others, individuals should be free to do as they please.

A Brief History of Libertarianism

According to David Boaz in *A History of Libertarianism*, the first known libertarian was most likely the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu (Boaz, A History of Libertarianism). The creator of Taoism lived in the sixth century B.C. and wrote the *Tao Te Ching,* an extremely cryptic and influential text. Social media moguls and inspirational figures still adorn their pages with the inspirational passages found within it, further cementing its might as the progenitor of an increasingly common worldview.

Tzu is credited as saying, "without law or compulsion, men would dwell in harmony." (Boaz, The Libertarian Reader) It is a simple and idealistic statement, but from a historical context, ancient China was a totalitarian regime that considered Taoist principles to be more of a personal philosophy than any serious approach to political matters. Ancient China's legalist approach to ethics, politics, and metaphysics resonate more with modern day individuals, 27 centuries later in the West.

Libertarianism was also influenced by the Western school of Scholasticism, which was a system of theology and philosophy taught in medieval European universities, based on Aristotelian logic and the writings of the early Christians. Scholasticism places a strong emphasis on tradition and dogma (Dictionary); nevertheless, it gave way to individuals being able to think for themselves and ask questions – although it was often restricted to the Catholic practice of the catechism, which is a theocratic seminar led by members of the priestly order.

The first well-developed manifesto of libertarianism as Westerners view it today was *An Agreement of the People* in 1647. It was produced by the radical republican "Leveler Movement" during the English Civil War, presented to Parliament in 1649. It

clearly illustrated the ideas of individualism, private property, legal equality, diversity in religion, and limited government – ideas that were very popular in the very brief period during the second millennia of the Common Era when the English were not ruled by a monarch:

"We the free People of England ...agree to ascertain our Government, to abolish all arbitrary Power, and to set bounds and limits both to our Supreme, and all Subordinate Authority, and remove all known Grievances." (An Agreement of the People) (Liberty Fund).

During the 19th century, changes continued to occur throughout the Western world. More people began to see the importance of individualism in relation to cultural advancement, thus technological development and living conditions continued to improve. (Boaz, Britannica)

Some famous libertarians of history have included:

- Adin Ballou, anarchist
- William Lloyd Garrison, abolitionist who influenced Frederick Douglas
- Henry David Thoreau, naturalist and advocate of minimal government
- Ayn Rand, right-wing novelist and philosopher
- Noam Chomsky, left-wing linguist and philosopher
- Clint Eastwood, legendary Hollywood actor and director
- Yukio Mishima, writer and kendo master

The above list is a great example of how diverse libertarians are. They are not all anarchists. They are not all men. They are not of the same race. They are not subscribers to the same political ideology. They do not belong to a single social or professional background. They are all, however, grounded in their belief of limited government control and humanity's ability to choose the conditions of their self-ownership and the extent of their responsibilities for themselves.

What is Nihilism?

Nihilism is usually defined as the "philosophy of rejection, negation, or denial of a few or everything that has to do with life or thought" (Craig). It's been interpreted as an extreme invalidation of authority, irrespective of the categories: divine, political, even moral. The idea of nihilism stresses that an inappropriate association exists between political sovereignty and interpretative competence. Therefore, it is a hermeneutic problem as much as it is an ethical problem.

Ironic as this may be, nihilism has its own philosophical essence. Nihilism denies the existence of any basis for knowledge or truth and the general rejection of customary beliefs in morality, religion, etc (Collins Dictionary). In ethics, it is simply the belief that there is no essential purpose to life, and as such, one should not act as though purpose will be fulfilled via action. In politics, nihilism can only express itself through its counterpart - anarchism – which seeks to dismantle social, political, and economic institutions. It is clear how these various nihilistic methods go together. Their primary concern is to reject customary beliefs in favor of the belief that nothing truly matters. It is clear, then, why many anarchistic principles stem from this belief.

Many believe that nihilism is a bleak view. However, the practice of 'positive nihilism' complicates the narrative. Hartmut Lange wrote about this in *Positive Nihilism: My Confrontation with Heidegger,* "There is an abyss of the finite. It is temporality," (Lange, 1). Quotes like this are commonplace throughout the book, but Lange makes it a point to avoid going too far into the negativity of such statements.

"Consciousness errs constantly with regard to clarity of per-spective, to the temporal hue proper to present, past, and future. Even if the individual is capable of

recognizing the horizon of his possibilities, he may, at the behest of his psychological constitution, ignore, overestimate, or reframe what he has recognized, and may do so with explicit recourse" (Lange 4). Lange does grant the fact that the world has been governed by those with less than moral standards, but he also argues that there has been plenty of good that counterbalanced the damages made by the immoral. This has been done for no reason other than inexplicable necessity - yin cannot exist without yang.

Charlie Chaplin had a similar positive spin on the idea that nothing lasts forever, saying: "Nothing in this wicked world is permanent. Not even our problems." (Chaplin) If a popular figure such as him can espouse the same ideologies as a well-read academic, then it follows that other popular artists and creators can introduce their own approaches to these problems in whatever it is they create. In the following pages, I will explore works of nihilistic fiction and show how the seemingly anarchic and nihilistic characters written within them succeed in deriving meaning from their life, even if they do not necessarily admit it or realize it.

A Brief History of Nihilism

The term nihilism comes from the Latin word *nihil,* which means, “amounting to nothing, that which doesn’t exist.” This root is found in the verb "annihilate" - to negate absolutely, or to crush utterly. It began as a philosophy of moral and epistemological skepticism. It came to prominence in 19th-century Russia at the time of Tsar Alexander II’s reign, through cultural critics like Mikhail Bakunin and authors like Fyodor Dostoevsky. The definition expanded in the twentieth century to include additional ideas and definitions, all of which asserted the ultimate meaninglessness of ‘everything.’ (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica)

The German scholar, Friedrich Nietzsche[2], is frequently associated with nihilism. In his highly influential essay, *The Will to Power*[3], Nietzsche argues that "every conviction, everything considering something genuine, is fundamentally false because there is essentially no true world." For Nietzsche, there is no real structure or order on the planet except what we offer it.

Prior to its beginnings as a school of philosophy, nihilism was initially thought to be synonymous with having "no valid values, no genuine ends, that one's entire existence is nothingness.” In its most punctual European roots, “nihilism” was used as a pejorative term against contemporary trends that sought to defeat either domineering Christian standards or generalized traditions. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the writers of the Enlightenment led many of its readers to believe that power ought to be transferred to legislative branches of government, with well-trained bourgeois

[2] 1844-1900
[3] 1883-1888

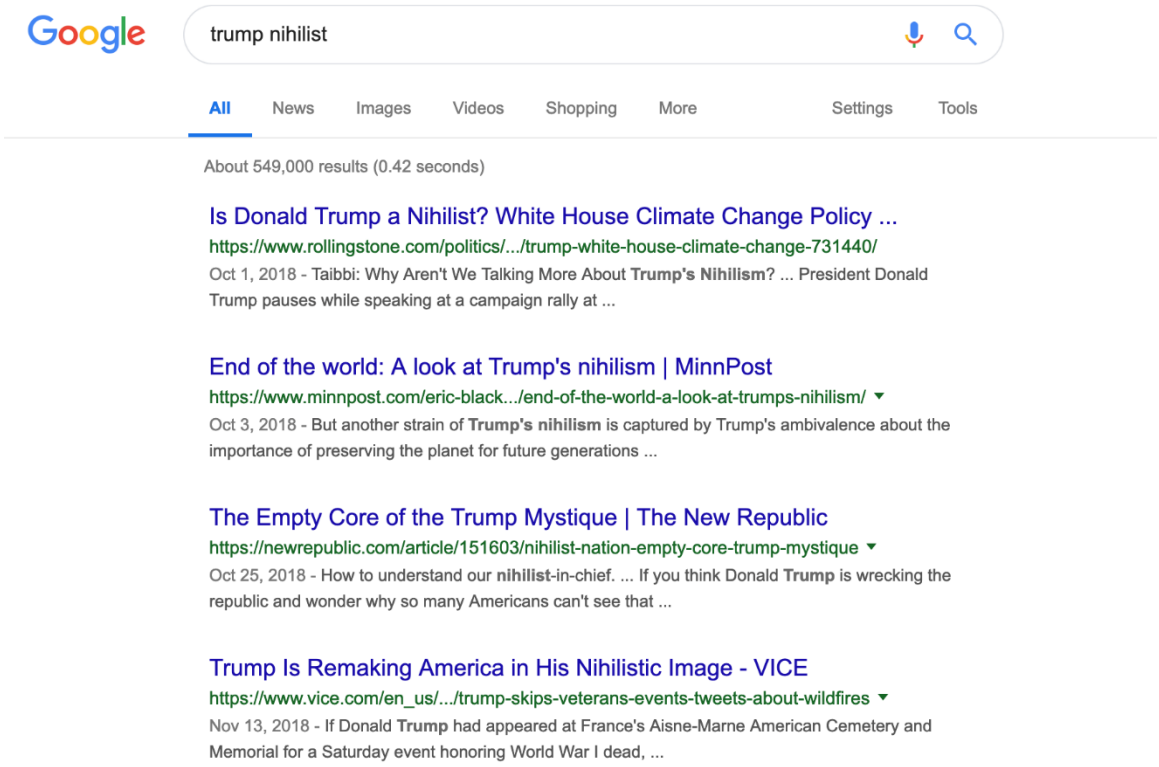
professionals to act as the appointees. Nowhere was this more of a threat than in France, where the executive power of the Bourbon kings was absolute.

Dreading insurrection, the aristocracy made a case: If power remained in the hands of a dependable legislative government, the resulting inefficacy of the executive powers would prompt destruction and death - as it were, nothingness and anarchy. This could only delay the inevitable, as such critiques were launched back and forth between both belligerent entities.

The traditions of absolute rule and feudal separations of social classes was considered valueless by advocates of modernization and change, who saw the status quo as bereft of meaning and relevance. Meanwhile, traditionalists envisioned democratic process and other "republican" ideas as meaningless and destructive in its quest for change, which they considered to be defective by default. Potential shifts in power or philosophy created an atmosphere of fear, so the significance of characterizing one's adversary as nihilistic was politically effective, as it was reactionary. The only thing the school of nihilistic thought brought to the table after the French Revolution was the denial of essential moral functions as they were attached to every institution and every overarching ideology.

Today, we see many nihilists in modern pop culture. Oftentimes, they are anarchists. Albert Camus, a moderate among anarchist thinkers, called upon individuals to rebel against the conditions which make them little more than reactionary beings, in the hopes that they will return to the abstract brotherhood of humanity. Others, such as the characters we will be discussing, choose a more active and volatile approach to radical transformation of society and its meaning. Many argue that Donald Trump is a nihilist, as

a search for the term yields over 549,000 results at the time of this writing. .



These results are speculative even now. Trump has never proclaimed himself to be a nihilist, and he probably never will. The main reason for this is that nihilists today are still very much equated with the underground Internet group Anonymous, who model themselves from the titular character from *V for Vendetta*. Furthermore, this character is based on the story of Guy Fawkes, defeated ringleader of the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, and perhaps the earliest example of the "bomb-throwing anarchist" stereotype.

Regardless, there are many who are not violent in the real world and even more who have nihilistic beliefs. With the rise of outspoken agnostics and atheists - like Penn Gillette (The Preachers), Ricky Gervais (Colbert), and Richard Dawkins (Dawnkins). It is

a matter of time before public figures begin speaking about their nihilistic beliefs as openly as these entertainers and academics who speak about their non-institutional codes of ethics.

Views of Libertarianism and Nihilism

There are many positive characteristics within the ideologies of libertarianism and nihilism, as much as there are negative characteristics. Scholars have been studying the implications of both these ideologies since their popularization in the 19th century, focusing on authors as diverse as Henry David Thoreau and Mikhail Bakunin.

However, many such scholars believe that the political aspects of libertarianism are dangerous and warrant caution. A relevant example of this can be found in Mathias Risse's "*Can There be Libertarianism without Inequality?"* where he stated:

"Unlike egalitarianism, left-libertarianism endorses full self-ownership, and thus places strict limits on what others may do to one's person without one's permission…Like right-libertarianism, left-libertarianism holds that the basic rights of individuals are ownership rights…The core of the problem lies in the attempt to combine two ideas that resist such combination, and thus raises doubts about the very possibility of a credible left-libertarianism" (Mathias 2003).

In his study, Mathias separates libertarians into the two sides of the political spectrum – left-wing and right-wing. He argues that the leftists' approach to libertarianism is especially problematic, citing their "every man for himself" approach to the ideology as one that breeds selfishness and cruelty.

Similarly, *The San Diego Law Review* published an article by Peter Vallentyne a few years later, titled "*Left Libertarianism and Private Discrimination".* The premise he uses to create his argument is defined as follows: "Left-libertarianism is…a form of liberal

egalitarianism in that it recognizes both liberty rights and equality rights." Vallentyne later attempts to prove that rights of liberty and rights of equality are contradictory, therefore leftist libertarianism causes unjust principles. "There is nothing unjust in principle with private discrimination, but there is something unjust about doing nothing to promote equal life prospects." (Vallentyne 2006)

Not everyone has agreed with that sentiment, deciding to publish counter-arguments of their own. The same year *Left Libertarianism and Private Discrimination* was published, Tibor Machan released *Libertarianism Defended.* The views he espouses are closely linked to the ideas that this dissertation seeks to prove - libertarianism often receives negative press from both sides of the traditional left-right political spectrum, but there are certainly positive ways that one can live by libertarian ideologies. Machan argues that the reason why few critics have stood by libertarianism is due to the politically loaded interpretations of it, created by Robert Nozick during the 70s:

"Ever since the publication in 1974 of Robert Nozick's 'Anarchy, State and Utopia', libertarianism has been much discussed within political philosophy, science and economy circles. Yet libertarianism has been so strongly identified with Nozick's version of it that little attention has been devoted to other than Nozick's ideas and arguments…" (Machan Abstract)

More recently, Kaja Tretjak published *Millennial libertarians: The rebirth of a movement and the transformation of U.S. political culture*, which attempts to redefine how libertarian ideology is expressed in a present-day context.

Libertarianism presently holds a renewed relevance for a substantial part of an entire generation gravely disenchanted by a world embroiled in economic crisis and heavily

militarized systems of governance. Millennial youth are currently the demographic that is most inclined to harbor a deep-seated suspicion regarding the capability nation-states have when attempting to meet the challenges presented by any number of contemporary dilemmas. While libertarian misgivings regarding state involvement in fiscal and economic affairs are well-known, approaches vary greatly within the strikingly multifaceted movement and draw upon disparate intellectual lineages. The single set of issues that presently unites the majority of participants across ideological divides is a critique of state-sponsored violence. Vehement opposition to U.S. imperialism and military action abroad has been the most consistent factor, but there is also an increasing level of outrage concerning the encroachment of civil liberties and the intensifying surveillance at home – both of which are created under the pretense that the war on drugs and domestic security are greater threats to civil liberties (Tretjak 4-5). Tretjak has clearly identified the reasons why newer generations are motivated by individualism, as well as leftist ideas. Based on the era within which they grew up, many do not have a great amount of faith to save for traditionally respected institutions, such as religion or the government.

The intensity of the debate is far less extreme when it comes to nihilism. Most scholars agree that it can be a dangerous view of the world. In *Nihilism: Belief Crisis of Youth,* John J. Mitchell identified how young people can become nihilistic and often grow out of it. This is a phenomenon known as *psychogenic nihilism,* which is a condition where a youth may become unstable due to nonbelief. While there are some merits to Mitchell's statements, he treats *psychogenic nihilism* as an axiomatic factor that controls ethical instability directly, therefore positive aspects of nihilism simply cannot exist. He is only referring to the part of nihilism where people lose hope and justify everything as a response.

Focusing on the negatives associated with nihilism can be just as dangerous as believing in nihilism, because nihilism never makes the case that meaninglessness automatically compels someone to act unethically and then claim that their liberation from presupposed sources of meaning is what made them do it.

Mitchell's critique of nihilism was penned in 1979, several years after *A Clockwork Orange* popularized Western nihilistic literature with youth at the center. Mitchell was instrumental in exposing modern nihilism to American audiences, which may explain why so many have such grim views of the most anti-ideological ideology in Western thought.

Mitchell's influence has done its damage. *The News Leader* published a recent article, called *The dangerous nihilism of Trump voters,* which argues this: "The voter nihilism that Trump both reflects and stimulates is a symptom of political decay. 'He's not perfect, but anyone would be better than this corrupt bunch,' is the sort of thing many Italians said, once upon a time, about Silvio Berlusconi, or Russians about Vladimir Putin, or Venezuelans about Hugo Chavez." Of course, this begs the question - is that really what happened? Was it really nihilism that got Trump into office? It seems like the people chose someone who was outside of the system, yes, but making that choice is anything but nihilistic. This exemplifies how popular culture uses nihilism as an ideological scapegoat that creates its villains. Trump voters may have their own ideological agenda they want to present within bureaucratic discourse, just as much as they would want no ideological agenda in government at all.

The most level-headed take on this controversial subject comes in the form of *Nihil "overcomes" nihilism: a study of "Nothing" in Heidegger's Being and Time and What is Metaphysics?* This book may argue that we can potentially overcome nihilism, but at least

it doesn't villainize it like the other critiques previously mentioned. "While there is no way out of the nihilist experience of the lack of why, an 'original' experience of 'nothing' can disclose a different way of dwelling in nihilism (Becker 1)."

Nihilistic Libertarians?

Many argue about whether it is even possible to be a nihilistic libertarian. As this work will attempt to prove, it is at the very least plausible to suggest that it is. Nick Crafts, Professor of Economics and Economic History at the University of Warwick, created a presentation on nihilism in *Fight Club,* where he stated, "Everything that we see, touch, hold, and smell is irrelevant and thus nothing matters except freedom." (Crafts, Critical approaches list). If libertarianism believes freedom ought to be the most important value to be upheld, then the common link between this ideology and nihilism also must be upheld.

My definition of a nihilistic libertarian is someone who feels that there is no given meaning in life, so they use their freedom to make their own meaning. Many of the characters in the Coen Brothers' films do this in a positive sense. The only thing that differentiates The Dude from the nihilists in *The Big Lebowski* is that The Dude never complains about how unfair certain situations appear to be. He simply "abides" by them as best he can. In many other cases, however, there are those that take nihilism to the negative extreme and have a more anarchic approach, like what we see in Chuck Palahniuk and Anthony Burgess's novels. Seeing as how the actions and motives of their characters lead to such drastic effects upon the world, many tend to think of nihilists as wholly negative characters. Even if this is not a given, it is still necessary to examine the negative representations of nihilistic libertarian characters in literature, if we are to authentically critique their presence and their effects on modern literature and film.

Nihilists in Libertarian Western Modern Literature and Film

Nihilistic characters with literature and film are usually portrayed as anarchists, dating all the way back to Mafile in Joseph Konrad's *The Anarchist.* However, for all their 'purposelessness,' even characters such as Mafile find ways to create their own meaning. Some of the meanings they create for themselves - like violence and hurting others - are extreme and not indicative of the classical definition of libertarian ethics. However, others find meaning through family, art, or education. If these characters truly believed in meaninglessness, they would not be so obsessed with these interests. Each of these interests must contain some promise of progress from one point in life to another. Without this promise, one loses the will to live – whether it's the simple will of existing or the more complex will of thriving within one's experiences. Anarchistic, nihilistic, or libertarian characters often choose to live their lives to the extreme, which is quite the contrary conclusion to make, compared to someone who believes life is completely without merit.

Nihilism doesn't need to be a negative or dangerous ideology. The only essential characteristic of nihilism is that it is a more narrowly defined ideology of freedom. The purpose of positive nihilism is to change values that no longer work and supplant them with the ones that do, which makes it a tool for critical thinking. Constructive nihilism thwarts the exclusionary attitudes that dictate sociopathic behavior, because it argues that it is a logical fallacy to justify that behavior by simply negating the existence of meaning in everything – including morals. The senseless violence of over-the-top nihilism reveals itself to be nothing more than intellectual laziness, as fallacious as many forms of inane political rhetoric. Once this realization has been obtained, nihilism can enter its

invigorating stage and turn into a premise within the greater ideologies of multiculturalism, pluralism, and the underlying foundations of religion - love, compassion, and charity.

Both nihilism and libertarianism are relatively new concepts, shaped within the past couple centuries and truly coming of age within the past fifty years. I argue that the turn away from community-oriented living has permitted nihilism and libertarianism to flourish in whatever way it presents itself. As recently as a century ago, community was centered around religion and around trade unions. People in the community would meet with their neighbors in church and with their coworkers in public venues. They generally were there for one another at work and at home. Today, however, our western world has largely turned away from both institutions. It is true that communities have been made through other avenues, such as online forums. Nevertheless, it is now possible to join dozens upon dozens of communities from an armchair, therefore we are physically far more atomized than we were even fifty years ago.

Rates of organized religion and church attendance are at an all-time low. An article in *The Atlantic,* titled *Breaking Faith,* stated:

"Over the past decade, pollsters charted something remarkable: Americans - long known for their piety - were fleeing organized religion in increasing numbers. The vast majority still believed in God. But the share that rejected any religious affiliation was growing fast, rising from 6 percent in 1992 to 22 percent in 2014. Among Millennials, the figure was 35 percent." (BEINART)

A similar article was released in the UK in an article that ran in *The Spectator,* with this headline: *Religion is on the decline – yet our society is underpinned by faith.* The article

claims that the number of people who identified as religious plunged five percent in just one year. (The Spectator)

We are encouraged to develop personal identity far more often than we are encouraged to participate in the local community, which has its merits just as much as it has its failings. Society at large is now more inclined to accept people who are not a part of majority demographics, whether the variable involved is their race, gender, class, sexual orientation, etc. However, because there are enough people hard at work to diminish the power of such acceptance, these minority communities create their own party lines, thus placing a hard limit on the extent to which individuality can be explored. For example, it may be difficult for a trans woman to become fully accepted by the LGBT community (Jacobs) if they espouse more conservative views. This is the case with Caitlyn Jenner, who is a registered Republican (MORRISON).

It should be clear at this point that the effects of nihilism and libertarianism on individuals and communities are far from self-explanatory. This creates room for interpretation when it comes to the examination of these ideologies and their auxiliary themes within works of popular culture. In the following pages, I will explore nihilists (or nihilistic societies) in film and literature and point out where they truly derive their meanings, both positive and negative.

From Violence to Freewill and Family: A Clockwork Orange

The British novel, A *Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess, was published in 1962. It was turned into a classic film adaptation by Stanley Kubrick in 1971, based on the American version of the novel, which removed the end chapters to create an ending completely divorced from the author's original intention. It follows the protagonist, Alex, who is the teenage leader of an 'ultraviolent' gang. As the plot progresses, he accidentally murders a woman and is sent to jail. While serving his sentence, he is signed up for a new experimental process called the "Ludovico Technique", which promises to remove his violent urges through severe classical conditioning. Alex undergoes the process successfully, and his violent urges have been removed. Thanks to a string of coincidences related to the beginning of the story, however, those who he hurt at the beginning of the story exact their revenge upon him. The extent of Alex's conditioning has removed his ability to act violently, even if it is in self-defense, thus Alex is unable to do anything about it. The final act of the film finds Alex in the hospital with the governor, who apologizes profusely. As Alex imagines a violent scene in his head, we realize that his free-will has been restored, so he can choose to act as he pleases according to his conscience. This film, as well as the localized American novel, concludes here. The original British publication ends once Alex decides that violence is boring and imagines himself with a family. Although the two endings are radically different from each other, both versions are nihilistic and libertarian in their own ways.

This argument has been made before in various publications. Kubrick's film was listed as one of the top 15 nihilistic films of all time by Taste of Cinema[4]. However, if one were to read the novel alongside the film, regardless of its localization edits, the story comes off as more libertarian than nihilist. Regardless of the direction Alex moves towards, both Burgess and Kubrick agree that it is better to at least possess the power to exercise free will rather than sacrifice it and hand it over to a government entity. Governments who use scientific means to control free will fail to penetrate the mystique behind it, which is why Alex could not become anything more than a clockwork orange after the success of the Ludovico Technique.

Finding meaning through violence is perhaps the main critique of nihilism as it appears in the beginning of the story. Alex and his gang's main goal at the beginning of the book is to terrorize, but it is merely for their own amusement. They can do this because of a lack of "law and order", or so says a homeless man they beat up early in the plot. But this begs the question - how much law and order does it take to create too much law and order? By the end of the book, we clearly see that hypnotizing people so that they can no longer act in ways the government views as inappropriate may be more dangerous than people acting violently according to their own free will. What becomes the real nihilistic principle in the story – violence resulting from boredom, or violence resulting from a social mandate?

The book points to the fact that individuals should decide right and wrong for themselves. It is not sufficient to be 'good' just because an all-powerful being, such as a

[4] http://www.tasteofcinema.com/2015/15-great-nihilistic-movies-that-are-worth-your-time/

god or a government, tells them what is good or permits them to do good by its standards. Even though it cannot provide an idealistic resolution to the systemic problems associated nihilism or authoritarian doctrine, both Burgess and Kubrick insist that the preservation of freewill is a required axiom if any such solution to is be treated with any credence. Without freewill, we cease to be individuals, and a sheer lack of individuality is truly a dangerous prospect when you have authority figures creating that lack for the sake of law and order.

Anthony Burgess and Why He Chose to Write A Clockwork Orange

John Anthony Burgess Wilson was born in 1917 in Manchester, England, to his father Joseph Burgess, a clerk and bar piano player, and his mother Elizabeth Wilson. His mother and his sister both died of influenza in 1919, and Burgess was raised by his maternal aunt, and later his stepmother. He went to study English language and literature at Xaverian College and Manchester University in 1940 where he earned a degree in English language and writing. However, his primary enthusiasm was music, which may be why Alex is so drawn to music in *A Clockwork Orange* – the only source of meaning in Alex's life that isn't dictated by violence.

Anthony Burgess started writing *A Clockwork Orange* in late 1960 when he was diagnosed as being on the verge of "dying from an inoperable cerebral tumor." He initially wanted to expound on the "world of adolescent violence and government retribution", which was a saying associated with the politicians of that time. Mods, Rockers, and Teddyboys were the names of the street gangs prowling through the cities of England during the 60s, and Burgess used the cultures behind all three belligerent groups as sources

of inspiration for his characters. However, he feared that the utilization of current street vernacular would, in the end, make the book feel obsolete as time carried on.

By 1961, it appeared though as Burgess still had some time to live. He decided to transform the main theme of the book into this simple, yet powerful statement: Choice and free will are essential to maintain humankind, both exclusively and publicly; without them, man is never truly human but a "clockwork orange" - a mechanical toy for others to interact with in ways they see fit.

In 1962, *A Clockwork Orange* was published. Its readers and its critics immediately recognized the ironic and dystopian themes surrounding the brutal endeavors of a modern high school gang and its classical music-loving leader, Alex. The book parodies psychologist B.F. Skinner's theories of human conduct and the welfare state, as they were tied in to his overarching psychological theory of behaviouralism, perhaps the only school of thought that was capable of challenging psychoanalysis at the time. It also pays a heavy homage to George Orwell's *1984*, by using a linguistic creole unique to the world of *A Clockwork Orange,* called Nadsat. Stanley Kubrick's adaptation of the book into a feature film in 1971 won Burgess many new readers and verified the novel's notoriety as one of the most scandalous in 20th century English literature. Lamentably, Burgess sold the movie rights to A Clockwork Orange for just $500 and got below $3,000 in payments after the release of the film. Needless to say, he was not a great fan of the film, despite it being directed by one of the greatest directors of all time (Burgess, A Clockwork Orange) (Bartebly). Much attention has been paid to the stark contrast between Burgess's ending and Kubrick's, but it also must be noted that the use of Nadsat in the film is very

conservative compared to the novel – which may have served to diminish Burgess's views on the adaptation even further.

Is It Really All Just About Violence?

Many readers and viewers of the film are blinded by the violence associated with the story. Much like Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* (1994)*, Clockwork* satirizes violence. Burgess writes the most horrific parts of it in an exaggerated style to illustrate its danger. Kubrick takes it a step further by making effective use of a wide variety of shooting and editing techniques. Readers and viewers can imagine and even see a greater point being made about society, provided they are capable of examining the material that exists beyond the spectacle.

In *The Future of the Individual: The Relationship between the Collective, the Individual, Free Will, and Violence in A Clockwork Orange, Brave New World, and Ender's Game,* Adam Joseph Koci explores the relationship between the collective, the individual, and the violence that occurs between the two. The author writes that the central conflict of *A Clockwork Orange* occurs "between the individual and the social order." He argues that the main purpose of the novel is to determine whether an "individual's primary expression of free will is through acts of violence." He believes that due to the commercialism of the society presented by Burgess, violence is the only way that disaffected youth can express their free will. The appropriate response of a highly commercial society is to exert its authority by the same means as the nihilistically rebellious youth, which often results in police brutality and morally compromised experimentation in science.

Koci's opinions on this aspect of the story does possess its flaws. First, he argues that violence is a way of expressing one's free will in the book, because the commercialization of every aspect of society led directly to feelings of insufferable

boredom within it. This is only partially true. Drugs were 'commercialized', thanks to the Synthemesc, Vellocet, and Drencrom sold in the "moloko clubs". Fashions were also commercialized, which can be seen more viscerally in the film when Alex and his "droogs" encounter the rival gang – known for wearing disturbingly iconic military fatigues worn by German soldiers during the Third Reich. But was this dystopian society any more commercialized or any more violent than the society and the time within which it was written? Many characters had bright hair dyed different colors and dressed differently without resorting to violence in order to do it. Unlike the rest of his droogs, Alex enjoyed classical music – but never had to resort to direct violence in order to enjoy it. He had a pet snake, which he never treated violently. These were all ways of expressing his individuality. Whether he tied in his beloved Beethoven with thoughts of ultraviolence or not is merely an incidental factor in either case. It wasn't until Alex became a prisoner that everything positive he ever had was taken away from him. To cope with the true presentation of boredom now thrust upon him, he viewed his entry into the Ludovico program as entertaining – up until the point where the conditioning process began. The author even pointed out that the officers used violence, and it is clear that their aim was not to express their own personal individuality, or their own free will to be an abusive representation of the law. I believe the violence in the novel acted more as a vehicle to show that the violence associated with nihilism has its limitations, whereas the violence associated with authoritarian doctrine is limitless.

It is also highly obvious that Koci read and responded to the British version of the novel. In that version, Alex decides, with his own freewill, to cast aside wrongdoing forever and start a family. The American version and Kubrick's adaptation movie ends as Alex

relapses back into violent fantasy. Yet the author does not mention the distinction, which shows that he might not have been aware of the two very different endings and why he created an argument that is only partially convincing.

Koci also calls the violence in *Clockwork* ambiguous, and I think that is also a common misconception he falls victim to. Every act of violence in the story serves an explicit purpose, especially when one pays attention to the victims of said violence. Whether the victims are a rival gang, a senior citizen, or even Alex himself, power is always the dominant reason behind it. The rival gang does not act violently in self-defense, for they and Alex's gang are on an equal playing field, where only one can rise as the victor. The elderly cannot fight back because the young exude an aura of power that proves that they will win before the first blow has even landed. Alex cannot fight back because his conditioning has left him powerless to separate the need for self-defense from the power principle so commonly associated with violence-in-itself. Every offending character wants power, because they know that power and only power can help them find meaning within their otherwise incredibly dull lives.

A Libertarian Film and Novel Disguised as a Nihilistic One?

A Clockwork Orange is a story where readers and critics can argue back and forth as to whether it is libertarian or nihilistic. “The denial of the existence of any basis for knowledge or truth” and “the general rejection of customary beliefs in morality, religion, etc.” (Collins Dictionary) are themes that can be seen clearly within the text. Libertarian themes, such as the dangers of too much government power are visible as well. If we are to examine the environment surrounding the story’s events, then it is easy to see where the debate comes from. The book and film start out quite nihilistically. There is no law and order. The world is in chaos. But by the end, we see that the government possesses so much power that they can take away freewill through psychological experimentation. The film adds even more complexity to the problem by showing Alex going back to his old ways of violence, at least in terms of his desires. We wonder whether he had freewill to begin with, or if his sociopathic tendencies could ever truly be removed. In the end, Alex is controlled by internal and external forces, but the government has no control over either of them, allowing for nihilistic and libertarian interpretations to have equal merit. The UK version of the book sees Alex overcoming his sociopathic tendencies due to maturity. One might think this is a point against nihilism, but then again, perhaps it is simply the psychological effects of aging. But even if we are to assume that this is the case, it doesn’t strengthen any argument for the importance of freewill in personal development if we are forced to wait until we are older before we become better people.

A fantastic dissection of the film by Daniel Shaw has this to say on the subject: “To be essentially characterized as a causally determined mechanism with no free choice reduces human existence to a nihilistic collocation of its chemical properties.” If we link

this statement to the phrase ‘a clockwork orange’, then we can see that authoritarianism is directly linked to the development of nihilism. Burgess himself also provides evidence for themes of libertarianism superseding nihilism: “A human being is endowed with free will. He can use this to choose between good and evil. If he can only perform good or only perform evil, then he is a clockwork orange — meaning that he has the appearance of an organism lovely with colour and juice but is in fact only a clockwork toy to be wound up by God or the Devil or (since this is increasingly replacing both) the Almighty State.” (Riggenbach)

Nihilists know that one can be good or evil, but each person in crisis over this may not believe that they hold the power to control their journey that leads them further down either path of morality. Libertarians, on the other hand, would hear this and believe that such inability is tragic, if not criminal, which may have been Burgess’ true intent in writing this book. The main question that should be asked is how each character in the story values certain things. The parental figures value fashion and consumerism more than their family. The adolescents value violence. The government values power. Each party has created their own distinct meanings in their lives, and they value themselves based on the meanings they apply value to. Alex’s mother Em is proud of her purple hair. It gives her more meaning, in the sense that she is able to live with herself. Officer Deltoid, on the other hand, would not feel more valuable from having purple hair. It might even affect his confidence in a negative way. Having the power to put social deviants in jail is preferable. Each of these characters find their own meanings, but do their individual meanings mean anything if they are not universally appreciated?

Paul Fredric calls *Clockwork* a "libertarian anthem." (Fritz) Plenty of evidence exists supporting this. At the very core of the story is the notion that freewill should act as the first and foremost principle of moral development. Depending on which version you read, it even says that it is better for someone to choose to be evil than for everyone to be forced to be good. Nihilists would challenge this by asking whether evil truly exists as a principle of freedom. Can someone truly be evil, or is evil merely a predestined personality trait? Is Alex truly evil or is he just influenced by internal and external forces out of his control? In Burgess's rendition, Alex's circumstances change; things are not as chaotic for him as they once were. If this was his decision to make, can anyone truly characterize him with a term as uncompromising as 'evil?' Obviously, his heinous and violent crimes are nothing to take lightly and they go directly against the classical libertarian view of doing as you wish, so long as no one else is harmed. On the other hand, though, the dangers of too much government interference are shown to be even more dangerous than an individual's crimes, and had it not been for Alex, this idea would never have been expressed to the reader as powerfully as it does.

Film Techniques in A Clockwork Orange

Stanley Kubrick's well-documented perfectionism as a filmmaker comes from his previous professional experience as a photographer. Above all, Kubrick is a master of *framing,* which takes the photographic elements of camera placement and mise-en-scene and applies them to a filmic format. The pivotal scene in which Alex kills the "cat lady" (Areias) is a great scene to explore, if we are interested in Kubrick's use of these photography techniques used throughout the film.

The first two minutes of the scene shows how the cat lady and Alex are shown in the frame. They are standing slightly off-center in the frame, signifying unease even during the exposition of the scene. The "rule of thirds" is also respected here in the first shot – which is one of the more complicated practices associated with framing technique. Imagine cutting the frame into 9 equal sections, like a tic-tac-toe board. Once that is done, it is important to try and identify what your eye is drawn to in each section. In the case of this establishing shot, the three erotic paintings are present in each third going from the left-hand side of the frame to the right).

When the action finally starts, the camera turns into a "steady cam", meaning that it is controlled manually by the cameraman. This is why the framing shakes so much during the fight; Kubrick is deliberately providing free movement for the cameraman, as well as the Director of Photography, in order to make the action more exciting – and consequently, more disturbing.

The use of zoom gives the final moments of the fight a farcical quality – pornographic, even. Nowhere is this more present than in the final few seconds of the fight.

The zoom goes in and out, which obviously refers to the violent turn that sexuality has taken here, as well as the complete dominance of Alex through his point of view.

When the murder is committed, the audience is not allowed to see it. This is nothing new in cinema – Mickey Mouse's character in Walt Disney's *Fantasia* destroyed the animated broom with an axe, but the shadows illustrate the action, not the characters themselves. However, Kubrick does something very different to produce the same effect. This is where Kubrick pays homage to Jean-Luc Godard, French New Wave director and contemporary to François Truffaut. Godard was responsible for popularizing the *jump cut*, an editing technique that used to be considered extremely amateur prior to the 1960s. The jump cut in question here is, in fact, a montage of many Warhol-esque erotic paintings.

Finally, we see Alex leave the house. Alex's position in the very center of the frame automatically proves to the audience that Alex has proven himself once again to be all-powerful. However, this is not to last. After a brief shot where Dim breaks the milk bottle over Alex's face (shot at a higher rate of frames per second to achieve a slow-motion effect), we see Alex on the ground wailing *while still completely centered in the frame*, making the reversal of fortune just as powerful as Alex's victory mere seconds before.

All the different methods Kubrick used to create this very pivotal scene serve to illustrate how brutal manifestations of power work. Sometimes the effect of power leads to a visual sense of unease, might, utter weakness, even macabre humor. Kubrick's perfectionism as a photographer was a requirement if he wanted every presentation of power in this scene to produce equally jarring effects within the audience.

In the book, the main problem that a new reader would have to address is most likely the author's use of language. One must learn the made-up Nadsat dialect rather quickly to understand the plot. In the film, however, brutal violence is the world building element. There is no looking the other way.

The film is brilliantly produced. The slightly futuristic British setting is incredibly geometric, full of urban decay that is masked only slightly through the use of vivid colors. Beethoven's music is among the main characters, as Beethoven's Fifth is played throughout the film. Alex is inadvertently also brainwashed to hate his beloved Beethoven music, which was a detail in the movie that was not present in the novel. It is difficult to imagine the loss of musical taste in a text description, but the film allows audiences to feel the protagonist's pain as his favorite artist makes him nauseous enough to attempt suicide.

In the book, we can see some influence from earlier works like *Fahrenheit 451.* Alex and his droogs do not care for education, and they show this by beating the books out of the senior's hands before they start beating him in earnest. The film is not as blatant about anti-education. On the contrary, Alex is presented as more intellectual, thanks to his appreciation for his "Ludwig Van." Because the book presents the brainwashing of Alex in a way that prevents him from enjoying all music, the negative effects of the brainwashing is far broader, far less precise in its implications. In the film, Alex was affected by only one classical artist – his favorite – therefore, the film shows that the greatest negative effect of the brainwashing is the dissonance between what Alex learned to appreciate and the psycho-physiological inability to do so. The Ludovico technique is a destruction of intellectual capacity.

The greatest discrepancy between Burgess and Kubrick's presentation of the story lies within the end of Kubrick's film. The last chapter in the UK edition is entirely missing from the US version, which was the source material Kubrick used to create his film adaptation. Burgess's American editor decided to rebel against the tried-and-true formula of the anti-hero who experiences a reformation of morality and spirit, preferring instead to leave the narrative at the point where the government fails to "cure" delinquency via brainwashing. The more optimistic outcome in the original British edition was deemed by this editor to be "too unrealistic". Burgess later admitted in an interview that he only agreed to this darker American version because he needed the paycheck. (Schindler)

When ThatWasNotInTheBook.com polled readers on whether the book was better than the film or vice versa, 70% preferred the book (That Was not in the Book). This is because the book does a better job at describing the meaning of the book than the film, which makes no mention of the title's meaning. In the book, Alex wrote an essay about the Ludovico procedure and how a man with a conscience that cannot make his own choices is no longer a man. The film would have had a much clearer meaning had that been described, because it is the one moment where Alex has the chance to put everything about his world on trial.

However, it is important to note that Kubrick was not a storyteller, but a filmmaker. He did not write his own scripts, unlike many other auteur filmmakers of his generation. Nevertheless, this gave him all the reasons he needed to adapt a story to film, because he found many opportunities to create a very convincing visual spectacle out of the source material. Some aspects of the film, like the music and vivid colors, add an undeniably powerful layer over the equally impressive use the language and thematic details that exist

in the book. Others, like the film's shot-by-shot techniques, express even more through suggestion and manipulation. What we are left to conclude is that an experience of both the book and the film is required to obtain a comprehensive appreciation of the vision of Anthony Burgess.

Stephen Whitty wrote an article which made the bold claim that *A Clockwork Orange* was more relevant today than ever. I believe this is because of the more violent and unpredictable fluctuations that is currently gripping 21st Western society. It drives individuals to look for their own meanings within anything, which sometimes turns into nihilistic/anarchistic events that would not be out of place if they were to be seen within *A Clockwork Orange.* On the controversy, Whitty wrote:

"A Clockwork Orange" isn't about the unimportance of family and social structure, but about what happens when they become unimportant; it's not about the temptations that make us act like beasts, but how the ability to control those urges makes us human."

If abject nihilism does not apply to the personalities and ideologies that form Alex and many other characters, both in the novel and the film, it may be more appropriate to describe them as "reformed nihilists". Due to the anarchic society they lived in, they were desperate to finding meaning anywhere they could, even in the most desperate of places. But by the end, many of the characters saw that there was more out there than they realized, and that is when they begin to change and see the world from another point of view. Alex Delarge explores the meaning of his life in both the novel and film. First and foremost, his meaning is power derived through violence. Devoid of any institutional purpose, such as 'law and order' or religion, Alex turns to violence through his gang to project his power.

For a brief time in prison, his purpose becomes getting out of prison. He even feigns religious epiphany to do so, but it is not long before we see his true colors, as he envisions biblical scenes within the framework of graphic, cathartic violence. Even in prison, his life purpose seems to be centered on his violent urges. When those urges are taken from him, he suddenly has no will to live. When he miraculously survives his suicide attempt, Alex goes right back to his old ways of violence. From there, we can intuit that violence is the one true meaning in Alex's life. In the British novel's ending, Alex toys with the notion of giving up violence, but we do not see far enough into the future to see if he actually does this.

Nihilists do not usually derive meaning from such violent means, but Alex is an extreme case. He sees no true consequences to his actions at the beginning of the book, but by the end, he does see that there are greater meanings – once he has experienced the consequences of his own personal meaning in life for himself. Does this necessarily mean he will change his behavior? No. But it does mean he has a greater understanding of his role in society and his attitudes to life, regardless of what he does with it.

Another meaning in Alex's life is music, which is explicated thoroughly in the book:

"There was music playing, a very nice malenky string quartet, my brothers, by Claudius Bird-man, one that I knew well. I had to have a smeck, though, thinking of what I'd viddied once in one of these like articles on Modern Youth, about how Modern Youth would be better off if A Lively Appreciation Of The Arts could be like encouraged. Great Music, it said, and Great Poetry would like quieten Modern Youth down and make Modern Youth more Civilized." (26)

Alex thinks in these terms, and when his music is ripped from him, he is considerably more lost than when he was a delinquent. It is plausible to argue that the lack of music in his life, not violence, ended up being the factor which contributed to his suicide attempt the most. Alex could not be a true nihilist or his will to do all that he did would not exist. Alex socializes, leads people, joins groups, enjoys the arts, and so much more. If he or his society truly believed there was no meaning to anything, he could not have enjoyed any of that, not even the moloko plus.

On page 62 of the novel, Alex says, “It's funny how the colours of the like real world only seem really real when you viddy them on the screen.” He clearly has a deep appreciation for the world around him and sees value in the beauty of it – but only in a commercialized format. In a world where we view the world through screens, we can see why some would consider this work more relevant today than ever.

In the last lines of the book, Alex says:

“But where I itty now, O my brothers, is all on my oddy knocky, where you cannot go. Tomorrow is all like sweet flowers and the turning vonny earth and the stars and the old Luna up there and your old droog Alex all on his oddy knocky seeking like a mate. And all that cal. A terrible grahzny vonny world, really, O my brothers. And so farewell from your little droog. And to all others in this story profound shooms of lipmusic brrrrrr. And they can kiss my sharries. But you, O my brothers, remember sometimes thy little Alex that was. Amen. And all that cal.”

There is another meaning Alex has derived: he wants to be remembered. He wants a legacy. That is his new meaning. He sees that yet another meaning to his life will be what is passed on of him, how he will live on.

No Country for Nihilists?

No Country for Old Men was written in 2005 by Cormac McCarthy and made into a Coen Brothers film in 2007. It takes place in 1980 near the US-Mexico Border in the West Texas desert. The title of the novel has been taken from the W.B. Yeats poem *Sailing to Byzantium,* which states how there is no place in this society for men of a certain age, given the transformation of values that come with each generation.

The book *No Country for Old Men* is about three central characters: Anton Chigurh, a psychopathic murderer; Llewellyn Moss, a hunter who stumbles over a drug deal gone wrong; and Ed Tom Bell, a Texas sheriff. Moss finds a bag among the littered dead filled with $2 million in cash. He takes the bag and remains on the run through the rest of the story. Chigurh, who is loosely connected to the cash exchange with the drug dealers, has one mission to accomplish: recover the cash, by any means possible. Bell is the unsuccessful and unlikely hero of the story. He tries to save Moss' life every chance he gets, finding nothing but barriers between himself and the level of success he wants out of this case.

Sheriff Bell and his deputies start their investigation of the ill-fated drug deal and a few connected murders. Bell, who is haunted by the passing of his men in WWII, makes it his main objective to protect Moss and his young wife, Carla Jean, while bringing the criminals involved to justice. Meanwhile, Chigurh, a merciless hitman who uses a slaughterhouse gun intended for killing cattle as his weapon of choice, has no traditionally defined modus operandi. He normally flips a coin to decide if someone lives or dies. Regardless, he is the one hired to track down Moss and the money. A thrilling game of cat

and mouse begins, in which Moss utilizes his survival instincts and military aptitude to avoid Chigurh and the Mexican drug cartel, who both want the money back.

A couple of months later, Sheriff Bell visits his Uncle Ellis and seeks advice on the blame he feels about his involvement in WWII and his inability to unravel the mystery behind the crimes in his locale. He discusses leaving his job as sheriff. When he returns home, he gets a call informing him about the discovery of the weapon used to Kill Carla Jean, who he couldn't protect. The story ends with Bell's resignation, a symbolic surrender to the overwhelming powers of evil that will always reign in the world.

At the time that this story takes place, the desire for easy money gave rise to several illegal industries in the southern borderlands of America - including drug trafficking, kidnappings, and professionally contracted murders. McCarthy argues that human predilection towards violence is the sole reason for the present socio-political climate. The antagonist Chigurh does not seem to be bothered by worldly concerns like the other characters. On the outside looking in, Chigurh seems insane and wildly unpredictable. However, Chigurh lives by a value system all his own. He seems to have his own twisted value system associated with the concepts of chance and destiny, which he believes can be seen clearly through the coin toss. As such, Chigurh finds his meaning through ritual, which provides the order and purpose he needs to keep moving forward.

The film stayed very true to the novel, which is not surprising, since the adaptation was produced merely two years apart from the source material. The dialogue is mostly taken straight from the book, and the general tone of the movie captures many of the novel's thematic components precisely. It is a distinct, mysterious, and vicious movie

produced from a book that is similarly distinct, mysterious, and vicious (Cormac McCarthy).

The one major difference is in the ending. Our protagonist Llewelyn Moss is killed offscreen by the drug cartel, and then the ending comes quite quickly once Bell retires. Other differences include how the decreased level of interaction between Chigurh and Moss' wife in the novel compared to the film; the text only explains how he shoots her. She likewise does not refuse to call head or tail on his coin in the novel. When she does, she does it inaccurately. However, the dialogue they share in the book is very similar to that of the film, which discusses how Chigurh is the one calling her destiny and not the coin.

The book is also more explicit about how Chigurh wound up in the vehicle of the deputy he killed at the start of the movie; he killed a man for a nasty comment, then allowed himself to be caught "to see if I could extricate myself by an act of will." Even though he exposes some parts of his life to Carson Wells before murdering him, Chigurh casts it off as a useless, silly act.

Additionally, the first hotel encounter between Chigurh and Moss plays out differently. As opposed to punching out the lock and injuring Moss, Chigurh seemingly takes a key from the dead clerk and silently goes into Moss' room. Moss hides and ambushes him at gunpoint, so they get an opportunity to see and know one another. At that point, Moss runs, and the chase begins.

Finally, the book often returns to the sheriff's monologues, underlining his sense of defenselessness, while the film naturally centers on the action between Moss and Chigurh. If these differences seem far less extreme than those of *A Clockwork Orange*, it's because the Coen Brothers wanted them that way. Adapting literature into a predominantly visual

format forces creators to rearrange content that detracts from the visual power associated with the characters. Chigurh might not have been as menacing in the film if he did say something about his brief capture while interrogating Wells. Nor might it have been possible for the themes to become fully integrated into what is shown on screen.

The events we see in the book and film, as well as the omnipresence of the dark themes within then, were not completely uncommon during the 1980s. Greed gave rise to a new breed of organized crime, which revolved around drug use, murder, etc. This new development of the criminal underworld was, according to some cultural critics, all thanks to the generation responsible for the sharp decline in regular church attendance (Tobin). Without religion, people were free to find other causes to serve, many of which included greed. The rise of cynical phrases used by young urban professionals such as, "Greed is good," was not lost on Oliver Stone when he was creating the film *Wall Street.* Although Chigurh is not carrying out his crimes based on greed, the fact that there is a suitcase filled with two million dollars to begin with says something about the socioeconomic climate.

Moral deterioration hardens people, and this holds true for those who do not seriously consider the consequences of illegality, as they are driven by a toxic form of lust devoid of meaning. In the 1980s, activities considered illegal had become powerful tools to make money, gain power, and live gloriously. McCarthy's novel clearly depicts the corrupt nature of 1980s society by showing the overwhelming criminality taking place in West Texas, simply for those three goals alone. (Girard) (Robinson)

Cormac Mccarthy and Why He Wrote No Country for Old Men

A standout amongst the most recognized American writers of the last century, Cormac McCarthy knew early on that the times had changed since the glory years of his American literary predecessors, such as Hemingway and Faulkner. He believed that, “people have always tended to take a look at the past via a somewhat pink lens.” He explained this further through a memory: "When I was growing up, my grandmother would begin one of her standard languishments on the perversity and abnormality of today’s youth: ‘it was not normal for a young fellow to go through the night playing poker while his fiancée is left alone.’" (Cinephilia&Beyond)

Many individuals did things like this without their girlfriends a hundred years prior. Even so, this was a sensible and genuine proclamation for his grandmother's to make, as she felt that a change which she wasn't a part of had happened and the world she was accustomed to was now different. It had evolved without her approval or presence. Like many other elders, she felt discarded and ignored, her wisdom and knowledge were simply not valid points in the debate. It is an issue all too common in our society: many people do not like change, especially when they do not understand why or how it is happening.

The merciless, silent, and creepy murderer who wanders the forlorn landscape of southern United States - allowing a coin toss to determine the extent of the bloodshed he leaves behind him - is really a universal story that did not have to be set in the 80s. Similar characters meandered the barren valleys and plains a thousand years before this era in human history. Their weapons might not be so unusual, and their hairstyles might not be as silly as a bowlcut; however, the increasing brutality of human existence is just as recognizable to someone in the ancient era just as it is now.

"He's a Psychopathic Killer, but So What?"

Lydia Cooper penned a controversial article titled "He's a *Psychopathic Killer, but So What?": Folklore and Morality in Cormac McCarthy's No Country for Old Men* in *Edwardsville* (Cooper). She quotes directly from the text stating:

"At one point, a minor character, Wells, describes Chigurh as 'a psychopathic killer,' but he shrugs at the description, adding, 'but so what? There's plenty of them around' (NCFOM 141). The inexplicable evil of Chigurh and the equally inexplicable moral code practiced by Sheriff Bell may merely underscore the pointlessness of any discussion of morality, as Wells seems to believe. In this respect, the novel may have much in common with the nihilistic world… Bell's first-person narrative frames, however, draw explicit, meta-textual attention to the purpose of narration, suggesting that something more than nihilism infuses this novel's dark cosmos. Bell is not the novel's narrator, and his prophetic and visionary monologues frame the tale while remaining ambiguously separate from it. The framing device of the narrative sections, along with the stripped prose of the main narrative and the two-dimensional characters in fact foreground the nature and purpose of story-telling. In particular, this novel explores the relationship between story-telling and morality by evoking archaic tropes and modes of narration more typically associated with the folktale." (1)

Cooper continues to compare the characters and their motivations. In the concluding paragraph, she says, "Despite the pervasive violence of the border region, and of humanity itself, there are also prophets of hope, visionaries of humankind's capacity for

redemption." (24) That is where the libertarian and positive nihilistic views come in. These characters see hope, which is why they make the decisions in the ways that they do. They find meaning through their own methods (Cobb). It is hard to prove that this was necessarily McCarthy's intention. He wrote a bleak novel about corruption. It is considered nihilistic by the majority of McCarthy's audience; however, I would be inclined to suggest that Chigurh is more than a *rebel without a cause.* There is something driving his sociopathic tendencies. As strange as it is so say, there is *hope* that he can act as the manifestation of will, destiny, and the chance required to tie the two together into some determined and profund.

In *The Gay Science* (Nietzsche), Nietzche wrote:

Interpretation

My soul is in my work, I will admit,
But I myself cannot interpret it.
If you climb up your own path, then you might
My image carry with you to the light.

The following pages will attempt to convince, if not prove, that this work has clearly aligned itself with Nietzsche's predictions. There is a caveat to this interpretation – Nietzsche's philosophy will not be found in the text directly. Instead, a deeper analysis of the characters is required – an interpretation which pays more attention to Moss's differences from Chigurh than Chigurh from the rest of the world.

Who's the Real Nihilist Here?

No Country for Old Men wrestles with heavy themes of free-will and justice, themes that have been brought into question since the dawn of ancient philosophy. Cormac McCarthy's story has been classified as a libertarian book, an approach to the text that the Coen Brothers decided not to interfere with. It has also been read as a profoundly nihilistic book and film adaptation. Cineaste writer Royal Brown said:

"Not only does the subject matter of No Country for Old Men go out and meet something akin to pure nihilism, the Coen brothers, following Cormac McCarthy's brilliant novel quite closely, have found, on every level, the consummate cinematic means for communicating not only that which cannot be understood but also the fact that the word "understand" has no relevance in this climate." (Brown)

On the surface, Chigurh seems to be the classic definition of a nihilist, seeing as how he has little regard for life, creating chaos wherever he goes. However, if we look a bit closer, we find that he is far too meticulous about his moral code to be considered a true nihilist. He does not want to kill people who do not obstruct his path towards his end goal, yet his set of beliefs cannot allow him to ignore the hubris of many "innocent" people without exposing them to it, or possibly punishing them for it. Instead, he has a coin toss decide their fate.

Therefore, his expressions of nihilistic ideas only apply to an essence of nihilism only made from pre-conceived value judgements. The existential form of nihilism is nowhere to be found, which Brown fails to address. Chigurh affirms and reaffirms his sense of meaning not through violence for violence's sake but through the process of outwitting

or educating others – preferably at the same time. He is convinced that he is the instrument of fate as he casts fate upon them. “Anything can be an instrument,” Chigurh says early in the novel. “Small things. Things you wouldn’t even notice. They pass from hand to hand. People don’t pay attention to it. And then one day there is an accounting. And after that nothing is the same. To separate the act from the thing. As if parts of some moment in history might be interchangeable with the parts of some other moment. How could that be? Well, it’s just a coin. Yes. That’s true. Is it?” (McCarthy)

McCarthy instantaneously duplicates the style of the American crime novel down to its early-20th Century origins, yet he widens the scope of the novel to further explicate his concerns about themes that are as old as the Bible and as modern as this morning's headlines.

The characters in the book and its film adaptation could be free, but they put shackles on themselves instead. Llewellyn, the main protagonist, lives a seemingly average life with his wife. One day, he decides to risk everything by taking $2 million that was originally owned by drug barons he discovers dying in the desert during a hunt. He has the chance to save his wife from Chigurh – whose sense of morality compels him to murder her based on proximity - but he chooses to gamble on her life, believing it is still possible to outsmart him. Every choice he makes leads to his eventual murder. However, those were his choices to make. In this case, not even law enforcement was a match for Chigurh.

If the close reading were to stop there, one would miss a subtle, perhaps more disturbing message to be gathered from the story. Chigurh and Moss see the world through different lenses, where the former is certainly unconventional compared to the latter. An

analysis of their character traits simply cannot work if we look at them separately from the world that suffers the consequences of their worldviews.

Llewelyn's misadventure began the minute he woke up the morning after the drug deal. He is the sort of man who finds pleasure within the pursuit of something, even though he accepts it far more soberly than a stereotypical hedonist. However, that pursuit does not have grand objectives, and this absence of direction leads him through every decision he makes.

At the point when Llewelyn finds the dead body, as well as the satchel loaded with dollar bills, his demeanor throughout the rest of the story isn't particularly haughty or victorious. He understands that the cash will lead him down a journey that he cannot turn back from. At that point, his destiny is recognized. He is aware of the reality of the situation, but his actions from that point forward don't necessarily reflect that situation.

It becomes much more reasonable to argue that Llewellyn is more of a nihilist than Chigurh. As the story progresses, Llewellyn becomes increasingly more passive to his destiny and sees no reason to rationalize his actions in a way that conforms to the reality of this destiny. Chigurh, on the other hand, never relents in his ability to adapt to situations as they evolve – whether they are turning in his favor or not. His moral code always finds a way to affirm itself within those situations. Once Llewellyn finally speaks to his nemesis, he demonstrates no desire to consider changing his way of doing things, to play Chigurh's game – even though he knows that his wife is now caught within Chigurh's crosshairs, despite the fact she has not done anything to him.

No Country for Old Men is a triumph, despite the misunderstandings many readers and viewers have regarding its characters. McCormac proves in this novel, and once again

in the film, that nihilism doesn't simply mean "relentless antagonism or criticism suggesting an absence of values or convictions". It is better to identify it fully as the philosophical term used in Nietzsche's philosophy. Chigurh is the über-mensch of Nietzsche's imagination, whereas Llewellyn represents the personification of the "herd mentality", an attitude that keeps Moss free to pursue a goal. But this is merely a delusion on his part – instead, such an attitude only serves to hasten his ruin.

Film Techniques in No Country for Old Men

Sometimes even the simplest editing techniques can work absolute wonders for directors, if they present the film in the right way.

Aspect ratio in film is responsible for the little black bars you see in widescreen films. When filmmaking became a hot commodity during the 20s, the Academy format (1.33:1) was made standard for American films (similar to the 4:3 projection you see on older televisions.) Wider aspect ratios were often used as either the first or last shots of a film in the 40s and 50s. The major exception to this rule applied to the Western genre, where landscape shots were extremely important.

No Country for Old Men is shot in 2.39:1 for a variety of reasons. For one, the West Texas landscape becomes incredibly vast and beautiful, and Joel and Ethan Coen wanted to give this film the experiential vibe of a modern Western/noir film. However, in the famous gas station coin toss scene (Screenplayed), you can see how effective the aspect ratio can be, even for something as common as a two-shot - a shot where there are two characters dominating the framing.

This scene is predominantly an over-the-shoulder two-shot. With the wide lens that is used, you get the feeling that Chigurh is nowhere close to fitting in with the environment the proprietor has created. The strange collection of items that the store proprietor owns and sells would not have been seen in a 1.33:1 aspect ratio. However, those items are seen to the left of Chigurh when the camera faces the proprietor, as well as to the right of the proprietor when the camera faces Chigurh. All of this seemingly unnecessary content in

the frame is meant to illustrate that even though the scene is deep within the world of the store owner, Chigurh still manages to dominate over it.

There are very few instances where the over-the-shoulder turns into a close-up. This happens when Chigurh tells the proprietor "he doesn't know what he's talking about" – one of his greatest pet peeves, and the close-up does not switch back to an over-the-shoulder two-shot until Chigurh "breaks" the tension by replacing it with another source of tension entirely by accusing the proprietor of being deaf.

After the coin toss, the camera slowly begins to zoom in, so slowly you don't even notice it, until the character in the foreground becomes blurred due to the inability for the cameraman to focus without breaking focus on the content associated with the background. The primary thing to take from this scene is that all the camera activity in this scene is controlled by Chigurh. This symbolizes his power as a figure of destiny, the end results of predestination coming home to roost.

Compared to Kubrick, the Coen Brothers – as they are filmmakers who are adapting a story to the screen – use scenes like this to solidify the world view of the character they want you to pay attention to. Kubrick decided to do the same thing, but he also wanted to go farther and change the way the themes of *A Clockwork Orange* were meant to be perceived by the audience. The Coen Brothers knew that this wasn't the best approach to consider when it came to a novel produced so recently by a cult literary figure at the height of his powers. The final cut of *No Country for Old Men* allows the themes of the story, as they existed in the source material, to continue to speak for themselves without the assistance or the resistance provided by the filmmaker.

Drugs and Dreams

Set against the weathered brick apartment buildings and the abandoned beaches of Coney Island, *Requiem for a Dream* tells a series of stories running parallel to each other; connected by the relationship between the forlorn, bereft Sara Goldfarb and her beloved but careless son, Harry. Sara, excited by the possibility of appearing on a TV show, has begun a dangerous diet routine to improve her looks for a national audience. Meanwhile, Harry and his girlfriend Marion, have gradually started to reveal themselves to each other, with each looking to the other to reclaim years of pain and isolation.

This hard-hitting book by Hubert Selby Jr. was transformed into a film by Darren Aronofsky, released a decade after the original novel was published. Both the book and the film are about the descent into chronic drug use. The four main characters in this work of fiction all suffer the same fate of addiction, but what makes this story thought provoking is that 'street drugs' are not the only addictive substances involved. Harry Goldfarb, his girlfriend, and his best friend are all addicted to the drugs society normally sees as illicit - and we watch their descent unfold throughout the plot. On the other hand, Sara Goldfarb - Harry's mother - ends up addicted to diet pills, which adds an intriguing twist to the overarching definition of addiction.

The story begins in the summer. Sara, a middle-aged woman, lives alone in an apartment in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn. She spends all her day watching television, precisely a monotonous and insipid weight-loss infomercial, wherein the TV host lists the three things he did to transform himself over and over again. Two of them - abstinence from refined sugar and red meat – she understands well enough, but the third is out of reach as she slides down into a drug-induced stupor. In the film, the sound is depicted as distorted

speech, incomprehensible to the audience. Alongside this, she invests her time in eating chocolates and other undesirable foods, as well as yearning for her late husband, Seymour. Harry only appears at her condo occasionally to steal her TV so he can finance his heroin addiction.

The film is also quite unique in its execution. In *Subversion of the Dominant Narrative Structure of Mainstream American Cinema in Aronofsky's 'Requiem for a Dream' (2001*), Henry Konik writes:

"…Aronofsky uses certain techniques of critical cinema to make the audience aware of the 'constructed-ness' of the represented material. In doing so he goes against the 'norms' of mainstream American cinema that aim to 'mesmerize' the audience and 'draw' them into the narrative. There are distinct parallels between the techniques used by Aronofsky and those employed by Eisenstein in his critical cinema, namely the use of non-stable footage, to make the camera conspicuous, the use of montage of rhythm, to disrupt the continuity of the narrative, the use of 'word play' in relation to the captions and the representation of footage in 'reverse', which force an audience to engage critically with the material, and the use of 'Brechtian' theatre techniques to alienate the audience from the text. However, Aronofsky does not merely mirror Eisenstein's use of these techniques but rather develops them in his own way." (i) (EBSCOhost)

When a person becomes a heroin addict, nobody acts surprised but many behave judgmentally. Diet pills, which are closely related to amphetamines, are legal everywhere and can be prescribed by a medical expert. These types of addiction are often ignored in

our society. Both Aronofsky and Selby are aware that the effects of legal amphetamines are issues troubling society at large, affecting well-meaning people just as much as people who are deemed criminals by the justice system. The result of this mutual awareness is that little difference exists between the book and the film. However, slight differences between the two works still reveal themselves.

In the film, they move the plot of the story along in a vastly improved and additionally interesting style. The music, composed by Clint Mansell and the Kronos Quartet, offers an incredible layer to this madness. Sara's character is more fleshed out in the book, with far more details about her personal life, yet Ellen Burstyn – who plays Sara in the film - makes up for any lack of character development within the script. We do not to get to see too much of the other characters, other than them doing drugs, partaking in crime, and partying. Sara becomes the focal point of the film version of the story, because it is necessary that we understand the motives for her downward spiral into addiction. It is those motives that make addiction a far more disturbing spectacle for audiences to sit through. Her husband's backstory is more readily available in the film, as well as her need to impress her neighbors, and her longing for people just to love her. Similarly, the relationship that exists between the characters is written and executed quite well by the actors and actresses in the film.

While the book and film are quite similar, it should be noted that *Requiem for a Dream* isn't meant for the fainthearted. Reading through the awful events that propel the story forward is one thing but seeing the stark realities behind self-destructive drug use is another. Many lists rank this as one of the most difficult films to sit through. More than anything, it is a cautionary tale about dreams and how we like to believe we can achieve

them through the dream-like escapism that drug use offers. Aronofsky stated that he "needed to make a movie from this book because the words burn off the page.” (Mottram) Likewise, it's undeniably superior to any anti-drug PSA you will ever hear or see.

Hubert Selby Jr. and Why He Wrote Requiem for a Dream

Hubert Selby Jr. is an author who specializes in creating gritty, Beat-inspired stories inhabited by the destitute and the desperate. Expelled from the merchant marines for poor health at 19 years old, Selby chose to take a stab at writing. The respiratory issues he suffered in his life drove him to become reliant on heroin and painkillers, experiences that informed *Requiem*. It is a book that's terrifying and convincing – regardless of whether or not the reader has the same habits and addictions.

Requiem for a Dream is a novel that can be felt physically, primarily because Selby Jr.'s physical condition colors the way he writes. After being hospitalized with tuberculosis the age of 18, he went through three bedridden years, which saw him through a terrifying amount of surgeries. Ten of his ribs ended up being removed, a ruptured lung was repaired, and a piece was cut out of the other one. Other surgical complications were not long in appearing, namely hepatitis.

This is a portion of the background he brought to the novel. Memories of destitution are also a part of Selby Jr's source material. While residing on Manhattan's Lower East Side, he strolled along Avenue C, watching other New York denizens standing around outside a candy store on a street corner. This was in the middle of a brutal winter, with wind chill factors of minus 20 degrees. These people only had light jackets on; their eyes stuck, sweating, eating candy because they had nothing else. Just like Jonathan Swift in his famous satirical essay *A Modest Proposal*, Selby had often thought that the best approach to end the heroin issue is to take Chuckles and Snickers candy bars off the market and every addict would die of malnutrition.

Written in a stream of street vernacular – this book uses a unique style of writing possessives. Instead of using apostrophes, Selby used backslashes. The backslash's close proximity on the typewriter permitted Selby to write more rapidly, which gives the text a very fast-paced feel that stands in direct contrast to the sluggish experiences of heroin addicts, not to mention the even more sluggish responses to those who are out of the loop regarding narcotics addiction. The book follows Harry Goldfarb and his closest companion, Tyrone C Love, as they move Harry's mom's TV down to the pawn shop to get the money that will allow them to "score a taste". Whenever Sara comes to understand what the two of them are doing with her property, they shrug off the accusations, proclaiming that these japes are normal. Additionally, the routine that comes with events like these simultaneously act as indulgences on Sara's part. She ultimately has no choice but to use these events as excuses for her only son – otherwise, she would be left all alone. The dreams she harbors have a tragicomic, hollow ring to them as a result.

The Film is Worth a Thousand Words

If Darren Aranofsky has a stylistic calling card, it may be this: Aranofsky uses very important information to create the final moments of a film, but all this important information is packed so tightly together that it's very hard to not feel overloaded by it. That is the point. It is apparent, even at this early stage in his career, that Aranofsky possessed the framework that allowed him to create stunning conclusions - like that of *Black Swan* – early on in his career, with films like the disturbing black and while *Pi,* about a mathematician gone mad. A recurring theme in his films is obsession turned into madness.

It takes nearly ten minutes for us to see what becomes of the four characters in *Requiem for a Dream*. The way in which we see it is reminiscent of David Fincher's work at the time, including *Fight Club* – but it does not copy his style outright. In fact, Aranofsky breaks a great number of the rules Fincher imposes on himself. Closeups and steady cam shots, two things which Fincher avoids using at all costs, are strewn all throughout the montage.

Moreover, Aranofsky steadily increases the pace of the cutting to the point where the connection between one shot and another is almost subliminal. The reason why it isn't subliminal is because Aranofsky allows us to attempt to tie all these disparate scenes together through the use of match cuts. Perhaps the most famous example of a match cut – though it is certainly not the earliest – was made by Kubrick, as he transitioned from the first movement of *2001: A Space Odyssey* to the second by comparing a bone to a spaceship.

Whereas Kubrick attempts to make a grand statement about the immutable nature of technology through a single, Aranofsky uses a vast number of match cuts to tell us that which we already know. Though each character has taken a radically different path to get there, each character is bound to each other in terms of the sordid fate they have built for themselves through their drug use. Tyrone and Marion's fates are intertwined through the sexually charged imagery of Tyrone's prison work and the actual sexuality occurring at the underground club. Harry and Sara's fates are also similarly intertwined in that they are both obtaining medical treatment, but one is an application and the other is an amputation. All four fates work in tandem with one another when we see each character curl up into the fetal position at the very end.

Black Swan's ending might be more palatable to wide viewership because the information we obtain during the end is unreliable. Therefore, when we see the correct information later on, the feeling of overload that we experience as an audience is more rooted within an interactive experience of the information that causes it. This could not work in *Requiem for a Dream*, because this film's subject matter and its themes make it clear that you are being taken along for a ride. Drug use is, in Aranofsky's view, a ride, which is already out of control before one feels as though its out of control. The match cut, its more rudimentary counterpart the jump cut, and the montage which ties all this material together, is what illustrates this fact.

Requiem's Bleak Nihilism

Requiem for a Dream is often classified as a nihilistic work, because it ends bleakly. At the end of the story, we see the tragic turn that each character's life has taken in excruciating detail. Nevertheless, *Requiem for a Dream* also needs to be read as a libertarian work, as it cannot be denied that these characters found their own meanings through substance abuse.

In a 2003 article appearing in *The Paper Journal,* the idea of drugs causing nihilistic beliefs was discussed. It was argued that dispensing or taking drugs can cause in a darkness or void within the individual that consumes them to reckless abandon, a case that can clearly be seen in *Requiem.* Bigelow "called upon physicians to recognize nature as 'the great agent of cure'...others called it 'therapeutic nihilism'..." [4; 55-6] (Morell) Therefore, in this cautionary tale, all four titular characters found the wrong meanings for themselves in seeking answers through drugs.

Counter-arguments that offer a greater sense of sympathy for these unfortunate people have existed in academic literature decades before the article in *The Paper Journal.* Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (Félix Guattari) wrote about how drugs do nothing more than to tear apart and rebuild something called a "body without organs" in in *A Thousand Plateaus.* The general idea behind this idea is that anything you use to redefine yourself - whether it is language, food, political viewpoints – are all going to act like drugs. You can get meaning out of them if you consistently experiment with the experience, but if you're chasing after the same experience over and over again, that's where the danger reveals itself. The "body without organs" is no longer "full", as it would be in its most ideal state. Instead, it turns "cancerous", and moves further down the path of self-destruction for self-

destruction's sake. Every decision that every character chose to make in Selby's novel were solely based on the characters' own wishes. If we are to stick to a pro-libertarian narrative, all the blame is placed solely on them. This sentiment can be seen in this quote from Selby Jr. in the preface to the 1999 version of the novel: "Eventually, we all have to accept full and total responsibility for our actions, everything we have done, and have not done." (Selby Jr)

John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men* addresses the dissolution of the "American Dream". Selby chose to follow the same tradition of criticizing the American Dream within his work. Aranofsky's adaptation also spares no expense in dismantling the legitimacy of such a mythological experience of nation. In Renee Curee's *Beautiful Junkies,* she paid a significant amount of attention to the film adaptation, in terms of its messaging: "Aronofsky's film suggests that the 21st century American social landscape is the product of a three-hundred year lie about the American Dream, particularly regarding who has access to it." (R Curry)

Each character in this story had their own dream, which they believed could transform into reality through drug use. The most obvious example to be seen here is Sara, whose need for fame was more likely a need for acceptance and love, both of which were lost after her relationship with her son fell apart. Another example is Marion, an aspiring artist whose suffering was tied to the estrangement between himself and his mother. He was searching for love, just like Sara, but drugs served to fill that role to the point where he couldn't rely upon anything else.

Fight Club or Nihilistic Libertarian Club?

"You are not the car you drive."

"Deliver me from perfect teeth."

"You are not the contents of your wallet."

Tyler Durden advertises those phrases throughout *Fight Club.* They are a nihilist's anthem: Don't worry about these shallow things; they don't matter. But they are also a libertarian's motto: Just because everyone else has perfect teeth doesn't mean you have to. Use your own thoughts to decide what you want and how you want to look (Crafts, Nihilism in fight club).

Chuck Palahniuk's debut novel is about a narrator who is extremely dissatisfied with the way he lives. The anonymous main character suffers from insomnia, which he treats by falsely admitting that he has cancer and attending support group sessions. The sessions enable him to witness suffering much greater than his own, which work wonders for his sleeping problem. At the point when the female protagonist Marla, discovers his secret, he never again feels welcome at the support group, so he is compelled to find another outlet for his illness.

The Narrator is on vacation on the beach when he meets a strange man named Tyler Durden, who gives the Narrator his telephone number. When the Narrator gets back home, he discovers that his apartment has exploded. With no place to go, he calls Tyler, who permits the Narrator to stay at his house for some time. One day, Tyler convinces him to hit him as hard as possible; reluctantly, the Narrator complies. Tyler and the Narrator both realize that they like fighting, simply because it makes them feel invigorated and "real." Tyler Durden works with the Narrator to set up the famous Fight Club, in which men fight

in the vault of a local bar. The reason for the fighting, they demonstrate, isn't just to throw punches at one another. The men fight against their fears and their frustrations which surround each of their lives individually, and collectively.

On a work trip, the narrator notices that men with cuts and bruises on their faces are everywhere, approaching him with respect and reverence. This leads him to realize that they think he is Tyler Durden—and it is only later that he understands they are right—he is Tyler. He has a split personality, and when he is asleep, the revolutionary side of his personality, Tyler, takes over. Tyler's persona is beginning to take over his own, which leads the protagonist into a long, drawn-out struggle between the person he is and the person he would like to become (LitCharts) (Sichtelg) (SuperSummary).

The narrator goes through the beginning of the story bored out of his mind, working a desk job for the sole purpose of purchasing fancy furniture. Palahniuk perfectly satirizes the public's obsession with the status that surrounds various things:

"You buy furniture. You tell yourself, this is the last sofa I will ever need in my life. Buy the sofa, then for a couple years you're satisfied that no matter what goes wrong, at least you've got your sofa issue handled. Then the right set of dishes. Then the perfect bed. The drapes. The rug. Then you're trapped in your lovely nest, and the things you used to own, now they own you."

Fight Club is not just about consumerism, though. It is also about the actions one takes to distance themselves from it. The 1996 publication of the and the 1999 release of David Fincher's film adaptation both follow the same plotline, in the sense that the fight

club transforms into a terrorist organization, leading to the death of one of their main members. Everything comes to a head when the organization plots to blow up a 'consumerist' building. It is at that point in the film adaptation when the narrator discovers he is Tyler Durden and that he must stop himself from committing something so drastic. The film culminates with the buildings blowing up, but at least the narrator has Marla by his side. He has found his meaning in love, which he realizes he has been running from the entire time. The book ends with the narrator waking up in what he thinks is the afterlife, which is actually a hospital for the criminally insane. Palahniuk clearly believes that the search for meaning outside of consumerist standards of living is bound for bleaker conclusions than Fincher, but Fincher clearly believes that transcendence of the consumerist experience is also possible – upon which Palahniuk remains silent.

About the Real Narrator

Palahniuk took to writing literature in his early thirties. His first attempts at publication encountered difficulties, because his material was perceived by many publishers to be ‘excessively irritating (Sullivan).’ He managed, in any case, to have a short story published in a minor editor’s collection in 1995. This short story acted as the primordial source material for his most famous novel, *Fight Club*. Incredibly, after he expanded the short story into a novel, it was acknowledged and published in 1996. It won the 1997 Oregon Book Award for Best Novel and the 1997 Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association Award.

Chuck Palahniuk first thought of the idea for the novel in the wake of being pummeled on a camping trip when he whined to some close-by campers about the noise of their radio. When he came back to work, he was entranced to find that no one would acknowledge or talk about his wounds, preferring instead to go around the problem and discuss more typical things as "How was your weekend?" (Cormier) Palahniuk inferred that people reacted that way on the grounds that if they asked him what had happened, a level of personal interaction would spring up that would make them extremely uncomfortable, if not angry. It was his interest in this societal 'blocking' that turned into the foundation for the *Fight Club.*

Fight Club, Book Vs. Film

Fight Club's deviation from the source material is interesting. David Fincher's 1999 film adaptation follows a similar plot as the novel, and it uses similar terminology and sloganeering. For instance, the majority of the Fight Club and Project Mayhem rules are taken from the novel verbatim. The characters themselves are generally left as they were, including the absence of the main character's "real" name. The film starts off close to the end of the story with the storyteller having a gun pointed in his mouth, and after that, a flashback happens - just like in the novel. The movie was likewise similar in the sense that it is presented very mysteriously. Brad Pitt, as Tyler Durden, appears in a single frame in various points at the beginning of the film, only to disappear – signifying subliminal messaging or the idea that the film is playing tricks on its audiences.

Many people were pleased with how the actors portrayed their characters in the film. Edward Norton (the narrator), played his role of the insomniac man well. His exhaustion seems existential driven rather than physically driven, and he reflects this by narrating in a bitter, monotone voice within various audio overdubs set against the action on screen. This creates a jarring effect in which the audience is constantly reminded of the tedious, sleep-deprived observations the narrator makes about almost anything.

There are some differences as well. One of them is that the book was more visceral than the film. Although the film was already bloody, it pales in comparison to the book's descriptions of each fight and their aftermath. The utilization of language in the book had very precise descriptions of violence and its aftermath. At the very beginning of the book, the narrator is described as having a hole in his face, a broken nose, and half his tongue chopped off by his own teeth. Readers are fully aware of the extent to which this

anonymous character will suffer, but the film demands that we only know the extent of the character's suffering once the great revelation arrives towards the climax.

The most significant difference, however, concerns the story's denouement. In the book, the narrator eventually ends up in an asylum which he calls "heaven". In heaven, he has a discussion with "God" about human instinct. Fincher's rendition of the ending only showed the narrator and Marla gazing out at a window as the creditor buildings before them explode. Both were effective in various ways. The film has an ending that answers all questions, but it leaves the audience to wonder what's going happen to them after the world they knew so well falls apart. The book gives a direct account of what happens to the narrator, but the narrator is still asking questions.

With everything considered, both approaches to the story and its themes are entirely bewildering. Chuck Palahniuk expressed something rather intriguing about adaptations of his own work. To paraphrase, he argued that an adaptation ought to give something slightly different from the original work. David Fincher's visual adaptation of Palahniuk book is faithful to the original in many ways; however, the ending explicitly travels down a different route - which everyone thought to be fascinating and poignant (Ghosh) (Tam) (Cosma).

Film Techniques In Fight Club

Interestingly, David Fincher is not a fan of the steady cam (Painting). The reason: Fincher wants to show us that something inhuman is going on here, without us knowing it.

When "Jack" hits himself for the first time, the camera does not move in response to it. This creating a very unsettling effect, an effect we would personally feel if we were to see someone hit themselves unexpectedly. Jack falls into the foreground, which goes against the filmic traditions that come with fistfights on screen. The camera also cuts in the middle of movement after Jack hits himself, creating even more strangeness. The most striking example is when Jack pulls himself back up onto his feet by his collar. From a physical standpoint, this is impossible for someone to do to themselves, but Fincher used wires to create the effect and then edited out the rigging in post-production.

The action is broken up by freeze frames, dolly shots (which is camera movement that isn't manually controlled, guaranteeing smooth movement and/or panning), omniscient narration, and close-up shots of objects that the boss considers valuable. The business cards, the phone, the title on his desk – it all signifies a belief in one purpose in life, which Jack is convinced is ludicrous, depressing, and dangerous. It motivates "Jack's smirking revenge"; it proves that he is right and society is wrong.

When the scene ends, you have two characters in the foreground that are out of focus, forcing the audience to look more closely at Jack and his boss, who are just off-center in the frame. Even though Jack is not in an authoritative area in the frame, his position, as well as the obscuring of the rest of the background by the two security

guards, draws your eye to him as he lies a victim of his boss's brutality – despite the fact that you know Jack masterminded the whole event.

It is easy for film buffs to endlessly speculate on what would happen if a different director worked on an adaptation of a novel. YouTube content creator Patrick (H) Willems has done just that, making fake trailers for superhero films in the style of various auteur filmmakers. David Fincher's style seems directly linked to the source material he adapted, defying the idea that any other director could have made the same successful result that he made. Kubrick's presentation of *A Clockwork Orange* is as cold and as calculating David Fincher's presentation of *Fight Club*, but Kubrick's talent as a photographer comes through is his films, letting us know that humanity exists behind the camera. This does not apply to Fincher, and Fincher would prefer it to remain that way. As Fincher himself admitted: "I just love the idea of omniscience, the camera goes over here perfectly…and it doesn't have much personality to it, it's very much like what's happening is doomed to happen," (Painting).

American Psycho Killer - Qu'est Que C'est?

One of the many epigraphs at the beginning of Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* is a small set of lyrics taken from Talking Heads' 1988 hit single "Nothing But Flowers": "And as things fell apart/Nobody paid much attention". It is a quote that is certainly indicative of what happens to the main character, Patrick Bateman. However, the music of Talking Heads – and David Byrne's lyrics especially – is omnipresent throughout the text. "Psycho Killer", a single from 1977 during the first stages of the band's career, dives deep into the psyche of a psycho killer. Even though Bateman, a psycho killer in his own right, doesn't speak any random French phrases throughout the story, the question David Byrne asks during the chorus of that song is the same question Bateman asks of the universe every time he commits a murder, each more violent than the last. "Qu'est que c'est?", transliterated into English, would be: "What is what it is?" It is an odd question, but the French say it that way because they are trying to get to the definitive, existential answer behind the unknown thing they are referring to.

Patrick Bateman is an investment banker invested in fitting in with the New York yuppie lifestyle his profession demands of him. He describes his day-to-day activities, which includes taking drugs and going to nightclubs. Furthermore, he describes his relationships with his girlfriend, his brother, and his mother. He frequently makes arbitrary references to musicians and designer clothing in places where it doesn't make sense, or in places where it does nothing to move the plot forward.

Patrick Bateman is an arrogant, wealthy, twenty-something elitist in 1980s New York City, who just so happens to be a serial killer on the point of a severe psychotic break. He's the quintessential member of consumer society who is not satisfied with simply existing on a much higher level of social status than his victims. He prefers instead to consume his victims in a cold and calculating fashion, as cold and calculating as his taste in fashion itself. There's no discernable plot to be found in Bateman's world, nor is there a regular timeline. Instead, the story is told as an array of events, ideas, and confessions – all told from Bateman's perspective.

Moreover, there is no actual character development in anyone other than Bateman himself. Bateman doesn't see strangers, colleagues, lovers, or family members as people – he can only see them as objects. He does not talk about people he meets on the street by their personalities or physical characteristics, but rather by what they're wearing and who made it.

These descriptions tend to become dull and disinteresting; however, this is how Bateman judges everything he comes into contact with. Everything is either conspicuously boring or without any sense of value. His solitary concerns are his appearance, women and the body politic that comes from his dalliances with them, how much things cost, the tape rentals he needs to return, and what feature the Patty Winters Show has to offer that morning.

Patrick Bateman is not an equal opportunity executioner, even if the total body count consists of six women, five men, a child, and various animals. The ability for him to consume the child victim is minimal at best, whereas he consumes the bodies of women – sometimes literally – for days at a time after they die. As the story progresses, the style of

consumption borders on the absurd; the level of violence associated with the killings near the end of the book is so visceral and disturbing, it is hard to imagine them as events that are associated with the realm of plausibility.

Ellis knew this at the time he was writing it and used these scenes to prove a point. There is a question that pops up in the mind of every reader: "Did all of this truly happen?" Evidence exists for both answers, yes or maybe. Everything the reader has been told comes from Bateman, and it is impossible to know whether the story is reality itself or if it is just a part of his sex-crazed, wealth-obsessed, drug-induced fall into madness (CENSORSHIP). Thus the question that David Byrne asks comes back to haunt the reader, just as much as it haunts Bateman: *What is what it is?*

Bret Easton Ellis and Why He Wrote American Psycho

In 1991, Bret Easton Ellis published his second novel, *American Psycho*, at the age of 26. The book has sold over one million copies in the United States and been published in many international editions. Notwithstanding a rapidly changing social landscape, *American Psycho* remains relevant – whether we want to admit it or not.

Bret Easton Ellis said he wanted to write a New York novel initially, focusing on the goings-on in Wall Street in a style that was significantly more realistic and earnest than his debut. Like *Less Than Zero,* the new novel was going to follow a young urban professional. Oliver Stone's *Wall Street* had made a large impact on American literature's analysis of high society for the first time since the era of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Ellis was in a prime position to add something to this legacy of late-20th century socio-political literature. As such, he spent a great amount of time with "yuppies", imbibing in their lifestyle as soon as it became open to him, thanks to the success of his debut.

High society likes to focus on where to eat, where to shop, and where to party. Talk of work rarely ever occurs. One night, while Ellis was out in the Hamptons, he saw one of these young urban professionals who claimed to possess the prettiest girlfriend, the best suit, and the best house. He abruptly began to imagine, as well as understand just how insane and inane many aspects of New York upper-class life actually was. The idea for Patrick Bateman as a serial killer on the verge of abject madness was merely a simple step forward towards the logical conclusion that could be made from participating within such an affluent lifestyle. All that Ellis had to do was funnel his own experiences within that culture – both positive and negative - into Bateman's personality, who simply cannot live with both attitudes.

At its heart, the novel is a caustic parody about materialism and the empty inclination that accompanies the pursuit of it. It is a first-person account of a hard-bitten, vain Wall Street elitist named Patrick Bateman who adores the pop music of the day and experiences difficulty dealing with his lethal inclinations. Remarkably, it has been adapted for film and for the stage, the former being a 2000 film which features a smarmy Christian Bale, and the latter being a Broadway musical which features even more exaggerated smarminess from Matt Smith. Each adaptation portrays the story as a black-comedy thriller, but it is Mary Harron's film that has carried the standard of the story's success throughout the decades. (Grow) (King) (Coreno)

Nihilistic Libertarianism in American Psycho

When it was first published, *American Psycho* was one of the most reviled books in print (Lipman). It was hated so much that Ellis's original publisher Simon and Schuster dropped it after being boycotted by the National Organization for Women. Ellis also got many death threats. Many would view it as the epitome of a nihilistic novel, in the sense that it was written nihilistically, rather than written as an examination of nihilism. This quote from a review originally published in the early 90s serves as proof of the general consensus surrounding this book:

"Its concluding 150 pages can only be described as repulsive, a bloodbath serving no purpose save that of morbidity, titillation and sensation; `American Psycho' is a loathsome book. It is also, and in the end this matters most, a bad book." -- Jonathan Yardley, Washington Post

Many would argue that Patrick Bateman is the ideal case of a nihilistic man. He has no genuine feelings, save for impulses of greed and loathing. However, as Bateman progresses from being a disinterested yuppie to an utterly terrifying serial killer, his ways of acquiring meaning shifts in a wide variety of ways. At first, he aims to impress people, which fails because he cannot seem to make an impression on anyone. Then, he derives meaning through violence, only to fail again because no amount of violence is ever enough for him to feel satiated or at ease with himself. He even goes so far as to try and find meaning through bottles of alcohol and mood stabilizers at a time, but he fails again

because odd questions such as “Will I ever do time?” keep Bateman in a frenzied state of obsession.

Much like *Fight Club,* the book is best known for its violence, as opposed to unique social parody. The significant achievement of the book - its humor - is obscured by the anxious wait for the next sadistic event. In the wake of reading about somebody’s lips being clipped off - which Harron did not deem necessary to show in order to get the point across - one would feel complicit in the crimes portrayed if they chuckle at something on the following page. (Curmudgeon)

If American Psycho has a theory, it is that specific kinds of people are so nihilistic and fanatically driven towards outward impeccability that they miss what makes humanity valuable in the first place. Consumption and greed become their meaning, but it is a meaning that can never be fulfilled. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (McLeud) explains how this inability works to a very precise degree. The high society that Bateman participates in has no need to concern themselves with the first two levels of needs – the physiological needs and the safety needs. Once these members of high society reach the third level – the needs associated with love and belongingness – the sheer lack of perspective members possess regarding the first two levels obfuscates the metrics defining the fulfillment of every need above them. This obfuscation only becomes worse when the fourth level – esteem – is addressed. Because nobody has an authentic relationship with each other in Bateman’s high society, Bateman cannot come close to achieving a need that is so abstract and divorced from his reality.

Bateman expresses this inability every time he scales the violence upward. A fetishization of status and self-glorification becomes apparent very quickly (Carlisle): all

the book's characters, let alone Bateman, gloat about paying more than they truly did. They also look for relationships because they need a distraction from certain things; companionship has nothing to do with it. In the film, there is a scene where Bateman and his colleagues compare business cards and get jealous over who has the best one. At one point, Bateman proceeds with his thorough detailing of designer clothes as he tears apart the body of a conscious human being. He is demonstrating to us where a philosophy of vanity can take us: It all leads to a point where labels matter more than humanity itself. Humanity, as an abstract essence that defines the worth of the individual, is not considered part of the equation that leads to a fulfillment of complex needs, such as companionship, self-esteem, or even self-actualization. Libertarian ideas are nowhere to be found in this system, so deeply intertwined with New York upper-class life. As such, the freedoms of the individual are there for Bateman to dismiss and violate on demand.

This would specifically explain why the violence in *American Psycho* is as sadistic as it is. On every page, this philosophy is portrayed in thoughts and dialogues that have little need for physical expression, but the physical expression is the logical conclusion to make if one's thoughts are so deeply entrenched in such hatred and disregard. (Turner)

Interestingly, the story is just as relevant, if not more relevant than it was when it was originally penned. In an interview with *The Guardian*, Ellis had this to say of the rise of Donald Trump, a character never seen in the novel, but certainly mentioned:

"Trump today isn't the Trump of 1987. He's not the Trump of Art of the Deal," Ellis said. "He seemed much more elitist in 87, 88. Now he seems to be giving a voice to white, angry, blue-collar voters ... To the guys that I was talking to in the Eighties when I

was researching American Psycho, Donald Trump was an aspirational figure. That's why the jokes are throughout the book. It wasn't like I pulled that out of my hat; that was happening. And so I just thought it was funny that 'OK, well, Patrick Bateman's gonna be obsessed with Donald Trump. He's gonna want to aspire to be Donald Trump.' And I don't know if he would think that today." (Cain)

Film Techniques in American Psycho

Compared to Bret Easton Ellis's original vision for the character study, Mary Harron's presentation is considerably toned down. However, the toning down of the presentation allows you to focus on what Christian Bale is doing with his rendition of Patrick Bateman.

The scene where Patrick confesses his crimes (Movieclips, American Psycho (11/12) Movie CLIP - A Pretty Sick Guy (2000) HD) is pretty much all that a viewer would need to see to figure out how Harron does it. The events that we get explicit detail about in the book are merely referenced in Bale's climactic monologue. The presentation of the monologue is also thematically consistent.

The scene first begins with an establishing shot, where Bateman calls Howard, his lawyer. It shifts to a closeup in which Bateman simply states that he's "killed a lot of people" – somewhat soberly. The camera cuts back to a wider shot, where Bale uses a lot of random hand gestures to signify his inability to connect the legitimacy of the murders described. Not only that, this is the one area where he expresses a generalized regret.

When it moves back to the close-up, this is where Bateman takes pride in having killed Paul Allen, "with an axe – to the face." The hand gestures, even if you can't see them very well, are much more controlled, much more deliberate. The closeup is much more capable of expressing self-disgust with "eating some of their brains".

The entire film has a slightly grainy texture that makes the film look older than it truly is. It is certainly plausible to argue that this film was shot in black and white, then colorized in post-production. This effect can clearly be seen in the very first scene of the

film (Gnu), approximately two minutes in. Everyone's skin tone at the table – McDermot, van Patten, Pryce, and Bateman's - is exactly the same, even down to the slight pink flush in their faces. The pink and off-white color scheme of the restaurant also suggests the possibility that the entire film was colorized after having been shot purely in black-and-white film stock, as the colors are nowhere near vibrant enough to prove that they are actually present in the film.

The first scene of the film intends to signify that everyone is in many ways the same exact person, indistinguishable from one another – even Bateman, who secretly despises that fact. Going back to the confession scene on the phone, it is possible that the black and white film stock was used to dramatize the lighting effect on Bateman's face in the closeup – a technique used to great effect by Ingmar Bergman, Swedish director of films like *The Seventh Seal.* The right profile is lit, while the left is obscured, referring to Bateman's duplicitous nature, being made public for the very first time. Oddly enough, the blood on Bateman's face after he kills Paul Allen (Movieclips, Hip to be Square - American Psycho (3/12) Movie CLIP (2000) HD) is also exclusively split down the right profile, making this more than mere coincidence. This is called *screen direction*, an under-appreciated aspect of continuity.

All these subtleties are used to draw the viewer away from the well-known spectacle Ellis creates in the book, preferring instead to draw the viewer towards Bale. Only the most cynical of interpretations would suggest that this is because Harron shared a distaste for the source material, or that she promoted the idea of a censored adaptation. In truth, Ellis's novel has far too much material that simply cannot be adapted to the screen

– the boring descriptions of fashion in the text would make for an even more boring presentation on screen. Inversely, Ellis's novel has far too much material that would distract viewers from the major point that he tried to illustrate, in ways that the material could not do to its readers. Harron successfully achieved a balance between the material that compels audiences to continue watching and the material that shocks audiences not through the use of objects in the frame, but of the subjects of the frame, and one subject in particular: Patrick Bateman.

Think for Yourself! With Fahrenheit 451

Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury is a tale that stands with the classics of 20th century dystopian literature. The book is set in a world controlled by human wretchedness, oppression, and suffering. The protagonist Guy Montag is a firefighter – however, the firefighters in *Fahrenheit 451* share little in common with the men in yellow suits that we see today driving large red trucks.

The task of each firefighter is to burn books, which are viewed as a threat to society because they cause people to overthink. People are rather expected to give up their independence and be content with insipid radio and TV programs. Authority figures have proclaimed once and for all that thinking is dangerous, remembering even more so. Only the dangerously educated would ever have the chance to know that book-burnings occurred in the past, from the Bonfire of the Vanities to the intellectual purges of the Third Reich. The freedom for one to know, for one to remember, and for one to act in accordance with what they have learned and remembered, is annihilated by people like Montag, who simply view his task as a job like any other.

At the beginning of the book, Montag starts to question the kind of life he leads when he crosses path with his free-thinking neighbor, Clarisse. Although only in high school, Clarisse asks him some profound, insightful questions that he cannot ignore. Specifically, she asks if he is happy. He realizes after thinking about it for a while that he is not happy with the kind of life he chose. He understands that his relationship with his wife and burning books are unfulfilling.

The book's thematic messaging is clearly against restriction of written information, whether the restriction in question comes from censorship of information or the abject

destruction of it. It forces the general populace to live solely within the present. Massive TV screens dominate every home and radios continually blast sound into their ears, but it is rarely ever recorded. The tyrannical government has proclaimed that all writing is incendiary, as it is contradictory from one source to the next. Furthermore, it enables individuals to be aware of unpleasant aspects of society. Montag's transformation from a destroyer of information to a protector of it is entirely world-altering in that he suddenly transformed into an enlightened character, rather than a tool used by government administrations to keep people in the dark. The novel's none-too-inconspicuous message is that reading makes people aware of thoughts that might be dangerous to an authoritarian state. Whether one source of written information contradicts another is completely beside the point. The point is to possess the power to analyze both sides of an argument, casting away presuppositions of truth as the analysis occurs. Only then will it be possible to find the level of truth required to make society better than what it is (Schools).

A Bit About Bradbury

Fahrenheit 451 describes a futuristic and dystopian American culture where books are banned, and "firefighters" are given the task to burn any that are found. It's named for the fact that paper bursts into flames at 451°. In Waukegan, Illinois, Bradbury explored around a fire station alongside his father as a child. Later, he found out about book burnings which were currently happening in Germany, China, and Russia, as well as the tale of the great libraries of Alexandria that were destroyed two millennia prior. Bradbury frequented libraries beginning at eight years old. As he never went to school, he considered libraries to be his "college."

Ray Bradbury said it disturbed him terribly when he learned about Hitler burning books in the streets of Berlin. He was only 15 years old at the time. He said he was utterly in love with libraries and it was as if Hitler was burning him when the Third Reich turned book-burning into a civic duty. The reason why Bradbury chooses books and reading as the influence most responsible for free thinking tendencies is entirely due to his romantic relationship with that learning style. Individuality and free thinking could have been taught to Bradbury with similar effects if he somehow happened to pick an art or even a sport. However, TV and radio were beginning to threaten the status of books as the essential vehicles for active imaginations. Therefore, he used these newly commercialized technologies as targets for criticism, describing the dystopian future he had in mind in ways that Huxley and Orwell had trouble describing in *Brave New World* and *1984,* respectively. Other illustrious authors concerned with the role new technologies would play in creating horrific futures would follow Bradbury's example, most notably J.G. Ballard, who wrote *Crash* several years after *Fahrenheit 451* was published.

The original title of the book wasn't *Fahrenheit 451* but “The Fireman”. Also, it was only perfect that Bradbury wrote the book in a library ─ the basement of UCLA's Powell Library ─ on a typewriter that he rented for twenty cents per hour. He completed the story in just nine days, which is fitting due to the connections between the pacing of the story and the fire which is omnipresent throughout it (Mourgos) (eNotes).

Fahrenheit 451 is Ray Bradbury's classic work of science fiction, and it remains relevant even in the 21st century - thanks to the unobtrusive symbolism attached to its characters. It was published in 1953 and made into a rather obscure film in 1966, which was remade in 2018. Every character in the book struggles with the idea of knowledge in a different manner. While some of the characters grasp knowledge and assume the role of protecting it, others dismiss knowledge in order to protect themselves and their comfortable place in society. Montag wrestles with this problem all throughout the book, trying his best to stay unmindful - even as he tenaciously seeks out knowledge in a battle against himself.

A young reader discovering this novel today will need to think of its world as a piece of alternate history. The past remains the past we have always known it to be; however, something changed between Bradbury’s time and ours, create an entirely foreign world in its place. However, the heart of the book remains immaculate, and the questions Bradbury raises remain as important and valid today as they were during the 1950s: Why do we need novels? Why should we read them? Why should we care? The answer is that writing by its very nature is an exceptional thing. The novel attempts to be a love letter to the written word, just as much as it is a love letter to people.

Libertarians can discover one of their own in this non-conformist author, who in spite of moving to Los Angeles in the 1930s, never tried to learn how to drive a car. A

quintessential self-teacher, he never went to college either. He loathed affirmative action, condemning "this political rightness that is rampant on campuses," and required a quick boycott of standards in advanced education. "The entire idea of advanced education is refuted, except if the sole paradigm used to determine whether students qualify is the grade they get on standardized tests." (Bradbury, 96)

This cautionary libertarian tale explains why governments in Bradbury's world took to burning books. This society was profoundly authoritarian and thus did not care for individuals thinking for themselves. Novels and ideas have always been viewed as a threat by people in power, and many governments have burned "dangerous" works in centuries past. This book also shared a similar fate from time to time. The book was challenged and banned for its language and violence over the years (O'Connor).

Many believe that "fires" are set every day whenever politicians, bureaucrats, government workers, and the general population who support them decide that the classics shouldn't be taught in school anymore. One signature is enough to wipe out Greek and Latin literature for many years. This libertarian novel seeks to challenge that notion.

The Original Fahrenheit Film

French New Wave directors are renowned for shooting on location with very small crews. Sometimes the crew is as small as the actors on the scene, the director, and the DP – who doubles as a cameraman. Much of this is because the budget for film production is upsettingly low compared to modern standards. Directors like Godard and Truffaut knew this well enough to have fun with the fact, to the point where they made scenes shot on expensive soundstages incredibly cheap looking in order to emphasize the manipulative, immersion-breaking effects of their style of cinema.

The expository scene between the two protagonists in Godard's *Pierrot le Fou* shows exactly how they did it. For the majority of the scene, we see the camera fixed on a car that isn't actually moving anywhere. The only immersive elements that betray any illusion of motion is a red light to Jean-Paul Belmondo's right, a blue light to Anna Karina's left, and a yellow light behind the car. Its status as the only scene shot on a soundstage throughout the entire film signifies that Godard deemed the use of a soundstage as highly important to the development of the film's thematic development. This is the beginning of a story in which two ex-lovers are on the run, and yet they cannot get beyond the tiniest details of their personality that keep them motionless throughout the entire film – until it is too late.

Truffaut is no Godard, nor did he try to be. However, his experiences as a low-budget director certainly affected his entry into large-scale productions, to an extent some film critics found controversial. The scene where Montag first meets Clarice is a strange

one because it utilizes the same expository techniques Pierrot le Fou used for Ferdinand and Marianne.

One might be inclined to believe that this scene was shot on a moving elevated subway car, were it not for the fact there is a strange amount of white cel shading around the actors who are in front of a window. In fact, the first half of the sequence was shot on a soundstage, with green screen elements used to create a second layer of film that would show the exterior passing by. The second half shifts to an on-location tracking shot that showcases the more futuristic elements of Bradbury's world more authentically.

The plausibility of Truffaut succeeding in creating an effective presentation of Bradbury's environment must be upheld, even though this film is not considered to be Truffaut's best. Tensions between the director and Oskar Werner led to continuity errors, stilted performances, and other prestige-diminishing factors. However, the use of green-screen is a moment in which a well-trained eye can see that humanity is separated from the rest of the world, precisely because recorded information about the world is separated from humanity. Once Clarise and Montag leave the elevated subway car, they are brought back into the world as it really is, which is exactly when Montag is first introduced to the ideas that will shape his actions and his philosophies throughout the rest of the film.

Kickass: The Ultimate Nihilistic Libertarian

As exemplified by many of the above examples, nihilists are typically portrayed as grim anarchists. There is another side to nihilism, though, where it creates an entirely positive manifestation of its principles in the world. The protagonist of the graphic novel and 2011 film *Kick-Ass* is a superhero appropriately named Kick-Ass. His story, as well as the stories of its supporting characters, act as a terrific example of a positive approach to nihilist and libertarian ideology.

Kick-Ass begins with introducing readers to the life of a high school-aged comic-book fanboy who is grieving for the loss of his mother. He is viewed as a 'loser' at school and doesn't have much self-motivation or 'cool' friends to help him along. All these factors have led him to a moderately nihilistic view on life. But then, he creates his own meaning by becoming a 'superhero.' He has no powers or special abilities. He simply believes he can do something extraordinary. Upon realizing that he has more to gain than to lose from becoming something as strange as a superhero, he dons a unitard and begins fighting criminals.

The *Belfast Telegraph* put it best in their review of the story:

"Kick-Ass taps into modern day lawlessness and senseless brutality by pitting one regular teenager, without a single super power to his cumbersome name, against real life bad guys capable of killing him with a single blow to the head." (Belfast Telegraph)

His life is permanently changed when he inadvertently inspires a subculture of copycats. Kick-Ass comes into direct contact with a couple of crazed vigilantes - including an 11-year-old sword-wielding expert, Hit Girl and her father, Big Daddy. Later, he establishes a friendship with another young superhero, Red Mist. Be that as it may, owing

to the plotting of a neighborhood horde boss Frank D'Amico, that new alliance is put under severe scrutiny. (Mark Millar).

Kickass was called "the quintessential libertarian film," by Breitbart writer Leigh Scott. (Scott) It is not difficult to see why. The 'average people' in this film and book create their own meanings through the sheer daring that comes with being different. If that approach to life is what helps people fight crime or do anything else that is deemed positive by the general standards of society, so be it. Scott states her case further:

"Yes, on the surface, 'Kick-Ass' is morally depraved. It features wildly offensive language and breathlessly violent images. It does indeed have an eleven-year-old girl who could take down [Jean-Claude] Van Damme and whose mouth would make Mickey Rourke blush. It features people having sex in public. It depicts drug use. But that's not the whole story. At its thematic core, it's about the struggle between good and evil, personal responsibility, and the importance of the individual. It is a solid, truthful message wrapped up in a morally questionable package." (Scott)

It is also highly nihilistic. The father of the eleven-year-old super hero, Hit Girl, is defeated and dies towards the end of the film and book. How many superhero films kill off a single parent, let alone a superhero? Spiderman and Batman are classic examples, but in an age where superheroes are commoditized and mass-produced, *Kick-Ass* reminds comic enthusiasts of the medium's tragic roots, bringing back the idea that a tragedy such as the violent loss of a parent can happen at any time, not just in a primary stage in the development of a hero.

Mark Millar's extraordinary plotlines have made him the art form's most dominant figure since *Spider-Man's* legendary co-creator, Stan Lee. He squashes his devout

Catholic faith with his determination to show bloody violence for what it really is; however, his violence has a meaning. Millar has called his work "a song to neo-conservatism." (Turner) (Bastos Gurgel) (Baldwin) (Somers) (Johnson). Whether that label is legitimate or not is neither here nor there; however, there is certainly a strong case for proclaiming it is a song to libertarianism – whether it is conservative in its politics or not. (Bath) (Berman)

Graphic Novel V Traditional Novel

There is something to be said for the fact that out of all the nihilistic and libertarian works one can find, only a handful were ever originally published as graphic novels. It is relatively easy to find graphic novels centered around real people telling their stories, zombies, and of course super heroes. A graphic novel exists that focused on Karl Marx, the god-father of Communism. However, finding a graphic novel that combines libertarian and nihilistic themes is a rarity.

The other unique aspect of this novel was that it was one of the only truly positive nihilistic books readily available. The graphic novel element adds to this. Graphic novels are traditionally light reads. Even if a graphic novel discusses very heavy or dense philosophical material, the illustrations serve to break up the story into something as visual as it is contextual. There is certainly a lightheartedness to be found within *Kick-Ass*, as violent as it may be. In this graphic novel, no matter how rough, tragic, or harsh it gets, these moments are usually followed up by a joke, usually of a juvenile variety. This is done in a way that only a graphic novel can. If this were a traditional novel, it is possible that it could not have received the intuitive understanding it did from its audience.

The film acts the same way; it is humorous without being a full-fledged comedy. It is so violent that its sequel received scorn from star Jim Carrey. (Child) However, because the graphic novel argues that anyone can be a superhero, provided that they have the drive to follow through with the wonders and horrors that come with it, the story achieves a balance that allows the positivity of its nihilistic attitude to flourish. Tim Posada, author of *Superhero Fatigue: Unmasking the Visual, Aesthetic, and Transmedia Language of an Emerging Genre,* describes it like this: "…in Kick-Ass…something different happens.

They present a type of pastiche that is laughable without becoming camp or parody. While this remains an underdeveloped concept, it holds promise for films to come. (Posada)"

Posada also references Todd McGowan's *The End of Dissatisfaction? Emerging Society of Enjoyment,* which suggests that *Kick-ass* "drives much of its…humor, from the incongruous spectacle of Hit-Girl's superheroic performance, which sees her adopting adult roles and behaviors that appear alternately ridiculous and frightening." Posada provides the following addendum: "The brutality is never depicted as anything but brutal, though the film does turn it into a joke on several occasions, thanks to Dave's 'wincing."

Personally, I am not convinced this is the whole truth. There is undoubtedly humor at seeing an eleven-year-old girl, as the title suggests, *kick ass,* but there is more at work here. The humor also comes from the fact that there is a great deal of hope in this film and graphic novel. Sometimes it is ridiculous and naïve, but it is always inspiring to see these average people performing incredible feats.

The Future of Film and Fiction

In the 60s, when *A Clockwork Orange* was written, children were largely brought up to be seen and not heard. That is partially why such a novel was considered so outlandish. Not only that, youth culture was viewed as something entirely new, and therefore, something entirely dangerous. As the years have gone on, power has shifted more to the young people of society. Parents no longer lecture their children for their poor grades; they lecture the teachers. Children and teens have more power than ever before, and this is also due to the power that they now hold thanks to the Internet. They can be connected to anyone and anything at any time. Stories through the mid-20th century tried their best to prepare people for the possibilities that the future would provide for the decades to come – but nobody could possibly predict just how readily available information would become to the young generations of the 21st century.

It is largely known that so much of what used to be science fiction is now reality. Our constant connection to sources of information has allowed many people to express themselves, work for themselves, and learn by themselves. This will continue to occur within the next generation of film and literature. There is a reason superhero films are now the most bankable: they show the implications of furthering technology and how we can use it to improve society.

A professor at Drew University said in a lecture on African American Science Fiction that Americans tend to look to the future, since we are such a young nation. It is because of this forward-thinking way of life that Americans were able to revolutionize technology through the internet, smart phones, and social media. It is because of this technology that we set the trends of individuality. The LGBTQ+ movement hit its

monumental strides thanks to social media having the power to show that it is okay to embrace those who are different. That is why, in many ways, American innovation and technology are to blame for this unprecedented shift from community centered around religion to individuals.

Discussion and Conclusion

A century ago, the works included in this paper would have been inconceivable. Delinquent children taking over a city, only to be brainwashed to be good at the cost of their ability to function? A teenager who dons a superhero suit and fights crime? "Where are the familial values," traditionalists would ask. "Where is their fear in God?" The answer may not be as simple as arguing that family life is overrated and that God is dead. It may be that there are things far more terrifying to the people of today than God, and that there may be values more at risk of falling apart than those associated with family.

While many of the entries were quite violent, it must be understood that none of them condone violence as a viable solution to the questions that haunt the violent characters in these stories. Each author uses violence as a vehicle for a larger point they want to make, and that is where the satire is either appreciated or lost on audiences. The violence in *A Clockwork Orange* and *Fahrenheit 451* was used to illustrate how the State controls one's mind, whereas in *Fight Club* and *American Psycho*, it was a vehicle to show the darker side of materialism. The film versions of these books add new dimensions to our appreciation of these themes, especially in the cases where the films were released in close proximity to the books' release. They add a new environment and lead us further down an examination of a very important question, which affects our society and our own lives.

Of all these works, none had a classic 'happy ending.' Some were more cinematic than others, but they were all responses to the constant tension between nihilism and libertarianism through and through. *Kick-ass* was a great example of positive nihilism. *Requiem for a Dream* is an argument for positive nihilism. *No Country for Old Men* – maybe not so much. The main point for each of them is that a person should always have

a choice as to how he or she finds their meaning in life. Without that choice, it leads to impotent people living in impotent societies.

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