

Faculty Mentor: Jodi Byrd

Tentative title: “Performing Fatherhood and Masculinity in Digital Games”

I intend to write an honors thesis on the representation of protagonist fathers in recent digital games, focusing on the performative nature of the medium. My analysis will explore what it means to *play* a father in these stories, and how the audience’s experience diverges from literary or filmic experience by way of play. My primary texts will be *Heavy Rain* (2010) by Quantic Dream, *The Walking Dead* (2012) by Telltale Games, and *The Last of Us* (2013) by Naughty Dog; all of these critically acclaimed games feature a father as the primary or sole playable protagonist, and their drama revolves around the father’s relationship with his child or child-figure. I plan to explore how the player’s potential performances of fatherhood evolve throughout these titles, which variably propagate and undermine the notion that traditional masculine values of violently protective paternalism are effective or necessary in a father’s relationship with his children.

My previous coursework has set the stage for this thesis. The majority of my upper-level classes in English have devoted significant time to gender studies, which has spurred my interest in masculinity. My experience performing in over a dozen plays with the student-led What You Will Shakespeare Company – along with various courses on the subject of Renaissance theatre – has indirectly steered my own research to the realm of Performance Studies; I find this field to be crucial to a deeper understanding of digital games, a medium that, like theatre, is largely rooted in performance. So, much of my perspective comes from Performance Studies generally and theatrical theories specifically. I may explore how a union between Stanislavski’s system of

acting and cinema's concept of "identification" (introduced to me by a Major Authors course on Alfred Hitchcock) could provide a context with which to discuss the player's relationship with the protagonists of these digital games. I am also registered for ENGL 578: Issues in Performance Studies for Spring 2014, and I hope this seminar will reveal to me more performance theories that I will find applicable to my thesis. I will also consult previously established theories in Game Studies, as well as game journalism written specifically on my primary texts.

Using this framework, I will critically analyze my primary texts to see what performances these games allow, encourage, or force upon the player and how the game narratives react to those performances. When in these games is violent protection the only course to solve family issues? Why might so many father-child narratives be appearing now in the medium's history? How do these family-centered narratives relate to the larger theme of violent, masculine wish-fulfillment performance in the medium of digital games? Do these games represent an attempt to move the medium beyond these themes – frequently censored by media and society as immature and dangerous – toward a more respectable artistic enterprise, and is that attempt successful? What can be learned about masculinity and the familial role of the father in our society on a larger scale? These are some of the questions I plan to confront in my thesis.

**Between Misselthwaite Manor and The “Wild, Dreary” Moor:  
The Functionality of Enclosures in *The Secret Garden***

*“Two things cannot be in one place. Where you tend a rose, my lad, a thistle cannot grow.”*

*~Frances Hodgson Burnett*

I. Childhood and Perceptions of Space

As a beloved classic in the canon of children’s literature, scholars and bibliophiles alike have been critically examining *The Secret Garden* since its 1911 debut. While the garden has been tirelessly analyzed in terms of colonial influence and Mary’s sexuality, its function is more than a cultural commentary. In a larger sense, the garden encapsulates how children negotiate compartmentalized space. As evident in Frances Hodgson Burnett’s narrative, enclosed spaces import competing notions of regeneration and death. Mediated through the divide between nature and culture (and consequently, England and India), compartmentalized spatiality becomes dualistically life giving and death inducing.

In children’s literature, the way that space is constructed incompletely represents the child’s experience. Rather, it reflects the “powerful manifestation of the ways in which the world is interpreted and explained to children” (Bavidge, pg.3). These spaces are not reflective of the world-- they reveal how adults idealize the world of the child. In a sense, spatiality suggests nostalgia for child perceptions of nature in a way that accepts its distance. Jenny Bavidge claims that “children’s literary criticism has not paid enough attention to questions of spatiality (particularly urban space) and has rarely attempted to theorise the nature of place and space in children’s literature” (5). In the context of imperialist literature, Mary Goodwin champions the

importance of spatiality in relation to the “moral climate” of texts. According to her essay, each space in *The Secret Garden* conveys a certain moral affect:

The setting of *The Secret Garden* spans...worlds, each of which offers its own moral climate to mirror the meteorological and topographical environment: India, a fen of deadly vapours and punishing heat that causes physical, moral and spiritual lassitude; the bleak and desolate Misselthwaite Manor in the Yorkshire moors, whose inmates languish in a Gothic maze of dark lonely rooms; and the gardens and countryside beyond the manor, alive with secret power to breathe spirit back into dying matter (2)

As Goodwin delineates, spaces construct emotional and moral perceptions of self. The foreboding house at first provides Mary with security; the Edenic garden frightens Mary before she becomes intrigued in its upkeep. Neither the English manor nor the landscape of India sufficiently nourishes the characters. In India, Mary is “forgotten” in the “perfectly still” bungalow (Burnett 8, 10); similarly, Mary laments how “lost and odd” she feels in the “gloomy” English mansion (Burnett 22). The presentation of the garden as rejuvenative has some textual accuracy, yet does not fully account for Mary’s engagement in the flowery space. Not only is Mary ostracized from the moor and manor, but the lure of the garden is in its otherness: like Mary herself, the “garden [is] secret and closed-up” (Evans 2). While the garden may contain “secret power”, its enclosed spatiality remains just as problematic for Mary as the “frightfully hot” Indian climate and the “wild, dreary” English moors (Burnett 8, 21)

Despite the historical rarity of a spatial lens, *The Secret Garden* must be read for its “engage[ment] with the ways in which children make and experience space” (Bavidge 2). In children’s literature, the reiterated discrepancies in natural and cultural spaces facilitate perceptions of childhood. The enclosures in *The Secret Garden* simultaneously prove problematic and nurturing for the liminal character, Mary Lennox. Each instance of

compartmentalized space conveys a womb/tomb dichotomy: the novel uses spatiality to both create domestic safety and incur death.

## II. Implications of Geographic Spatiality

Despite the geographic disparity, Burnett consistently describes Indian and English wildlife as dangerous, while Mary's homes in both countries facilitate her alienation. The "frightfully hot" (Burnett 8) climate of India breeds exotic species like "scarlet hibiscus blossoms" and "rustling snakes" that clearly differ from the milder English weather. Even when Mary leaves India, her perception of nature is shaped by "cholera" causing her family to "die like flies" (Burnett 9). While Indian skies were "hot and blazing", the "awful dreary gray" moor prompts Mary to conclude, "I thought perhaps it always rained or looked dark in England" (Burnett 51). Iconically, Mary first experiences nature in England through the "wide, bleak moor" that looked like "a wide expanse of black ocean" emitting a "wild, low, rushing sound" (Burnett 21). In both countries, Mary's experiences construct nature as inaccessible or frightening.

While Mary's interactions with nature connate danger, her experiences in domestic spaces result in alienation, rather than belonging. Even in the midst of exotic scenery, Mary's life in India remains within the bungalow. The "sickly, fretful child" (Burnett 1) reappears in different scenes of society: the nursery, drinking wine in the dining room, and "waiting in the house... staring at the wall" (Burnett 10). Compartmentalization defines Mary's life in India: her mother keeps in a separate room, where "Mistress Mary" (Burnett 35) exclusively receives attention and care from her Ayah.

Tentative Title: The Maintenance of the Mainstream: Policing Difference in *Mad Men*

Advocates of AMC's television series *Mad Men* (2007—) cite its period detail, interweaving of historical events with fictional plot, and emphasis on character development as key elements that frequently earn the series high critical praise and popularity. Additionally, the series engrosses viewers and critics alike for its virtually constant, and often troubling, linkage between the work lives and personal lives of Sterling Cooper's employees. Besides simply driving the show's plot and character development, the intersections between work and personal lives for *Mad Men*'s main characters also reveal how *Mad Men* imagines sexual, racial, and gender politics of 1960s America.

Two particular episodes of *Mad Men* demonstrate how the convergence of characters' work and personal lives help the series address societal norms and expectations during the 1960s, especially regarding gender and sexuality. Both episodes address sexual propositioning within the workplace, and both ask how reactions to such propositions threaten the employment and security of those affronted. In "Wee Small Hours," (309) Salvatore "Sal" Romano, the Italian-American and closeted homosexual art director of Sterling Cooper, refuses a sexual advance from Lee Garner Jr., a high profile executive of Sterling Cooper's most important account. In "The Other Woman," (510), Herb Rennet, a dealer manager for the luxury car manufacturer Jaguar, makes it clear that if he is not assured a sexual encounter with Joan Harris, Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce's Director of Agency Operations, he will revoke his support of SCDP's bid to handle Jaguar's advertising.

I plan on interpreting these episodes through the lens of historical analysis. Specifically, I will consult feminist and gay and lesbian historical studies of sexuality, gender, and race in the

Cold War era. I will maintain that since Don Draper, the series' protagonist, is heavily featured as the decision-maker in these episodes, *Mad Men* employs prevalent mainstream attitudes in America toward homosexuality, ethnicity, and gender during early Cold War. I plan to compare two episodes of *Mad Men* as a way of investigating how the show depicts sexual norms, specifically women's heterosexuality as compared with men's homosexuality. I will ask how Sal's homosexuality and ethnic background inform Don's reaction to Garner's sexual advance toward Sal with support from scholarship that questions how homosexuality and communism were linked as major threats to the welfare of the United States in the early Cold War. Additionally, I will question why Don reacts so differently in Joan's case by examining the episodes from the perspective of gender, and will argue that Don dissuades Joan from responding to Herb's sexual proposition because *Mad Men* imagines Don participating in a set of early Cold War attitudes that condemn the active use of female sexuality for power or gain.

**Excerpt:**

In "Wee Small Hours" (309), Salvatore "Sal" Romano, the Italian-American and closeted homosexual art director of Sterling Cooper, refuses a sexual advance from Lee Garner, Jr—one of the top executives of Lucky Strike, a cigarette company that has a longstanding and highly invested relationship with Sterling Cooper. Lee propositions Sal inside a film editing room at Sterling Cooper, and Sal responds by refusing to engage in sexual activity at work with a male client, saying, "There's been a misunderstanding" (309). Lee, obviously offended and embarrassed, calls Harry Crane (who heads Sterling Cooper's television department) and demands Sal's immediate dismissal, saying, "I have a bit of a problem. It's that Salvatore fella, the director? He's no good; I'd like him gone. I can't work with him. Get rid of him" (309). Because Harry has no managerial authority over the Lucky

Strike account, he fails to act on this demand, and the next day Lee storms out of the agency's offices when he sees Sal, indicating that his business, a major source of the agency's revenue, will be taken elsewhere if Sal remains employed at Sterling Cooper.

In "The Other Woman" (510), a similar type of sexual propositioning occurs. Two account executives with Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce (SCDP) treat Herb Rennet, a potential new client and the dealer manager for the luxury car manufacturer Jaguar, to an expensive dinner. Herb expresses his desire for a date with the Director of Agency Operations Joan Harris, saying, "I would sure like the opportunity to get to know her better" (510) and "I like that redhead. And I think she and I would both welcome the opportunity to spend the night together" (510). While the SCDP account executives tell Herb to ask Joan on a date if he so wishes, Herb insinuates that if he is not assured a sexual encounter with Joan, he will revoke his support of SCDP's bid to handle Jaguar's advertising. All of the partners of SCDP—except the show's main character Don Draper—vote to present Joan with an offer that she sleep with Herb in order to secure the account.

Don Draper's reactions to sexual propositioning within the workplace illustrate how *Mad Men* imagines Cold War sexual and gender norms. Don, the series' protagonist and a distinguished advertising executive, is heavily featured as the decision-maker within these episodes; he confronts both Sal and Joan once he learns that they have received sexual advances from clients. In both cases, he attempts to reach what he considers the best solutions for their individual situations. However, the attitudes and reactions that Don displays toward Sal and Joan are markedly different, and I will argue this marked difference is inherently linked with Don's masculinity and sexuality.



*Fighting for Peace: The Cultural Crucx of Youth and War in Jack Kirby's Comics*

Jack Kirby was one of the most influential and innovative American comic book creators of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Working in a medium that was (until rather recently) designated mostly for youths, Kirby did not allow the scope of his audience to limit his artistic vision. Often described as “a kid at heart,” he instead found inspiration in the interests and concerns of young people, which he incorporated into his work. I am intrigued to observe how this engagement with youth culture, which pervades throughout Kirby’s body of work, transitions from his early comics of the 1940s to later his works of the 1970s.

Of particular interest to me is how the emergence of hippie culture (a movement widely embraced and spread by American youths of the 1960s/1970s) is juxtaposed in Kirby’s comics against themes of war, violence, and punishment (elements which are common threads in the genre of superhero comics, but are of particular significance to Kirby, a veteran who fought on the beaches of Normandy in ‘44). Framed by two wars (World War II and Vietnam), Kirby’s body of work shifts dramatically from where he begins (with the patriotic Captain America) to where he ends (in the dystopian world of O.M.A.C.) in regards to his thematic and tonal approach to the impact of war on youth.

In addition to *Captain America* and *O.M.A.C.: One Man Army Corps*, potential primary texts may include Kirby’s work on the following comics: *Forever People*, *The Newsboy Legion*, *Boy Commandos*, *Superman’s Pal Jimmy Olsen*, and *Boy’s Ranch*. Applicable secondary texts may include Charles Hatfield’s *The Superhero Reader* and *Hand of Fire*, as well as B.J. Oropeza’s *The Gospel According to Superheroes* and Bradford W. Wright’s *Comic Book Nation*.

This proposed avenue of research will certainly be of value to enthusiasts of Jack Kirby, the superhero genre, and/or the medium of comic books and graphic novels. But even those not well versed in these mediums can appreciate the vast legacy of Kirby’s work; he pioneered techniques

that have become staples of the comic book genre and also influenced other mediums as well, such as literature and art. I thus intend to make my analysis of Kirby's work accessible to anyone with a general interest in art and/or literary criticism (for comic books can bridge the gap between these two worlds).

Stepping outside the lense of media criticism, this project will also appeal to those with an interest in history, specifically, the history of American war culture. I believe an exploration of Kirby's work in context of the narrative of American war will unveil important insights into the complicated history between America's culture of war and the culture of its youth. An association with war and patriotism became increasingly prevalent in American culture via war propaganda, much of which was aimed at American youth. I am intrigued to discover more about how American war culture evolved in the wake of WWII, how counter-culture peace movements – lead primarily by young people – gained prominence in America leading up to and concurrent with the war in Vietnam, and finally, how these tensions became expressed in American comic books, as shaped by Jack Kirby.

## *Annotated Bibliography*

### *Primary Sources:*

**Kirby, Jack. *Jack Kirby's OMAC: One Man Army Corps.***

**New York: DC Comics, 2008. Print.**

I plan to orient my analysis around transitions in Kirby's body of work, particularly shifts in his thematic approach to war. A vital aspect of this will be the juxtaposition between the 1940's issues of *Captain America* against the 1970's *O.M.A.C.* As detailed Mark Evanier (a comic book artist who worked for a time under Jack Kirby) in this edition's forward, *O.M.A.C.* is in part a retelling of *Captain America*, set in a dystopian future. This was the intention Kirby had for *Captain America* when he returned to revamp the story in the 1960's, but Marvel rejected the concept. The two heroes share similar origin stories, but *O.M.A.C.*'s lack of agency (he is less of a "super hero" and more of a "super tool") makes for a less glamorized, more critical portrayal of the engineered soldier. *O.M.A.C.*'s adventures revolve around themes of exploitation (particularly of youth) and the paradoxical nature of enforcing peace with violent means, a stark contrast to the ultra-patriotic, borderline propaganda of early *Captain America*.

Other potential primary sources:

*Captain America*

*Forever People*

*The Newsboy Legion*

*Boy Commandos*

*Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen*

*Boy's Ranch*

*Secondary Sources:*

**Hatfield, Charles. *Hand of Fire: The Comics Art of Jack Kirby.***

**Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012. Print.**

Considered “The Kirby Bible” in comic book studies, Hatfield’s book is an extensive analysis of the conventions now associated with Kirby’s work. I consider this source extremely reliable in my scope of research as it will serve to flesh out basic and vital information about Kirby’s artistic style and techniques as well as providing information about his personal history (of importance to my topic as Kirby’s background in WWII influenced his approach to war in his comics).

**Hatfield, Charles, Jeet Heer, and Kent Worcester. *The Superhero Reader*.**

**Jackson: U of Mississippi, 2013. Print.**

Edited by the author of *Hand of Fire*, with assistance from Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester, this is a collection of critical essays on comics. Amongst these essays is a piece from Hatfield called “Jack Kirby and the Marvel Aesthetic” which will serve to explain how “The Marvel Method” (Marvel’s revolutionary approach which prioritized comic book art, rather than narration, as the main vehicle for storytelling) influenced Kirby’s craft.

**Oropeza, B. J. *The Gospel According to Superheroes: Religion and Popular Culture*.**

**New York: Peter Lang, 2005. Print.**

Like *The Superhero Reader*, B.J. Oropeza’s *Gospel* is a collection of various critical essays on comics. The two essays that relate most to my area of interest is one on *Captain America* by Robert G. Weiner and another on Jack Kirby’s *Forever People* by Scott Rosen. Though this collection of essays is assembled around a critical focus of comic books and religion, I believe they will still be applicable to my topic. It will be useful to examine effective methods of cultural analysis of comics, though in my case, the focus will be war culture instead of religious culture. That being said, war culture and religious culture in America share some similarities and at times inform one another, so the essays may prove useful in that context as well.

**Wright, Bradford W. *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*.**

**Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001. Print.**

This book takes a historical approach to comics and youth culture, with particular attention paid to post-World War II. The only problem I foresee with this book is the breadth of information, as it covers a wide time-span of American history. I will have to be selective about what I chose to include in my paper in order to maintain its focus.

**Working Title:** There's No Place Like Home: Orwell and a Return to the Domestic Sphere

**Part I:**

In his novels *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and *Coming Up for Air*, George Orwell depicts the world of the lower-middle class in the English suburbs during the Interwar period in the 1930s. Through the eyes of his two male protagonists Gordon Comstock of *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and George Bowling of *Coming Up for Air*, Orwell shows the struggles of the middle class Englishman as he attempts to break from the imperfect society in which he lives. However, these novels, written rather early in Orwell's career, are understudied and overshadowed by his later works; in my paper I hope to reopen a discussion of Orwell's earlier works, which are rich in complexity and dialectical in nature. Some of the major questions that prompted my study of these texts were: How are these texts similar and different? Do the conclusions suggest decline? What is the role of family in each novel? and What is the significance of the theme of escape that is present in both novels? With further research and continued close reading, I hope to craft an argument that the novels do not end in a retreat to the domestic sphere, but may in fact support the average, middle-class Englishman's attempt to live decently and raise a family.

Though George Orwell is often viewed as a radical, socialist writer whose most widely read texts, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm*, warn readers of the dangers of totalitarianism, two of his earlier novels, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and *Coming Up for Air*, offer his modern, English audience a much more complex critique of English society in the 1930s. However, much of the scholarship and study done with these novels fail to realize their dialectical and complex nature, and instead view the novels as tales of decline with unexceptional protagonists. However, this reading of George Orwell's *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and *Coming Up for Air* is arguably too simplistic and may be skewed due to one's

reading of Orwell's later works that are arguably much more allegorical and pessimistic. This simplistic reading of *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and *Coming Up for Air* is complicated through Orwell's use of humor and irony throughout the texts, as Orwell tells the story of two lower-middle class Englishmen who are rather ambivalent about success. In this paper, I am interested in taking a closer look at these instances of humor and irony that are often disregarded by many writers, such as Christopher Hitchens and Todd Kuchta. In addition, I intend to look at how the protagonists' ambivalence towards success is manifested through their attempts to escape or temporarily break from their imperfect societies. In *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, Gordon Comstock declares a war on the "money-gods" and rejects mass culture, leaving his job at an advertising firm to pursue a career as a poet. George Bowling takes a secret vacation to Lower Binfield, his childhood home, to escape his family and the premonitions of war that consume his thoughts in *Coming Up for Air*. However, I would like to argue that neither novel ends in failure, but instead concludes with the protagonists returning to and accepting their imperfect societies in order to maintain their duty to family, which appears to offer the protagonists at least some measure of comfort and purpose. Therefore, to view Bowling's and Comstock's return to the domestic sphere as a mere sign of decline would disregard the agency that Comstock gains through the establishment of a family and the sense of purpose that Bowling derives from providing for his family. In this paper, I would argue that this return to the domestic sphere is not a retreat, but rather the protagonists' attempt to establish a true identity and sense of place within a society that is quickly becoming consumed by Americanized mass culture.

## **Part II:**

Like Comstock, George Bowling, the protagonist of *Coming Up for Air*, also appears rather disinterested in achieving success or accumulating wealth. Bowling is introduced to

readers as he prepares for his day off of work at The Flying Salamander insurance company and leaves his home to take the train into London to get his new false teeth. Unlike Comstock who is anxious over the little money he has, Bowling lives a life of relative lower-middle class comfort due to his position at the insurance agency, and due to his recent windfall, is deciding how to spend the seventeen quid he won, unbeknownst to his wife, at the horse races. However, though Bowling has a respectable job and would be viewed by Comstock as a slave to the “money-god”, Bowling is conscious of his artificial role in capitalist society. Bowling thinks that though “[t]he prole [proletariat] suffers physically...he’s a free man when he isn’t working” (Orwell, 13), highlighting the demeaning nature of the labor he is invested in. He goes on to admit that “[m]y own line, insurance, is a swindle...but it’s an open swindle with the cards on the table” (Orwell, 13). By stating that his work is a swindle and emphasizing his dissatisfaction with his job, Orwell depicts Bowling as uninterested in professional success.

Though Todd Kuchta has argued that the suburban male is depicted in Orwell’s *Coming Up for Air* “as English avatars of the colonized: exploited, disposed of their homes, and plagued by feelings of powerlessness and enslavement” (Kuchta, 172), I instead argue that the lives of suburban males merely appears increasing insignificant in a period in which World War II is on the horizons. These men and women of the suburbs are members of the lost generation, who have already experienced a major world war, which has arguably left them feeling powerless and defeated. Bowling, like the other “poor bastard[s]” (Orwell, 13) who are never free from the burdens of maintaining a middle class existence in a capitalist society, works not to be successful, but to keep decent and take care of his family. However, this ambivalence towards success is not due to the exploitation of the common man in capitalist, English society in the 1930, but is arguably due to the generation’s involvement in World War I, which has left them with a desire to lead a quiet, decent life in the suburbs.



### **Part III:**

**Hitchens, Christopher. *Why Orwell Matters*. New York: Basic Books, 2002. Print.**

One secondary source that I will incorporate into my paper is Christopher Hitchens's book entitled *Why Orwell Matters*. In his book, Hitchens makes few references to *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and *Coming Up for Air* in a chapter entitled "Orwell and the Feminists: Difficulties with Girls". Though Hitchens is correct in stating that both novels include protagonists who struggle in their relationships with their wife or girlfriend, Hitchens's reading of Hilda Bowling and Rosemary is too simplistic and fails to grasp that though Orwell crafts imperfect couples, the male protagonists truly love and need their female companions. In my paper I hope to refute this argument through utilizing quotations from the text that suggest a greater depth to the protagonists' relationships.

**Kuchta, Todd. *Semi-Detached Empire: Suburbia and the Colonization of Britain, 1880 to the Present*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010. Print.**

Another secondary source that I hope to use in writing my paper is Todd Kuchta's *Semi-Detached Empire: Suburbia and the Colonization of Britain, 1880 to the Present*, which is a post-colonialist reading of modern English literature set in the British suburbs. One chapter of the text entitled "George Orwell and the Road to West Bletchley" heavily discusses both *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and *Coming Up for Air*, arguing the protagonists of the novels, both middle-class men who live in the London suburbs, are terribly disempowered and defeated, relating their status in English society to that of the colonized man under the rule of colonial powers. However, in my paper I hope to argue that this reading depicts the protagonists as lacking any form of agency and fails to take into account the protagonists' chosen ambivalence towards success and the agency that these protagonists have as fathers and husbands.

**Orwell, George. *Coming Up for Air*. New York: Harcourt Inc., 1950. Print.**

Published in 1939, *Coming Up for Air* tells the story of a middle-aged, denture-wearing insurance salesman named George (Tubby) Bowling who attempts to temporarily break from pre-World War II English society, in order to return to his boyhood home in Lower Binfield. This novel will act as one of my primary sources and will be discussed alongside Orwell's *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*. In this paper, I hope to discuss Bowling's ambivalence towards success, his failed attempt to break from pre-war society and his domestic duties, and his return to his wife and the domestic sphere.

**Orwell, George. *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*. New York: Harcourt Inc., 1956. Print.**

Published in 1936 and loosely based on Orwell's own experience working in a Hampstead-based bookshop, Booklover's Corner, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* tells the story of Gordon Comstock, a "moth-eaten" (Orwell, 3), twenty-nine-year old who chooses to struggle as a shopkeeper at a used bookstore and write poetry due to his self-proclaimed "war on money" (Orwell, 120). This novel will act as my second primary source. Over the course of the paper, I hope to compare and contrast Comstock's ambivalence toward success, failed escape from capitalist, mass culture society, and his decision to return to society and start a family, with Bowling's journey. My main goal in this paper is to argue that these novels are not mere novels of decline, but are in fact dialectical, complex, and worthy of continued readership and study.