Southern Adventist University

From Donna to Diane:

Analyzing and Imitating the Art and Craft of Suspense Fiction

Jamie Henderson

Dr. Keely Tary, supervising professor

From Donna to Diane:

Analyzing and Imitating the Art and Craft of Suspense Fiction

"Suspense is torture . . . but delightful," Ada Leverson writes in her 1907 novel *The Twelfth Hour*. While suspense, like torture, may have the power to drive people mad, it is also true that many readers cannot seem to get enough of it. Suspense Fiction is one of the best-selling genres in the United States, with over ten million titles sold in the first half of 2018 alone, second only to General Fiction ("Unit Sales"). Certainly, there must be some part of the human psyche that enjoys this delightful torture enough to subject the mind to it again and again with ever increasing enthusiasm. What is it about suspense that captivates readers to such an extent? What elements do suspense writers use to create stories that impact readers on such a profound level? Ever since the start of the suspense genre, authors have used foreshadowing and characterization to create suspense; these elements are vital to suspense fiction, as evidenced by the way successful contemporary writers continue to imitate them in their own writing.

Foreshadowing and characterization have been used in a myriad of ways throughout literary history; in suspense fiction, these elements take on a more fundamental role. In suspense fiction, writers use foreshadowing to reveal small details in a story that seem insignificant at first; when one reaches the end of the story, he or she realizes that those details were heralding the eventual end all along. A popular example of foreshadowing in literature is found in "A Good Man is Hard to Find" by Flannery O'Connor. O'Connor foreshadows the end of the story by beginning with the grandmother's anxiety surrounding the news of a recently escaped murderer. While the grandmother is hesitant to travel toward The Misfit's locale, the rest of the family is completely indifferent to her concerns. Though the family assures her that there is nothing to worry about, she continues to fret for the remainder of the trip; by the end of the story

her suspicions are proved correct as they run into him and become his next victims. Foreshadowing is akin to the proverbial “breadcrumbs” that one follows along a trail in order to find the end.

Characterization, on the other hand, is slightly more complex; it is a craft writers use to divulge information about their characters, who they are and why they do what they do, in a way that makes the reader see things from their point of view and root for their success. Characterization is built through how characters act, how they think, what they say, and what other characters think about them. A great way that suspense writers achieve this is by allowing their character’s depravity to claim center stage at an even pace – meaning that readers do not realize they are siding with a villain until it is already too late. For example, in Caroline Kepnes’ best-selling novel *You*, the protagonist is a smooth-talking bookstore owner who meets an aspiring writer and, over the course of the novel, begins to learn everything about her by stalking her and things quickly become deadly. One reader describes *You* as “an insane, obsessive and manipulative romance from the perspective of a charming psychopath” (May). While *You* is an example of incredible characterization, the idea of speaking through the mouth of a psychopath is not brand new. In fact, one need not look any further than the mid-19th century for the first and most famous use of characterization of this ilk: Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart”.

Edgar Allan Poe, known for his innovative forays into the world of the macabre, could be considered the father of suspense fiction. Poe ushered in this completely innovative genre called suspense by perfecting the art the twist ending, placing readers into the minds of killers, and inspiring other writers to do the same even centuries later. For example, in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” Poe uses foreshadowing to keep readers on the edge of solving the case, but manages to keep them far enough away from the truth that they are still surprised to discover the

identity of the murderer at the end of the story. Additionally, Poe uses the psychology of killers to amplify his characterization, especially in “The Tell-Tale Heart.” Poe allows readers “to live in the mind of a madman,” building greater and greater suspense as the narrator devolves into insanity and finally commits a heinous crime, all the while justifying it with terrifying ease (Baum). The shock one experiences at feeling what the killer feels and being able to understand his reasoning is even more terrifying than the description of the killer dismembering someone and tucking his heart beneath the floorboards (Poe). Poe’s techniques have been imitated by successful writers like Agatha Christie, Stephen King, and Shirley Jackson, culminating in what we have today: “an entire section of the bookstore” dedicated to suspense fiction ensnared by themes of darkness and intrigue (Baum).

Inspired by the works of Poe, Shirley Jackson firmly cemented herself into the literary canon almost immediately upon the publication of her short story “The Lottery” in 1948 and quickly became known as a master of suspense and surprise (Baum). With a bibliography of over two hundred individual works, there is no question as to how she perfected the suspense genre and came to be a significant influence on writers such as Stephen King and Neil Gaiman (Temple). Jackson’s techniques have played a major role in cultivating the quality and volume of suspense literature. For example, in “The Lottery,” Jackson demonstrates some of the most ingenious methods of foreshadowing to build suspense. In the same way that Poe surprised readers by putting them in the killer’s perspective, Jackson extended the idea even further by putting the readers in an entire town of accomplices to murder. Jackson’s approach is like the opposite of dramatic irony; the characters know the story will end in tragedy long before the reader realizes. This technique of creating suspense through knowledge and information is best described as a “who knows what?” approach. In the words of American novelist Tom Clancy

(qtd. in Heffron), “Suspense is achieved by information control: What you know. What the reader knows. What the characters know.” In “The Lottery,” this information control feeds into the creation of suspense as the antithetical setting and characters’ initially dismissive attitudes toward the lottery itself lure the reader into a false sense of security, while the sudden uneasiness of the crowd and each person’s relief at not being chosen clue the reader into the fact that all is not as it seems (Bartsch). Additionally, Jackson’s eerily even pacing only serves to foster more anxiety within the reader until that final, suspense-filled moment where we finally understand what it means to “win” the lottery in this dark American village.

Suspense writers have built upon one another’s strategies for centuries. This, of course, begs the question: how are these strategies being modeled and molded in the 21st century? Suspense has become an incredibly popular genre, as one need only visit his or her local bookstore to find a well-stocked section of mysteries, suspense, and thrillers, any of which may include some new take on the techniques of foreshadowing and characterization. However, there is one contemporary writer in particular who comes to mind when considering how an author has not only used these strategies in new ways, but also cultivated and built upon them in a way that truly reflects the legacy of those who came before her: Professor and award-winning writer, Becky Hagenston.

Hagenston, whose fourth collection of short stories is set for publication in August of 2021, has won multiple awards for her work and has been featured in numerous literary journals such as *Crazyhorse* and *The Oxford American* (“About the Author”). When asked who inspires her the most, Hagenston cites Tana French and Flannery O’Connor as two of her favorite writers – two women who are well-versed in the art of the psychological mystery and the suspenseful gothic, respectively. However, Hagenston is not what many might consider a suspense author; “I

think genre is so slippery," she says, "and I don't really think about it when I'm writing a story" (Hagenston). Therefore, she really does not consider herself a certain kind of writer, or reader, at all: "I read and write what I enjoy, and I enjoy a lot of different kinds of stories" (Hagenston). Even so, her story "Midnight, Licorice, Shadow" undoubtedly encapsulates the same delicate foreshadowing and detailed characterization that foster suspense within readers.

"Midnight, Licorice, Shadow" is a short story about a young couple, Donna and Jeremy, on a road trip, who adopt a cat and try to decide on a name for it. Jeremy tells Donna, the story's protagonist, that if she cannot come up with a suitable name for the cat before sunrise, then "it's bye-bye, Mr. Kitty" (Hagenston 35). The majority of the story consists of Donna brainstorming names for the cat. In addition, she thinks about her life before she met Jeremy and what she hopes the two of them can accomplish now that they are together. As Donna replays the last three weeks in her mind, the reader finds out that she and Jeremy are more than just runaway lovers – they are serial killers, and the cat once belonged to their most recent victim. At the end of the story, Donna still has not found a name for the cat that Jeremy feels is right; he kills the cat as Donna looks on in horror.

Hagenston includes various details throughout the story that foreshadow this ending without fully giving it away, which is why the suspense element is so effective. A quote that is often attributed to American aphorist Mason Cooley states that "suspense combines curiosity with fear and pulls them up a rising slope," and that is exactly what Hagenston does in this story. From the first few lines of the story, Hagenston has readers wanting to know more: "Midnight, Licorice, Shadow . . . they have had the cat for nearly three days . . . The harder they try to think of a name, the more elusive it becomes" (35). The idea of the elusive name comes back several times throughout the story; Hagenston eventually reveals that Donna came up with her own

name when she first left home at sixteen but is starting to feel like she should change it again "to something more serious" (36). Hagenston also characterizes Jeremy as having a "gift" that makes him "realize when something was right . . . or wrong (like not having a name for the cat)" (42). Jeremy explains that "it's bad luck . . . not knowing something's name is like having a bad spirit floating around," telling Donna that they must have a name for him in three days or else "he's history" – Jeremy believes that he and Donna will not be safe until he has a name (42). Jeremy's obsession with luck is also an example of Hagenston's use of foreshadowing, as Donna remembers telling him that she is lucky because she is "good at guessing" which cars will be unlocked so that they can steal from them (43). This obsession is made even more ironic by the fact that the kitten they are trying to name is black, as black cats are often seen as a symbol of misfortune in many cultures (Hackett). When Jeremy returns to the hotel after looking for other houses to break into, he tells Donna that he "couldn't get a break. It was like an omen or something. Bad luck," and that is how he knows she has not thought of a name yet (45). Finally, although Donna pleads with Jeremy to let her keep the cat, he squeezes it to death in front of her. This action sparks a change in Donna, one that only a reader with a keen eye for foreshadowing would see coming: "I don't feel like a Donna anymore," she says (46). When Jeremy's eyes darken, the two of them begin throwing names back and forth – "Cynthia, Regina, Anne" – trying to find one that fits (46). Hagenston uses foreshadowing to make several important points clear to readers: the idea that names are inherently evasive, the knowledge that Donna has already changed her name once before, and the fact that Jeremy feels that not knowing a name brings bad luck. Without this foreshadowing, the reader would not realize that this final sentence spells disaster for Donna – without a name, she will suffer the same fate as the little black cat.

Hagenston's use of characterization is another important thread that pulls "Midnight, Licorice, Shadow" together in the light of its suspenseful nature. In this particular story, Hagenston reveals who Donna and Jeremy are through Donna's memories and musings, as well as in how they interact between themselves and others. As the main character and speaker throughout the story, Donna's character is more immediately apparent and therefore more easily analyzed. Hagenston establishes Donna's troubled past in several instances, intentionally placing details in a specific order to show the reader who she is and where she came from. For example, Donna believes that "the things Jeremy knows about her are more mysterious and important than the things he doesn't know," because she is hiding all the details of her past from him (36). Hagenston reveals that Donna was married and divorced at eighteen, which ultimately lead her to "skanky" bars and "foul-smelling motel room[s]" with men who took pleasure in hearing her (made-up) stories about how "her uncle diddled her for three years" (37). Hagenston ultimately uncovers Donna's past in its entirety, showing how she came from an extremely broken home – "her daddy ran off and her mother went crazy" (41). Donna is reminded of her childhood trauma when she searches through Mrs. Jarvis's house, expecting to find something similar to what it was like to live with her mentally unstable grandmother: "she wanted to see if there was a bathroom cabinet full of pill bottles and if there were razor blades under the sink. . . [an] old lady lying [in the tub] with a razor blade beside her, her eyes closed under the red water" (43-44).

Even though Donna's past makes it seem as though she could be an equal accomplice to Jeremy's crimes, Hagenston also includes details that reference Donna's innocence and show the reader who she really is beneath her well-cultivated façade of indifference. When Donna first meets Jeremy, only three weeks prior to when the story begins, she trusts him instantly even though she likes "to have people figured out" and knows nothing about him (38). This shows her

desire to have someone close to her, even if that person has not proven themselves to be trustworthy. Hagenston uses this to make it immediately clear that Donna's love for Jeremy is more obsession than true affection: "Donna has Jeremy, and that's better than salvation" (44). What Donna truly wants, more than anything else, is for "the three of them" – Donna, Jeremy, and the cat – "to drive off together tomorrow morning, like a family on vacation" and settle down somewhere in the mountains (36, 38). She wants to have a normal life, go to Disneyland, watch cable TV, and have a family (39, 41). Hagenston creates depth in Donna by having her realize that, in spite of how often she has been hurt in the past, people can be kind, "and they don't expect you to be bad, either" (40). Although Donna helps Jeremy by stealing cars and looting houses while he kills their inhabitants, Hagenston characterizes her as someone who does not truly want to hurt anyone. Donna's relationship with the kitten is the most obvious example of who she is at heart: she shares her food with him, greets him with love and affection, and watches him sleep and play with fondness. When Jeremy kills the kitten that she has come to love so much right in front of her, even though she is sobbing and begging to keep him, Hagenston is showing Donna's realization that she is not where she wants to be, nor is she with someone she once thought was safe (46).

As for Jeremy, Hagenston shows his character solely through Donna's thoughts about him and his own actions. Hagenston hints that not all is what it seems with Jeremy from the very beginning when he says they will have to get rid of the cat if they cannot think of a name for him. While the reader may not immediately assume that this means he will kill the cat, it is certainly a very strange sentiment that would not come from any completely normal person. Another alarming facet of Jeremy's psyche is his fear of cable TV; he gets angry with Donna for leaving the TV on because "all the stuff that had been on all night had seeped into their

subconscious, and they had no idea what it might have done to them, what kind of bad ideas and thoughts might have gotten into their brains" (41). Jeremy and his strange ways have a power over Donna. For example, when Donna recalls how she first met Jeremy, Hagenston writes that he simply saw her standing on the side of the interstate, "pulled over and jogged toward her and then stopped and said, "There you are;"" although Donna does not know what this means, his charm tells her that "she has no reason not to believe him" (37). Later on, Hagenston writes that "Jeremy has a low tolerance for people – except for [Donna], of course" (39). His selectively antisocial tendencies could very well be an indicator of his ability to commit crimes without remorse, a fact that is later proven when he calmly suggests that he and Donna pick up Wendy's on their way home from the murder scene. The most telling of his behaviors, however, is the way he treats Donna; Hagenston describes the cheesy things he says as "mean and dangerous" in a way that makes Donna believe him (36). Hagenston both establishes Jeremy's psychotic nature and gives a terrifying glimpse into Donna's future when she writes of the first time Jeremy calls Donna his soulmate: "he had his right hand wrapped around her neck, and he squeezed just enough to let her know he meant business" (36).

Ultimately, Hagenston uses foreshadowing and characterization to tell a suspenseful story about a girl whose obsessive desire for love leads her to a man whose charm is more deceptive than she first realizes. This is the same strategy that Jackson and Poe used before, flipped on its head: Where Poe and Jackson placed readers into the minds of killers, Hagenston follows the thoughts of someone so close to the killer that they are able to justify his actions out of love and devotion. Although Donna is technically innocent and the reader may want to sympathize with her, the fact remains that she has deluded herself enough to cleave to a killer even though she knows what he is capable of. As a reader, seeing the story from Donna's point of view is even

scarier than if the story were narrated by Jeremy, as it imparts a much graver message: What is scarier, a serial killer without remorse, or a woman who is willing to do anything to keep him safe? “Midnight, Licorice, Shadow” is a piece that inspires writers to create: when one sees what Hagenston has achieved through the art and craft of fiction, he or she is innately challenged to carry on the legacy of suspense with a tale of their own creation.

Some may wonder if it is ethical to imitate another writer’s use of craft but, in reality, the best writers do this and always have. Stephen King claims he was inspired by Jackson, who in turn was inspired by Poe; Hagenston herself says that she hopes that writers, when they read her story, “feel inspired in some way to do something with their own work.” William Zinsser, author of *On Writing Well*, states that one should “[n]ever hesitate to imitate another writer. Imitation is part of the creative process for anyone learning an art or a craft” (235). With this sentiment in mind, it is clear that critically renowned authors approve of and even suggest that novice writers follow any string of inspiration they receive from any other work of fiction.

The key to ethical imitation of writers’ use of craft is just that – the craft. Just as a carpenter must use the same tools to make a chair as he does to make a table, so must writers use the same elements of craft to tell wildly different stories. In chapter eight of *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*, Craig Meyer rationalizes imitation by describing how writers can utilize imitation to “gain more insight into how sentences create meaning, how they can be changed, and how the decision-making processes relate to putting certain writing elements in certain locations for specific effects,” such as suspense (116). While some people may be inclined to equate imitation with plagiarism, Meyer explains that “imitation is not mindlessly copying, but mindfully understanding” how to write well. He continues, “by understanding how others put

words together and the style or voice of ourselves, we uncover a new set of procedures, styles, and possibilities, which then cease to be imitation but creation" (118).

In order to fully understand the concept of imitation for myself, I decided to take Hagenston's call to action and compose a story of my own based on the structure and elements used in "Midnight, Licorice, Shadow." Prominent film producer Jason Blum once said that "good suspense . . . is really about creating situation that are relatable, throwing a wrench in it, and watching people respond to that" (Gilchrist). Hagenston does this by writing about a couple naming a cat, so I chose to do something similar in my own work. My short story, entitled "What's for Dinner?", is also about a young couple, this time named Diane and Dennis McCoy, who are trying to decide what to eat for dinner. While Dennis leaves for work, Diane spends her day cleaning the kitchen and reminiscing about her life with him and their soon-to-be-born child. As Diane recalls how she and Dennis met and ended up moving into a typical suburban life, the reader discovers that one of their neighbors, a woman named Rosemary Schultz, has gone missing the day prior. It does not take long for Diane to reveal the truth, both about her relationship with Dennis and about what happened to Rosemary. The reader learns that Rosemary visited Diane the day before, and incidentally ended up discovering Dennis's "workspace." When she threatened to call the police and reveal what she found, Dennis murdered her to keep her quiet. In the present, when Dennis returns and has a taste of what Diane is preparing for dinner, he asks her what is in the dish, to which she replies, "Rosemary" – confirming that what Rosemary found in the freezer was human meat, and that Diane and Dennis McCoy are cannibals.

I was lucky enough to interview Professor Hagenston while working on my own story, and she gave me several helpful tips when it comes to using foreshadowing to create suspense.

When I asked Hagenston how she creates suspense, she said: “My main strategy in a first draft is to keep myself entertained . . . then I go back during revision and see how I can make things more cohesive.” She continued to say that she perfects her endings by rewriting them several times: “Sometimes I write past the ending, sometimes I haven’t figured out enough about the main character. In this particular story, I think it worked because I didn’t see it coming. I had an idea of where it would go, and it didn’t go there.” Similarly, I knew that I wanted to write a story with a surprise ending, but I was not sure what that ending would be until I had already written most of the story. Once I realized what the twist would be, I was then able to take Hagenston’s advice and go back to add and remove details as needed to help move the story along to that eventual end.

The ultimate plot twist of “What’s for Dinner?” is the revelation that the McCoys, but especially Dennis, are cannibals. I foreshadow this in the beginning of the story by immediately having Diane, the mouthpiece of my story, tell the reader that “[f]or Dennis, a meal just isn’t complete without protein” (1). This is meant to reflect the beginning of Hagenston’s story where a small line (i.e., “bye-bye, Mr. Kitty”) takes on a deeper meaning by the end of the story. Dennis is also similar to Jeremy in that he dislikes most people: “I keep a very closed circle of true friends; everyone else is simply . . . chum” (3). At first, this line makes it seem as though he is simply antisocial or has a superiority complex, but the end of the story sheds a new, more literal light on this response. One of the other major hints I used was Diane’s obsession with Dennis’s “sabretooth smile”: “his teeth were what captivated my attention. They were so white I almost thought they were fake . . . his canines came to subtle but defined points” (1, 2). In addition, Rosemary’s “perfectly straight smile” serves as a contrast to Dennis’s wolf-like grin; this is to subtly suggest that Dennis is the predator to Rosemary’s prey (5). When Dennis comes

home to find Rosemary, his anger is evident to Diane who notices that “his perfect teeth were hidden behind a tight smile that didn’t quite meet his eyes” (7). Finally, Dennis smiles as he murders her, baring his teeth in a blatant display of predatory lust (8).

As in “Midnight, Licorice, Shadow,” the bulk of my foreshadowing comes from the characterization of Diane and Dennis. Diane is obviously the picture of a perfect suburban housewife – she can “count the number of times [she’s] skipped cleaning on one hand,” she makes her husband’s favorite meals, and she obeys Dennis’s desire for her to keep to herself even when she is tempted to socialize with the “boring and dense” women in the neighborhood (1, 5, 4). However, analogous to the mysteries Donna hides from Jeremy, there is a darker side to Diane that only she knows exists. I include the details of Diane’s innocent, Catholic upbringing in order to show who Diane was before she met Dennis: “empty. Meaningless. Directionless . . . a girl with few friends and fewer fond memories” (3). Diane states that she “never wanted to be a mother” because she did not have a good example from her own, which gives the reader just a small glimpse into what her life was like growing up. Although Donna comes from a more overtly abusive family, Diane’s indifferent parents contribute just as much to her impressionable personality. Like Donna, Diane is easily swayed by a man’s charming disposition. From the moment she meets Dennis, Diane is changed from an innocent sorority pledge into a woman entranced: “Dennis and I were the only two people there, perhaps the only two people on earth, and I knew that we were destined to be together for life . . . who was I to deny him?” (2). On their first date, Diane tells Dennis that she is not much of a people person; she has obviously been conditioned to believe that everyone is as cold and apathetic as her parents were. Thus, when a handsome and charming man like Dennis shows an interest in her, she becomes just as

attached to him as Donna was to Jeremy – believing he can do no wrong even when she is a witness to his crimes.

However, I have also used characterization to show that Diane is undergoing another transformation: from a doting wife into a concerned mother. Diane's love for her unborn son is starting to lapse her obsession with Dennis, as shown by the way she thinks of motherhood "as something sacred and beautiful." Now that she is close to having a child of her own, she says: "I don't understand how my own mother could have been so distant" (4). When Diane expresses an interest in joining the neighborhood women's book club, the idea shocks Dennis, as she has never been interested in such things before. He asks if he should worry about her "changing tastes" on him (4). While Diane assures him that she is not, she continues to sympathize more and more with the neighbors, especially when Rosemary goes "missing": "I wonder if I've been wrong about these people all along . . . I imagine how I would feel if my baby ever thought I wouldn't come home to him . . . I turn away from the window before I start to cry" (4, 5). Dennis continuously attributes her softening heart to her pregnancy and Dianne eventually agrees, though she does not yet connect this to a loosening of Dennis's hold on her. Like Donna's connection to the little black kitten, Diane's growing love toward her child represents a realization: while Diane originally latched onto Dennis because he could give her the love and attention she never received from her parents, she is now realizing that her child can give her that love without the need to support her husband's crimes.

While the characterizations of Donna and Diane serve to demonstrate their transformations from willing accomplices to questioning their positions with the men in their lives, the characterizations of Jeremy and Dennis show how these two men are descending deeper into madness. Dennis initially appears to be a considerate yet traditional husband; he may

not encourage his wife to take a break from caring for the house, but he does show concern for her and their unborn child by showering her with affection and unpacking their child's room. When he first meets Diane, she describes him as charismatic, but it soon becomes clear that it is "all a façade" (3). Dennis does not want Diane to interact with the neighbors (or "those people"), for fear that someone will discover their secret stash of human meat in the basement freezer (4). He has obviously been operating as a serial cannibal and filling his freezer for quite some time because, as he kills Rosemary, Diane remarks that he is using a voice she had "heard him use many times before with others just like her" (8). While he does love Diane and, by extension, their baby, Diane notes that he will laugh if he sees her cry, proving that he is not truly capable of sympathy. This is akin to when Hagenston states that Jeremy wants to keep the cat but has him kill it anyway, despite Donna's tears, to show that his true nature will always win out in the end. Diane also states that she is afraid Dennis will kill her if she lets someone "see his workspace" (6). Dennis shows his true colors when he sees that Diane has invited Rosemary inside: "[h]is eyes were crazed now as he gripped my shoulders so tightly I thought they might bruise . . . "Dammit, Diane," he growled. "Now I have to handle this"" (7). Although the ending of "What's for Dinner?" remains more ambiguous than "Midnight, Licorice, Shadow" on what the protagonist's eventual fate will be, it is still clear that both women are living in situations that could quickly turn dire at any moment.

After completing "What's for Dinner?", I sought the advice of several peer reviewers in order to get an unbiased assessment of my use of foreshadowing and characterization. One reader called it "simply disturbing in the best kind of way," and said that, once he had the "opportunity to mull over some of the details mid-way through," he began to pick up on the "subtle hints" that he would have otherwise missed (Traxler). Another reader stated that the hints

of foreshadowing “are subtle on the first reading, but when you read the story a second time, you start to pick up on those cues. This makes the second read-through just as enjoyable as the first” (Vaudreuil). One reviewer, who has read both “What’s for Dinner” and “Midnight, Licorice, Shadow,” says that the two stories are comparable because they “both begin normal and bright, but soon turn eerie as the story goes on” (Woodruff). She continues to say that ““What’s for Dinner?” gives off an aura similar to that of a Utopian novel until you realize just how twisted Dennis really is.” Finally, Hagenston herself said “I did not expect [“What’s for Dinner?”] to end that way, but I guess with a name like Rosemary, it makes sense that she’d end up being delicious.” Following these reviews, I believe that I achieved my goal of writing a suspenseful story by imitating Hagenston’s use of foreshadowing and characterization. While I know that “What’s for Dinner?” will undergo several more revisions before it feels complete, I also hope that it is a story, like “Midnight, Licorice, Shadow,” that will interest readers and, more importantly, inspire writers to produce works of their own.

There is much to learn from studying the historical progression of a given genre, and even more to learn from imitating the craft of successful writers. Throughout this process of research and revision, I discovered a rich history of authors who have created masterful works of fiction by imitating each other’s use of craft. Were their inspirations not stated, one might never know just how crucial the influence of one author over another can be to the writing process. While it is evident that foreshadowing and characterization are vital to the creation of suspense, I believe that the true lesson I learned from imitating them in my own work is this: writers learn and grow best when they admire and analyze works of fiction that inspire them. Had I not attempted to imitate Hagenston’s craft, I never would have been able to find a craft or style of

my own. In the words of George Bernard Shaw (qtd. in Young): “Imitation is not just the sincerest form of flattery – it’s the sincerest form of learning.”

Bibliography

"About the Author - Becky Hagenston". *Beckyhagenston.Com*, https://beckyhagenston.com/about. Accessed 14 Apr 2021.

Bartsch, Christine. "How Did Jackson Create Suspense In "The Lottery"?". *Seattle PI*, https://education.seattlepi.com/did-jackson-create-suspense-the-lottery-5951.html. Accessed 25 Mar 2021.

Baum, Spencer. "Edgar Allan Poe And the Creation of Genre Fiction." *Medium*, 2018, https://medium.com/@spencerbaum/edgar-allan-poe-and-the-creation-of-genre-fiction-6357f54c0119. Accessed 25 Mar 2021.

"Becky Hagenston On Serial Killers, Naming Cats, And Half Magic". *Thestoryprize.Blogspot.Com*, 2010, http://thestoryprize.blogspot.com/2010/08/becky-hagenston-on-serial-killers.html.

Heffron, Jack and Meg Leder. *The Complete Handbook of Novel Writing: Everything You Need to Know about Creating & Selling Your Work*. Writer's Digest Books, 2002, pg. 393.

Cooley, Mason. "Mason Cooley Quote: "Suspense Combines Curiosity with Fear and Pulls Them Up A Rising Slope."". *Quotefancy.Com*, https://quotefancy.com/quote/1144671/Mason-Cooley-Suspense-combines-curiosity-with-fear-and-pulls-them-up-a-rising-slope#:~:text=Mason%20Cooley%20Quote%3A%20%E2%80%9CSuspense%20combines,them%20up%20a%20rising%20slope.%E2%80%9D. Accessed 20 Apr 2021.

Gilchrist, Todd. "*The Purge* Producer Jason Blum Forecasts A Violent Future". *CBR.Com*, 2013, https://www.cbr.com/the-purge-producer-jason-blum-forecasts-a-violent-future/.

Hackett, Stacy N. "Black Cat Breeds and History." *CatChannel.com*, 2015,

https://web.archive.org/web/20150906094914/http://www.catchannel.com/breeds/black-cat-breeds.aspx.

Hagenston, Becky. “Midnight, Licorice, Shadow.” *Strange Weather*, Press 53, 2010, pg. 35-46.

---. Personal Interview. 6 April 2021.

Henderson, Jamie. “What’s for Dinner?” Self-published, 2021. https://sites.google.com/southern.edu/whats-for-dinner/home.

Jackson, Shirley. *The Lottery and Other Stories*. Farrar, Straus And Giroux, 1949.

Kardos, Michael. *The Art and Craft of Fiction*. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012.

May, Emily. Review of *You*, by Caroline Kepnes. *Goodreads.com*, Oct 2014. https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/1082804588?book_show_action=true&from_review_page=1.

Meyer, Craig A. “The Evolution of Imitation: Building Your Style.” *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writings*, edited by Matthew Vetter, Mary Stewart, and Dana Driscoll, Parlor Press LLC, 2020, https://writingspaces.org/sites/default/files/meyer-evolution-imitation-building-your-style.pdf, pg. 116-127.

Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Tell-Tale Heart". *Poemuseum.org*, 1843, https://www.poemuseum.org/the-tell-tale-heart.

Temple, Emily. “11 Famous Writers on the Genius and Influence of Shirley Jackson”. *LitHub.com*, 2019, https://lithub.com/11-famous-writers-on-the-genius-and-influence-of-shirley-jackson/.

Traxler, Caleb. “Review of “What’s for Dinner?” by Jamie Henderson.” Personal Archives, 2021.

"Unit Sales of Adult Fiction Books in The United States in The First Half Of 2018, By

Genre". *Statista.Com*, 2018, https://www-statista-com.ezproxy.southern.edu/statistics/730316/adult-fiction-unit-sales/.

Vaudreuil, Devin. “Review of “What’s for Dinner?” by Jamie Henderson.” Personal Archives, 2021.

Young, Ross and Felicity Ferguson. *Real-World Writers: A Handbook for Teaching Writing with 7-11 Year Olds*. Taylor & Francis, 2020.

Zinsser, William. *On Writing Well*. 7th ed., Harper Perennial, 2016.