

Hannah Decker
Writing Samples Portfolio

How to Interpret Scholarly Work

By Hannah Decker

When reading scholarly work, it is important to:

- Print it out
 - Studies show that students are more likely to retain information they consume through hardcopies than they are through digital journals. This, of course, may be different for everyone, but I know from my own personal experiences, printing readings out helps in the long run.
 - If you do not have a personal printer and are in NYC, you can print for free from MMC's library. You must, however, make a reservation first before entering the library so that we can control the capacity and maintain safety on campus. I have attached here a link to the reservation website:
<https://www.aaiscloud.com/MarymountManhattanC/Default.aspx>
 - Once you have accessed the website, you will click the Library Reservation Form that is listed under Reservation Forms on the left-hand side of your screen. Then, you can fill out the information it requires.
 - Since we have to reserve library space this semester, it might be a good idea to print as many readings out as possible during your reservation slot, so you do not have to frequent the campus to print.
 - If you do not have a personal printer and are at home or cannot access the MMC library, you can print from various Staples locations at the self-service printing areas for a small fee.
 - I've attached two NYC locations that you can access:
 - Near Cooper Square:
<https://printingservices.staples.com/us/ny/manhattan/769-broadway>
 - Near 55th St.:
<https://printingservices.staples.com/us/ny/manhattan/675-3rd-avenue>
 - I recommend calling ahead of time before making the journey to Staples to verify that they are allowing customers to use their self-service printers before going.
- Annotate

- As a student and a scholar, you should be practicing active reading. Active reading is the best way to remain alert and focused as you read. It keeps you engaged with the text as well as increases your likelihood of remembering it.
- Analyze the title:
 - The title is important because it often serves as a brief description of what the text will discuss.
 - Pull apart the title and circle the keywords that you think might be of importance to the text.
- Find/interpret the thesis:
 - The thesis is the main point of the article/journal. It is what the writer is trying to convince/inform you of.
 - The thesis statement clarifies more explicitly what the text will discuss. It often will reflect on the title of the text. It will also tie the article together. If you ever feel lost while reading the article, you can refer back to the thesis statement and it may help you understand the point the writer is trying to make.
- Contextualize:
 - To help contextualize, gather as much background information as possible in regards to the text, so as to better support your understanding of the main points of the article.
 - A few ways to contextualize include:
 - Researching the article itself:
 - Research of the article does not need to go in depth but small factors count. It's good to know the name of the author and the date on which the article you are studying was published.
 - The date of the article helps the contemporary reader understand what the social, political, economic, and technological climate of the original publication date was like, and how the state of the world at the time may have affected the text when it was being written. For instance, a journal that was written in 1941 was written during WWII. You may want to consider the conditions of the world during the time and how it may have affected the article and viewpoint of society when reading.

- Additionally, the English language is always changing. Words may mean something entirely new now than what they did when the article was originally written. Knowing the date of publication helps understand the original denotation, and even connotation, of specific words that are used in the article that may not make sense in today's world in the context they are used.
- It also may be helpful to know whether or not this small article is part of a larger body of work; the journal may be a specific chapter within a book, and knowing what kind of book it comes from is often helpful in understanding the particular section you are studying.
- Highlighting dates:
 - Similar to the way that knowing the article's publishing date is important, any dates listed throughout the text may help contextualize it as well.
 - For instance, in Gunning's article, the year 1906 is extremely important in regards to the main idea of the article. Highlighting this date and any other dates will keep you active as you read and, in turn, help you remember the central idea of the article.
- Highlighting places:
 - In the same way that highlighting dates is important, highlighting places is too.
 - The article you are reading may pertain to a movement that is specific to one location and it is important to keep that information in mind as you read.
- Researching name-drops:
 - Scholarly articles often include a lot of references to other people or bodies of work. Researching the people that a writer name-drops may prove beneficial in understanding the points the writer is trying to make in referencing them.
- Defining unfamiliar terminology/vocabulary:
 - Keep a separate piece of paper nearby and write down terms you do not know the definition of. Doing this is important because it will simplify the text as well as expand your vocabulary.

- It is especially important in Cinema Studies because you are required to know and utilize terminology that is specific to the industry.

- Paraphrase:
 - Oftentimes, the core meaning of scholarly work is deeply embedded in intellectual jargon, confusing sentence structure, and an over-abundance of commas used to impress the reader. When you're a student, this can make understanding the article especially difficult, which is why paraphrasing is important.
 - Paraphrasing is important so that you can understand what the text *actually* says. Putting it in your own words helps... a lot!
 - To help paraphrase, section paragraphs or sentences off and highlight what you feel is the important concept in the specific paragraph/sentence that you are interpreting.

- **All in all, your steps to help understand scholarly work include:**
 - **Printing the article out**
 - **Annotating**
 - **Analyzing the title**
 - **Finding/interpreting the thesis**
 - **Contextualizing**
 - **The text itself; dates, names, or places listed; unfamiliar terms.**
 - **Paraphrasing**

- If you need extra help reading scholarly journals/articles, I am happy to help. You can reach me at hdecker@mmm.edu.

Atomo Beauty - Branding

Example One: You don't need a lab coat and a biochem degree to understand skincare anymore! Atomo Beauty is a strictly no-textbook, no-late-night-studying, *very* user-friendly brand that does the science *for* you—so you don't have to. With natural ingredients and fuss-free science, Atomo Beauty makes purposeful skincare with the sole intent of empowering your appearance. A no-confusion and no-pretension brand, Atomo Beauty only wants one thing: to make your essential skincare routine smart, efficient, and effective, made up of products that actually matter, so you can feel like the best you without all the studying.

Example Two: Atomo Beauty exists because *you* exist. The natural ingredients and fuss-free science of Atomo Beauty make purposeful skincare that empowers your appearance. At Atomo Beauty, we're not looking to create the fountain of youth; we're looking to provide a product that promotes a natural aging process that coincides with your innate molecular makeup. It's no secret that every human body is a collection of cells made up of molecules made up of atoms, and, in case you didn't already know, that includes your skin. Not to get all existential here, but we're really all just walking, talking, functioning clumps of atoms. Atomo Beauty has set out to help nourish your clumps of atoms throughout life's daily tasks in the most essential way. With blatant, easy-to-understand products that are backed by a scientific foundation, Atomo Beauty wants one thing: to make you feel good from the inside out.

Mock Entertainment News Column: The Case of the Canceled: *The Carrie Diaries*

The Case of the Canceled: *The Carrie Diaries*

Long before SJP's triumphant return and Mr. Big's unfortunate, Peloton-ic demise on *And Just Like That...*, the life and world of *Sex & the City*'s beloved Carrie Bradshaw attempted to seek a fanciful rebirth on the silver screen with The CW's *The Carrie Diaries* (2013-2014). *The Carrie Diaries* served as the fun and young prequel to *Sex & the City*, one of HBO's most popular and influential series to date. *The Carrie Diaries* aired, rather, on CBS and Warner Bro.'s subsidiary company, The CW, and was geared, as per usual for the network's target audience, toward young women between ages 18-49. The series follows a young Carrie Bradshaw as she navigates her final years of high school and begins to make the transition from innocent Connecticut teen to New York City columnist and It-girl. The series opened a younger generation of girls to the world of *Sex & the City*, introducing and revitalizing the love the nation had for not just the show's central character, Carrie, but all four main characters. However, the love the world had for *Sex & the City* wasn't enough to justify *The Carrie Diaries*'s residency on television, and, with a 30% drop in ratings and continuously squandering viewership between its two year stint, the show was canceled after just two seasons.

How could it be that a character as socially pertinent as Carrie Bradshaw could not garner the attention of its audience long enough to keep a show running? Perhaps it could be that *The Carrie Diaries*—while it was, in fact, about Carrie Bradshaw—was not about the same Carrie Bradshaw the world knew. I don't just mean that this Carrie was different from the original one. It's no surprise or large feat for this character to be a younger version of her, portrayed by a different actress. But it wasn't (three-named actress) Anna Sophia Robb's portrayal of (also three-named actress) Sarah Jessica Parker's most iconic role that turned audiences away or delineated the character of Carrie from her original version. No, The CW's Carrie had strayed too far from the canon, creating her backstory as one of contradiction from the one SJP's Carrie detailed on *Sex & the City*. From the death of her mother, presence of her father, existence of her sister, and more, *The Carrie Diaries* ignored the pieces of a backstory *Sex & the City* revealed and gave her a very new one. Rather than a prequel, *The Carrie Diaries* became an alternate universe.

In some cases, an alternate universe version of a character so ingrained in American television and fan culture would work. Audiences see it all the time in television and film, allowing audiences to watch their favorite characters take on different storylines without it affecting the original canonical one. It allows for freedom in creativity that doesn't result in tarnish. No one can ever say, "I hate what they did to this character," when what they did occurred in an alternate universe. But, *The Carrie Diaries* was never sold as or intended to represent an alternate reality. It was sold and perceived as a prequel, a prequel that got its

protagonist all wrong. Unbeknownst to most, however, *The Carrie Diaries* isn't just a prequel to *Sex & the City*, as a majority of its audiences believed it to be—it's an adaptation of the 2010 book prequel to Candace Bushnell's anthology collection of *Sex and the City* columns written in the 1990's. That's where it gets convoluted, and where it confuses and loses the interest of its fans. *The Carrie Diaries* wanted to stand alone, but its fans wanted to see it connect.

During the show's run, viewership was never steady. Even before the show was renewed for a second season, its viewership was declining and unreliable. Airing on Monday evenings during its first season as a lead-in for *90210*, *The Carrie Diaries* rarely saw the turnout it anticipated. Some weeks, viewership would show success, with peak viewership reaching 1.61 million viewers, but other weeks not so much, with its lowest first season viewership reaching just 0.86 million viewers. The series, it seemed, couldn't find the same loyal audience that *Sex & the City* had. Its second season, which premiered in late October with a Friday night time slot, saw a disappointing turnout. The decision to move *The Carrie Diaries* to Friday came with the plan to pair it with *America's Next Top Model* and find its audience within the same crowd; however, it seemed this decision was the wrong one. *The Carrie Diaries* season two premiere saw just 0.78 million viewers. Its peak during season two never even crossed the threshold, amassing 0.99 million viewers for the season's ninth episode. Ultimately, on January 31st, 2014, The CW aired the series finale of *The Carrie Diaries*.

In the end, it was a combination of several factors that derailed the trajectory of The CW's *The Carrie Diaries*. Unfortunate turnout, low ratings, a misguided audience, and a new direction for a cherished character led to the show's cancellation. An unsavory timeslot could be the case of this canceled series. Maybe, it was Sarah Jessica Parker's very own disapproving comments that made viewers snub the show. All in all, *The Carrie Diaries* just wasn't a fit for the silver screen. Years later, however, *The Carrie Diaries* managed to gather new attention. Its presence on Netflix led to a rise in streams, as well as online discussion and interests. New fans, and old ones alike, have gathered to mourn its cancellation. *The Carrie Diaries* may have been canceled, but it seems as though it never really "failed." How can something that still manages to spark conversation and reaction truly be a failure? The short lived *Carries Diaries* somehow made a legacy of itself, reserving its spot amongst television's best canceled shows—all of which many people agree were gone too soon.

Mock Editor Letter

Dear Mr. Akhtar,

I write to you this evening to discuss section three of chapter eight from pages 268-283 in *Homeland Elegies*. You include a typed narrative of the father's courtroom experience in television script format—an element that both abandons the pattern of prose writing you have utilized so far and is ultimately the most metafictional element of all the metafictional elements of this novel. I *would* suggest opting for a prose version of this event should you not wish to further remove your readers from the text (key word: would), but I do enjoy this section as it is and believe its intent—or of what I assume is its intent—is quite clear. Removing your audience in this way is the best way of preserving the character of the father's likeability, and reminding your readers of this text's metafiction. My stance: Keep the script.

Is this a memoir? Are these characters *real* people? Some questions, I know, you prefer not to answer. It's difficult, I imagine, to pass this novel, and most of your work for that matter, off as fiction. You've chosen to name your protagonist after yourself—something I've warned against multiple times. Your protagonist's work resembles that of your own work. You've chosen to integrate the names of real life figures, like Trump, into the script while omitting the names of others, going so far as to conceal their identities with lines like “for the purpose of this text, I shall call him/her/they [insert fictional name]”. You've made up *fictional* storylines, while summarizing *nonfiction* storylines. But you've done this all in prose. Two patterns upheld.

Including the script breaks one pattern (writing in prose) while upholding and emphasizing the other: that this novel is a work of metafiction. This scene removes the audience from the text in a fresh way, reminding them of the metafiction of it all, sweeping past the question “Is this a memoir?” yet again. You compare this scene to *Law & Order*, because, like the decade-running procedural often does, you pick pieces of fact and mix them with fiction. A lot of *Law & Order* draws inspiration from true crimes but does so in a way that makes it fiction. It's a genius way of flexing your pen.

You scatter truths about being a writer throughout the text, including in a conversation between the protagonist and his father about Trump's *wall*: ““Giving them a thing to fixate on. It's classic storytelling. A visible, tangible goal. That's what gets an audience rooting for a hero” (309).

Apply this to the retelling of the courtroom scene and the reader now understands what Slaughter's plan of attack was. Readers may consider your goal of the script as: the less pandering on Corrine's emotional state the better—it keeps the painting of the father's humanity strong, rather than weakening it by overdrawing Corrine's victimhood. You kept Corrine technical so the father does not become the villain, as Slaughter so hoped to make him.

Nice work. Send more by Monday.

Best,

Hannah Decker

Back Bay Books

Editor

Hannah Decker
Professor Colbert
Writ 102
March 12th, 2020

The Other Side of the Wall:

An Examination on the Treatment of Mental Illness in Female Figures in Fiction

Symbols, motifs, metaphors, and imagery in literature often depict an underlying, hidden truth concerning the psychological, emotional, and physiological state of the narrator, the protagonist, and sometimes even the author themselves. These literary devices, also, reflect the state of the world in which we live, and often criticize, emphasize, or personalize the ideology of society at the time the text was written. In two specific texts, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," and Carmen Machado's "Mothers," one distinguished image pattern reveals itself. The symbolic image of a wall occurs in both stories, and in doing so, the use of such a symbol and the meaning behind it transcends time and stresses the importance of the societal, ideological stutter it represents. "The Yellow Wallpaper," published in 1892, and "Mothers," published in Machado's book *Her Body and Other Parties* in 2017, both employ the use of a literal wall to suggest the idea that both narrators of their respective stories are in a psychologically repressive state of mind and have blocked their consciousness off from acknowledging their trauma with a "wall." The fact that this image of a "wall" occurs repeatedly in works of literature over the span of over a century suggests something severely important in regards to the societal expectation of women and the treatment of mental illness in women, and perhaps forebodes an unfortunate yet inevitable reaction that society imposes on those who suffer from such conditions.

In both stories, the emphasis of the "wall" and the cracking or complete destruction of the wall (literally and interpretively) occur in the climax of each story. In "The Yellow Wallpaper,"

the climax occurs when the narrator finally peels the grotesque wallpaper off of the wall and releases the “woman” (interpretatively, the narrator herself in her true form) into the world. Up until this moment, the idea of the “woman” in the wall was vague. Who she was, was unknown to readers (unless simply inferred). However, after the narrator peels off the wallpaper, frees the “woman,” and shouts at her husband, “I’ve got out at last... in spite of you and Jane! And I’ve peeled off most of the paper, so you can’t put me back in!” (15), it becomes abundantly clear that the woman slithering around beneath the confines of the yellow wallpaper was a mere reflection of the narrator herself. The steady anticipation and build-up throughout the story all adds up to this climactic moment—the denouement in which the narrator’s unsettling truth finally reveals itself in full. The yellow wallpaper, the wall, and the “woman” sandwiched between them, all along, actually represents the part of her that is repressed by the societal, patriarchal, and ideological views of women, the gendered role of the woman, and the mistreatment of mental illness in women. The “wall” suggests the narrator’s dissociation with her true self due to the pressure of the world around her.

Ashley Lowe, in her essay “Sylvia Plath: Providing a Voice for Women With Mental Illness,” writes about the theme of dissociation and despondency in Sylvia Plath’s famed novel *The Bell Jar* and poem “In Plaster.” In both pieces a second version of the narrator presents itself. In *The Bell Jar*, it is Esther’s dysmorphia of herself upon looking at her reflection. In “In Plaster,” it is the “body cast” the narrator describes around herself. Lowe interprets this body cast as a “coffin that she has built for herself” for the body of the “real person she is on the inside” that “she is killing” by depending on the “false self [she created] in order to appease society” (6). In “The Yellow Wallpaper,” it is the wall that suggests two versions of the narrator that she both dissociates with (by referring to the concealed version of herself as a “woman” or “figure” but

not herself until the very end) and reacts with despondency towards (the version of herself that she must present to society and, more specifically, her husband John versus the real version of herself that she attempts to bury beneath the wallpaper). The woman beneath the wall is the real narrator, but society wants and expects the other woman. The narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” is just as dissatisfied with the same societal expectations that conflict Plath’s protagonists in both *The Bell Jar* and “In Plaster,” and eventually peels back the plaster, or in this case the wallpaper, to oppose the false version society wants of her. Perkins Gilman’s use of a wall suggests the same “killing her real self” that “In Plaster” does, as pretending to appease society’s expectations is what’s driving her insane. The treatment of her mental illness and isolation imposed upon her by her husband further contributes to it. She is repressing her real self, blocking the truth of her mental illness that should not be spoken about due to the ideology of society, and ultimately, the “wall” is used to highlight this.

In “Mothers,” the climax occurs in the form of the memory of the last night of the narrator and Bad’s relationship. The narrator says, “The last night of us, Bad threw me into a wall,” resulting in her “head [leaving] a crack in the plaster” (61) as proof of the significant physical damage that this altercation generated, for both the narrator and the “wall” itself. Throughout the course of this story, the timeline remains non-linear, flashing back and forth between past and present and reality and fantasy. But in this moment, in this vivid image of violence and domestic abuse, the reason for such a non-linear sequence becomes obvious. Ashley Lowe, in her essay “Sylvia Plath: Providing a Voice for Women With Mental Illness,” presents the idea that trauma disrupts the timeline of a life of someone who suffers, disrupts the wavelength of memory, and jumbles the principles and values of its victim. She cites Cathy Caruth’s “The Wound and the Voice” to support this idea, and quotes,

[T]he breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world—is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event that... is experienced too soon, unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor (Caruth 4).

Everything else about the narrative suddenly halts upon reading this part of Machado's narrative; all of the narrator's confusing fantasies fade to grey and any previous foggy ambiguousness in the text becomes perfectly translucent. The "wall" that Bad throws her into cracks and the truth on the other side of it figuratively shines through, representing the repressive psychological state that trauma induces upon its victims. The pieces of the non-linear timeline of this story metaphorically rearrange themselves in order, and the reader can now understand *why* the narrator's internal dialogue and story presents itself in such a confusing way. As Caruth puts it, the "event that... is experienced too soon," in the narrator's case, is the climactic moment. Being physically thrown into a wall that figuratively represents the repression the narrator experiences as a result of her trauma is a breakthrough for readers in understanding this story better.

While in the context of these two stories, understanding trauma and the repression that comes as a result of it is important. However, extending that understanding and knowledge on a scale that reaches beyond these two pieces of literature is even more important. Literature reflects real life; it did in 1892 during "The Yellow Wallpaper" and it did again in 2017 with "Mothers." It always has and will continue to. The most important part about this reflection of real life is that it can teach readers how to change themselves, their perception, and move forward in a way that will change the world's perception as well. It allows readers and individuals to acknowledge where they are wrong in their ideology and reform it for the betterment of society. In Lowe's essay, she credits Sylvia Plath as being the pioneer of women

acknowledging and openly discussing mental illness. She believes that Plath's confessional-style writing enabled many more women to write about theirs as well in a way that helps aid and educates others, instead of blaming hormones and hysteria for "unusual" behavior in women. "The Yellow Wallpaper" and the symbol of the wall iterates the idea of mental illness simply being shrugged off and treated as mere womanly hormones rather than a real and serious thing. "Mothers" and the symbol of the wall iterates the idea of trauma leading to mental illness and leading to misinterpretation of how to treat it. The wall in both stories highlights the false ideology of how the world views mental illness and forces women to conceal and repress it rather than treat it. Plath may have enabled a movement in literature on how to present a dialogue about mental illness, but she was not the first to acknowledge its severity. Charlotte Perkins Gilman may have had to use symbolism such as a wall to suggest mental illness and critique the wrongful treatment of it and of women in general, but she did pre-date Plath in acknowledging it. It is writers like both Plath and Perkins Gilman who allowed for writers like Machado to continue openly penning the tragic and explicit details of women suffering from trauma-induced mental illness and patriarchy-induced mental illness. Together, however, these literary giants knocked down the wall.

Works Cited

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