

# To Be Decided\*

Journal of Interdisciplinary Theory



photo by Robert de Boer

Volume 6  
ISOLATION



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Volume 6 : Isolation



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## **Editor's Introduction**

In the midst of the current global pandemic, isolation quickly emerged as a topic of interest and concern. Suddenly in the spring of 2020, for most people globally, isolation was enforced in an effort to stop the spread of Covid-19. For months people stayed home, workplaces closed, social events were cancelled, and normal interactions and movement were replaced by wide berths, plexiglass, and closed borders. We became isolated as individuals and isolated as nations and states. Throughout the process of creating this year's journal, we have had the opportunity to examine many aspects of isolation and its effects.

Although isolation has been enforced globally, it has not affected everyone equally. In her paper "Social Isolation and Loneliness: The Potential Impacts of the Global Pandemic on 2S-LGBTQ+ Seniors Living in Ontario Long-Term Care Homes," Jonsson brings to light the assumptions implicit in policies enforced by long term care facilities to protect residents from Covid -19, which prioritize the rights of heterosexual residents, and render 2S-LGBTQ+ residents invisible, leaving them vulnerable to compounded negative effects on their mental and physical health.

In the arts, isolation can be considered a goal, not always a restriction or a challenge. In her piece "Neil Gaiman and the Rare Phenomenon of Creative Autonomy for Fiction Writers," Jaclyn Legg examines isolation as it pertains to the idealized notion of the

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author. She profiles the life of Neil Gaiman who is known for his long periods of isolated writing and contrasts his life and success with the challenges of making a living as a fiction writer that most writers face. In Legg's work, the ideal of an isolated artist is pitted against the harsh realities of the publishing industry, and the real sacrifice that is required to make a livelihood in fiction writing - that of catering to the demands of the market.

In this issue, we were very fortunate to be able to include a dialogue with an artist for whom isolation is a crucial part of his creative method. Our cover photo and insert are works from photographer Robert de Boer. de Boer's work brings to mind isolation and evokes the sense of being alone. de Boer himself, however, speaks of isolation in a few ways. He sees isolating an aspect of a scene as crucial to creating the mood, and to guiding the focus and attention of the viewer. de Boer also discusses his need to work in isolation, as each photo takes vision, patience and dedication. He can only create his photos in isolation and they can be seen as a celebration of the lone subject - on both sides of the camera.

At a time when the pandemic is threatening the sense of health and security for many people, questions of morality, obligation and belonging have become heightened debates. Against this backdrop, Guido Calderini gives us a review of Allen Buchanan and Russell Powell's *The Evolution of Moral Progress*. In Calderini's reading, Buchanan and Powell challenge the idea of parochial morality (that people are hard-wired to disregard those outside their

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group or social status), in favour of a more plastic and evolving morality, an idea which is supported by evidence of an ever-expanding belief in equality for all humans and rights for non-human beings.

We invite you to take a moment to yourself and explore the theme of isolation as one that is integral to the human experience, for better or for worse.

*To Be Decided\** Journal of Interdisciplinary Theory

Managing Editors

Nina Poletti and Sahara Nasr



# **Social Isolation and Loneliness:** **The Potential Impacts of the Global Pandemic on 2S- LGBTQ+ Seniors Living in Ontario Long-Term Care Homes**

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## **Introduction:**

On March 17, 2020, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ontario provincial government announced a state of emergency that closed workplaces, cancelled social events, and halted most activities outside of the home. Social distancing measures placed restrictions on indoor gathering capacities, and long-term care (LTC) (also known as residential care) homes were completely locked down. Health care providers scrambled to contain COVID-19 outbreaks in LTC homes; however, the system was riddled with inefficiencies that put thousands of seniors at risk of contracting the virus. In the first calendar year of the pandemic, from April 2020 to April 2021, over 3,500 seniors have died in Ontario LTC homes because of COVID-19.<sup>1</sup> This number continues to rise. Residents without COVID-19 faced different challenges, like social isolation and loneliness which can have major psychological impacts. In May 2020, the Ontario government acknowledged these failures stating, “the long-term care

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<sup>1</sup> “Long-term care homes,” Ontario, 2021, <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/data/long-term-care-homes>.

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system is broken.”<sup>2</sup> Justin Trudeau announced that what our elderly population is experiencing in LTC is “unacceptable.”<sup>3</sup>

I write this paper as a concerned citizen, activist, and researcher who is aware of how institutional systems of power can operate to diminish the quality of Ontario’s health care system which impacts Two-Spirit, lesbian, bisexual, gay, trans, and queer (2S-LGBTQ+)<sup>4</sup> seniors who may be forced to conceal their gender and sexual identity to avoid the structural inequalities that erase their existence in LTC.<sup>5</sup> I argue that individual experiences with social isolation and loneliness in LTC during the COVID-19 social distancing mandates are exacerbated by heteronormative ideologies that ignore the lived realities of 2S-LGBTQ+ older adults and their chosen families. Heteronormativity is a framework that refers to how heterosexuality is enforced by normative power systems that privilege monogamous, opposite sex relationships, while devaluing those who

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<sup>2</sup> “Ontario Announces Independent Commission into Long-Term Care,” Newsroom, Ontario, May 19, 2020, <https://news.ontario.ca/en/statement/56965/ontario-announces-independent-commission-into-long-term-care>.

<sup>3</sup> Adam Miller, “Canada Failed to Protect Elderly in First Wave of COVID-19 – Will the Same Mistake Be Made Again?,” CBC News, CBC, September 26, 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/covid-long-term-care-canada-1.5739798>.

<sup>4</sup> There are several acronyms used to refer to the 2S-LGBTQ+ community. I recognize that using 2S-LGBTQ+ is not reflective of the diversity of queer communities. I adopt this phrase for this analysis to stay consistent with the terminology used in Senior Pride Network (SPN) report to the LTC commissioner. 2S-LGBTQ+ includes two-spirit, non-gender conforming, intersex, and all other diverse categorizations that exist in our societies.

<sup>5</sup> Shari Brotman et al., “The Impacts of Coming Out on Health and Health Care Access: The Experiences of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Two-Spirit People,” *Journal of Health & Policy* 15, no. 1 (2002): 7.



fail to adhere to this lifestyle.<sup>6</sup> LTC are regulated through heteronormative institutional policies and practices that disregard non-biological kinship ties. This paper unpacks how social distancing mandates have impacted heterosexual seniors and their families differently than 2S-LGBTQ+ older adults. The first half of this paper uses local news coverage to understand the negative impacts social distancing mandates had on seniors and their families. The second half is a close analysis of how 2S-LGBTQ+ seniors are doubly marginalized by visitation policies during the global pandemic. My intent is to encourage researchers, activists, and concerned citizens to rise up against care inequalities to ensure that all seniors receive person-centred quality care during a global pandemic.

I am an active member of the Toronto Senior Pride Network, an advocacy group that aims to improve the lives of 2S-LGBTQ+ older adults. We formed a coalition with other 2S-LGBTQ+ advocacy groups in Ontario to submit a report to the LTC Commissioner titled “Long-Term Care, COVID-19 and 2S-LGBTQ+ Seniors – A Call to Action.”<sup>7</sup> It outlines key failures of Ontario’s LTC system and how institutional heteronormative approaches to care are marginalizing 2S-LGBTQ+ adults living in LTC. Our report raises concerns related to social isolation and

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Warner, “Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet,” *Social Text*, no. 29 (1991): 3-17. Accessed October 5, 2020, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/466295>.

<sup>7</sup> “Long-Term Care, COVID-19 and 2S-LGBTQ+ Seniors – A Call to Action.” *Ontario Senior Pride*, (2020): 1-32.

loneliness, which LTC homes and government ministries have a responsibility to address. I use parts of our submission in this analysis to share our concerns on why social interactions with chosen families and caregivers are essential to the overall well-being of seniors, especially those from communities who are traditionally marginalized and rendered invisible as they age.

### **Social Isolation and Loneliness in Long-term Care during the Global Pandemic:**

Social isolation and loneliness are interconnected concepts.<sup>8</sup> Social isolation refers to limited social interactions, contact or relationships. Social distancing measures mandate that people who are at high risk of contracting the virus should self-isolate, which means staying home and avoiding in-person contact with others.<sup>9</sup> Loneliness is a feeling that emerges from a lack of connectedness, occurring from prolonged periods of social isolation that can cause anxiety, stress, melancholy, and suicide.<sup>10</sup> According to the Canadian government, “53 [percent] of LGBT seniors feel isolated” and trans

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<sup>8</sup> Joanne Brooke and Debra Jackson, “Older People and COVID-19: Isolation, Risk, and Ageism,” *Journal of Clinical Nursing* 29, no. 13-14 (2020): 2044-46, Accessed September 25, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.15274>.

<sup>9</sup> Brooke and Jackson, “Older People and COVID-19: Isolation, Risk, and Ageism,” 2044-46.

<sup>10</sup> “Social Isolation of Seniors: A Focus on LGBTQ Seniors in Canada,” *Government of Canada*, November 19, 2018, <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/seniors/forum/social-isolation-lgbtq.html>; Peter MacCourt, “Promoting Seniors’ Well-Being: A Seniors Mental Health Policy Lens Toolkit,” *British Columbia: British Columbia Psychogeriatric Association*, (2008) :1-48, [https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/Seniors\\_Seniors\\_Mental\\_Health\\_Policy\\_Lens\\_Toolkit\\_ENG\\_0\\_1.pdf](https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/Seniors_Seniors_Mental_Health_Policy_Lens_Toolkit_ENG_0_1.pdf)

seniors are at an increased risk of having suicidal thoughts.<sup>11</sup> Humans are naturally social beings that require regular social interactions with others to feel a sense of belonging.<sup>12</sup> We are all susceptible to feelings of loneliness, but seniors are particularly vulnerable to several negative health and social outcomes when forced into isolation.<sup>13</sup> Seniors are less likely to be technologically savvy, so unlike younger generations, they are unable to easily use video streaming platforms like Zoom. While seniors live in communal LTC homes, during periods of lockdown, they are barred from visiting their friends as residents are confined to their rooms to stop the spread of COVID-19. These barriers and others cause heightened forms of social isolation and feelings of loneliness that are having detrimental impacts on their overall well-being.

Cutting seniors off from their family, friends, and support networks can have disastrous effects on their health. The Canadian Government refers to the determinants of health as a “broad range of personal, social, economic, and environmental factors that determine

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<sup>11</sup> “Social Isolation of Seniors: A Focus on LGBTQ Seniors in Canada,” *Government of Canada*, November 19, 2018, <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/seniors/forum/social-isolation-lgbtq.html>; Peter MacCourt, “Promoting Seniors’ Well-Being: A Seniors Mental Health Policy Lens Toolkit,” *British Columbia: British Columbia Psychogeriatric Association*, (2008) :1-48, [https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/Seniors\\_Seniors\\_Mental\\_Health\\_Policy\\_Lens\\_Toolkit\\_ENG\\_0\\_1.pdf](https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/Seniors_Seniors_Mental_Health_Policy_Lens_Toolkit_ENG_0_1.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Nicholas Nicholson, “A Review of Social Isolation: An Important but Underassessed Condition in Older Adults,” *The Journal of Primary Prevention* 33, no. 2-3 (2012): 137-152.

<sup>13</sup> Joanne Brooke and Debra Jackson, “Older People and COVID-19: Isolation, Risk, and Ageism,” 2044-46.

individual and population health,”<sup>14</sup> this includes employment, financial stability, social supports, resources, and the physical environment. It is well documented that when citizens have their personal, economic, and social needs met they live longer and healthier lives.<sup>15</sup>

Canada’s health care system operates on a two-tier model that delivers care through three sectors: public, private not-for-profit, and private for-profit. This is known as the public-private model of health care delivery.<sup>16</sup> Canadian health care services are covered through public coverage, private insurance plans, or individual payment plans. This is a hierarchical system of care that limits access based on an individual’s social location. Private-public partnerships focus on privatizing services within the public care sector.<sup>17</sup> Market-based solutions to health care are supported by governments because they claim to be more cost-effective and efficient in comparison to public services. These solutions are situated in a much broader system of market-based economies that require the outsourcing of labour to maximize profits. These initiatives are supported by government ministries in Canada and globally.

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<sup>14</sup> “Social Determinants of Health and Health Inequalities,” Government of Canada, accessed September 24, 2020, <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/population-health/what-determines-health.html>.

<sup>15</sup> “Social Determinants of Health and Health Inequalities,” Government of Canada.

<sup>16</sup> Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong, *Wasting Away: The Undermining of Canadian Health Care*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press 2002), 17-19.

<sup>17</sup> Heather Whiteside, *Purchase for Profit: Public-Private Partnerships and Canada’s Healthcare System* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2015), 5.

Health care reform in Canada uses neo-liberal discourses that promote a self-governance of care, leaving individuals responsible for their own health.<sup>18</sup> From my observations, public LTC homes provide residents with basic care needs, while private LTC homes operate like a resort, with a number of amenities that residents opt into. On-site spa services, pools, and private living spaces are often included in private residential care homes, like the ones operated by Sunrise Senior Living, Chartwell, and Revera.<sup>19</sup> Seniors with limited retirement savings are restricted in their choices when seeking out quality care services. As they age, some people may find it important to live in a communal space, not only to receive care, but to also develop a sense of belonging with others. However, social distancing measures eliminated social programs and restricted access to common spaces to protect residents, leaving people isolated in their rooms.

Prior to COVID-19, Ontario LTC homes were critiqued by researchers and health care officials for providing inadequate care services to their residents.<sup>20</sup> In 2018, the provincial government cut back on resident quality inspection (RQI) reports, leaving both staff and residents in vulnerable positions. CBC Marketplace reported that a lack of RQIs resulted in 68 percent fewer reported infection control

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<sup>18</sup> Whiteside, *Purchase for Profit*, 5.

<sup>19</sup> “Cost of Retirement Homes in Ontario,” ComfortLife, 2019.

<https://www.comfortlife.ca/retirement-community-resources/retirement-costs-ontario>.

<sup>20</sup> “Restoring Trust: COVID-19 and the Future of Long-Term Care,” Royal Society of Canada, June 2020, <https://rsc-src.ca/en/restoring-trust-covid-19-and-future-long-term-care>.

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infractions, meaning that incidents of COVID-19 were not always reported.<sup>21</sup> The 2015 RQI reports were five times more likely to catch these infractions.<sup>22</sup> These system failures place LTC staff and residents at a high risk of experiencing uncontrollable COVID-19 outbreaks. Lockdown is the primary response to containing and eliminating outbreaks. This strategy forces seniors to self-isolate while caregivers try to contain outbreaks. In the past, LTC homes compensated for their lack of staff by relying on informal care networks for support, including family, friends, and private personal support staff, but these care networks are currently limited in their ability to visit the homes, let alone provide care to their loved ones.

LTC homes encountered a state of emergency during the first wave of COVID-19, causing the Ontario government to call the Canadian Military for assistance with five LTC homes that had several active cases.<sup>23</sup> The report identified inadequate staffing levels, infection control infractions, and misuse of essential personal protective equipment (PPE) protocols.<sup>24</sup> The Canadian Military shared concerns over verbal and physical staff-to-resident aggression along with residents being neglected for prolonged periods of time.

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<sup>21</sup> "Fewer Violations Caught at nursing homes after Ontario cut 'Resident Quality Inspections'," *CBC*, September 24, 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1794841667574>

<sup>22</sup> "Fewer Violations Caught," *CBC*.

<sup>23</sup> Patricia Terble, "What's Inside the Disturbing Report on Ontario's Long-Term-Care Homes," *McLean's*, St. Joseph Communications, May 26, 2020. <https://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/whats-inside-the-disturbing-report-on-ontarios-long-term-care-homes>.

<sup>24</sup> Terble, "Ontario's Long-Term-Care Homes."

Residents were left in soiled diapers and were forcibly fed during meal times.<sup>25</sup> To protect seniors, administrators stripped them of their right to see family members, friends, and private caregivers. LTC homes went into complete lockdown and caregivers were tasked to contain COVID-19 cases in the home, leaving other residents unattended for hours at a time. Overnight, seniors became prisoners in their own homes. It is apparent that the care residents are receiving is anything but quality care.

### **Impacts of COVID-19 on Older Adults Living in Ontario LTC Homes**

On October 20, 2020, the Ontario Provincial Government put forth Bill 218, “Supporting Ontario’s Recovery and Municipal Elections Act, 2020.”<sup>26</sup> Bill 218 specifies that governments, corporations, and individuals in Ontario cannot be held legally liable for COVID-19 related exposure in the form of civil lawsuits. This legislation is significant as it allows LTC homes to defend policies and practices that fail to protect residents from exposure to COVID-19 under the cover of acting in “good faith.”<sup>27</sup> Bill 218 eliminates mechanisms of accountability as families who filed complaints related to resident neglect cannot pursue a civil process to seek damages

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<sup>25</sup> Terble, “Ontario’s Long-Term-Care Homes.”

<sup>26</sup> Doug Downey, “Bill 218, Supporting Ontario’s Recovery and Municipal Elections Act.” (Website, Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2020), <https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/bills/parliament-42/session-1/bill-218/status>.

<sup>27</sup> Downey, “Bill 218.”

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related to the spread of COVID-19 in long-term care homes. Bill 218 shields LTC administrators and governments from being held legally liable for the spread of infectious diseases during the global pandemic. Bill 218 represents a further entrenchment of the structural inequity inherent to the current LTC home system as it prioritizes profit generation and divests from resident wellness. New LTC home policies such as social distancing restrictions negatively affect residents and their loved ones as enforced isolation restricts communication and visitation among family members.<sup>28</sup>

Visitors to Ontario LTC homes may be required to do pre-screenings, get COVID-19 tests, and have their temperature taken upon arrival. They may also be required to book a time to visit their loved one. Each Ontario LTC home has established mandates for who can visit during the pandemic. According to their website, Chartwell requires all visitors to “attest to having been trained on infection prevention and control measures including how to safely put on and take off PPE and hand hygiene prior to their first visit with the resident and then monthly thereafter, as well as on the homes visitor policy.”<sup>29</sup> Additionally, they must review documents and instructional videos to be cleared for a visit. The private LTC facility “Extendicare” does not require training on PPE. Visitors must self-screen for COVID-19 symptoms, can only see their loved ones in a

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<sup>28</sup>Downey, “Bill 218.”

<sup>29</sup> “Visitor Information,” Chartwell Retirement Residences, accessed October 1, 2020, <https://chartwell.com/en/covid-information/visitor-information>.



designated outdoor space and only visit for up to thirty minutes.<sup>30</sup> Visitors have spoken out against these rules claiming that the restrictions are harming residents.

Ontario implemented stage three COVID-19 mandates on September 8, 2020. For the first time, families, friends, and personal support workers saw the full impacts that social isolation and loneliness have had on their loved ones. In an article for the Huffington Post, Sherina Harris shared the experiences of those visiting loved ones in LTC. She recounted the experience of one woman’s visit with her father: “during their outdoor visits — after she’s been asked about her health and had her temperature taken — the pair sit at separate ends of a table, at least six feet apart, as a mandatory precaution during the COVID-19 pandemic. A staff member stays in the garden, supervising the visit.”<sup>31</sup> Visits are heavily regulated and limited in time to protect residents. Many residents cannot fully comprehend the pandemic and why they cannot spend more time with their visitors, “Berenger has tried to explain the pandemic to her father, but he says he doesn’t understand why the visits are so short and why they can’t get a cup of tea or coffee or have a picnic like they have in the past.”<sup>32</sup> The lack of comprehension

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<sup>30</sup> “COVID-19 Visitation Policy,” Extencicare, accessed October 1, 2020, <http://www.extencicarebayview.com/our-home/news/covid-19-visitation-policy-97>.

<sup>31</sup> Sherina Harris, “Ontario Families Fight for More Long-Term Care Visits Before 2<sup>nd</sup> Wave Hits,” Huffpost Canada, August 13, 2020, [https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/ontario-covid-long-term-care-family-visits\\_ca\\_5f353edac5b6960c06718c4c](https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/ontario-covid-long-term-care-family-visits_ca_5f353edac5b6960c06718c4c).

<sup>32</sup> Harris, “Ontario Families.”

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combined with being isolated for a majority of their day is harmful to seniors who need social interactions to feel lively and connected.

Pat Armstrong, a professor and researcher at York University who specialized in long-term care expressed worries towards social isolation and loneliness in LTC, stating that residents are going unfed, unbathed, and cannot even go outside for simple walks.<sup>33</sup> Before COVID-19, family members assisted in meeting residents' needs when LTC homes failed to do so. They have already spent time in a caregiving role, so LTC administrators should take this into account when creating guidelines that protect a residents' well-being.<sup>34</sup> Without these support networks, more seniors will experience various forms of neglect, including being left unchanged, unbathed, and unfed while being confined to their rooms for prolonged periods of time. Those who have mobility issues are simply left in their bed for most of the day. Being confined to any space for a prolonged period of time is bound to negatively affect even the soundest of minds. Yet many people who are isolated at home can still network through remote platforms or go out for a walk. These basic human needs are going unmet in LTC, making seniors feel like prisoners in their own homes.

Visitors have raised concerns towards the social distancing measures used by LTC homes. CBC News shared Sheryl Davidson's

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<sup>33</sup> Harris, "Ontario Families."

<sup>34</sup> Harris, "Ontario Families."

experience visiting her mother for the first time in months.<sup>35</sup> She shared how her mother, Dorothy Snowden, lost fifteen pounds since the pandemic began. Davidson was happy that she could see her mother, but because of the visitation restrictions was unable to assist in caring for her mother like she did prior to COVID-19. Julia Richards, a concerned citizen stated that “those residents in [LTC] are literally prisoners. They’re being held hostage; they’re being denied access to their relatives.”<sup>36</sup>

In a Facebook group, titled “Advocates for Long-Term Care Reform in Ontario” members publicly share their experiences with trying to visit and provide care to their loved ones. One member stated that “Someone needs to be held accountable for the decline of residents of [LTC] who have been held prisoner since March. Just came from visiting my mom. Ladies that were vibrant and fun and fit are now confused and depressed and wheelchair bound. It is disgraceful and heart wrenching.”<sup>37</sup> Another member shared: “ZERO – In all the Ontario’s LTC homes NOT ONE RESIDENT WITH COVID-19 in two days says @PublicHealthON Families are still

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<sup>35</sup> “Families with Loved Ones in Long-Term Care Urge to Protect Privacy While Looking for Support,” *CBC News*, CBC Radio-Canada, August 8, 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ontario-long-term-care-essential-caregivers-1.5677075>.

<sup>36</sup> “Families with Loved Ones in Long-term Care,” *CBC News*.

<sup>37</sup> Barbara Vacon, “Someone Needs to be Held Accountable for the Decline of Residents of Long Term Care who have Been Held Prisoner Since March...”, Facebook, September 16, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/322186134878345/permalink/1039936809769937>.

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[not] allowed to hug their loved ones – only visit for [an] hour at a scheduled time; Where’s the science keeping them locked up?”<sup>38</sup> I include these personal accounts because the media is not scrutinizing LTC for failing to meet the emotional, spiritual, and psychological needs of their residents. Families are regulated in how they interact with residents, visits are monitored, and direct contact is not allowed. While these policies and practices are touted as necessary to protect seniors, it is clear they also diminish the residents’ quality of life. Visitors who complete pre-screenings, have taken COVID-19 tests, and followed the homes’ visitation guidelines should be allowed to see their loved ones in private.

The long-term impacts of social isolation and loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic will be unknown for years to come, but based on experiences shared by family members and others, seniors are rapidly deteriorating without their support networks. These issues become heightened for 2S-LGBTQ+ seniors who rely on informal care networks and community support programs to compensate for the lack of social assistance they receive in LTC. The next section focuses on LTC policies and practices that render 2S-

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<sup>38</sup> Heather Kok Wright, “Zero – In all of Ontario’s LTC homes NOT ONE RESIDENT WITH COVID-19 in two day says @PublicHealthON...”, Facebook, August 9, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/322186134878345/permalink/1008509412912677>.

LGBTQ+ seniors invisible, causing them to experience dual forms of marginalization because of their sex, gender, and sexuality.

### **Potential Impacts of Social Distancing Mandates on 2S-LGBTQ+ Older Adults in LTC:**

This section raises concerns made by advocacy groups and organizations in the LTC commissioner report, “Long-Term Care, COVID-19 and 2S-LGBTQ+ seniors – A Call to Action.”<sup>39</sup> The Ontario Senior Pride (OSP) coalition unified to advocate for the needs of 2S-LGBTQ+ seniors living in LTC homes. A national survey by Egale Canada collected data on how COVID-19 is affecting 2S-LGBTQ+ communities as a whole. 53 percent experienced employment insecurities, 42 percent reported impacts to their mental health, and 21 percent lived with chronic illnesses that impacted their physical health. 49 percent were concerned with their lack of social interactions, and how this could affect their sense of community belonging. Generally, 2S-LGBTQ+ people are 10 percent more likely to experience social isolation.<sup>40</sup> Specific data on 2S-LGBTQ+ older adults’ experiences with social isolation and loneliness during COVID-19 is unknown. The LTC commissioner report addresses concerns made by 2S-LGBTQ+ seniors who have

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<sup>39</sup> “Long-Term Care,” Ontario Senior Pride, 1-32.

<sup>40</sup> “National Survey Results: The Impacts of COVID-19 on the LGBTQ2S Community,” Egale Canada Human Rights Trust, April 6, 2020, <https://egale.ca/egale-in-action/covid19-impact-report/>.

multiple burdens due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, scholars critiqued LTC institutions for ignoring the importance of gender and sexual diversity in LTC.

Heteronormative value systems are deeply embedded in LTC homes through policies, practices, and social formations. Some LTC facilities segregate residents based on their gender. Social programming is catered to heterosexual seniors, and intake forms continue to use gender binaries. The OSP coalition raised several concerns 2S-LGBTQ+ have towards LTC such as: judgement, harassment and/or discrimination, the need to conceal their identities to receive care, limited definition of family, legal concerns, and fears of dying alone.<sup>41</sup> Administrators assume seniors are heterosexual, with biological family members to support them unless they disclose otherwise. When LTC homes are asked about their 2S-LGBTQ+ residents, they often respond with “we don’t have any gay people here.”<sup>42</sup> LTC staff may be unaware that a 2S-LGBTQ+ resident has a partner, since they may introduce them as a friend to avoid disclosing their sexual orientation. 2S-LGBTQ+ seniors living in LTC may be situationally forced to disclose or hide their gender/sexual orientation to/from service providers and other residents. In these cases they experience heterosexism, homophobia,

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<sup>41</sup> “Long-Term Care,” Ontario Senior Pride, 1-32.

<sup>42</sup> Katherine Kortes-Miller et al., “Dying in Long-Term Care: Perspectives from Sexual and Gender Minority Older Adults about Their Fears and Hopes for End of Life,” *Journal of Social Work in End-of-Life & Palliative Care* 14, no. 2-3 (July 3, 2018): 209-24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15524256.2018.1487364>.

and transphobia that can intersect with racism, ethnocentrism, and classism.<sup>43</sup> They may choose to conceal their identities as a form of survival in LTC, thus they are more likely to experience social isolation and loneliness while living away from their community networks and support systems.<sup>44</sup> This is exacerbated because of COVID-19 LTC visitation restrictions, as 2S-LGBTQ+ seniors can no longer leave LTC homes to safely see their partners and friends, or to participate in social programming.

Gender and sexual minorities may find it difficult to trust health care providers because of past experiences with racism, homophobia, heterosexism, and transphobia.<sup>45</sup> Discomfort and distrust towards health care providers stem from being pathologized and criminalized by health care institutions.<sup>46</sup> Concerns towards staff or residents harboring homophobic, heterosexist, and transphobic beliefs keeps 2S-LGBTQ+ seniors from openly participating in 2S-LGBTQ+ remote service provisions being offered to relieve social isolation and loneliness.<sup>47</sup> 2S-LGBTQ+ seniors are at risk of possibly being confined with abusive caregivers or residents who silence and ignore their needs. They express strong fears towards aging in LTC

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<sup>43</sup> Kortess-Miller et al., “Dying in Long-Term Care.”

<sup>44</sup> “Social isolation of seniors: A focus on LGBTQ seniors in Canada,” Government of Canada, November 19, 2018, <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/seniors/forum/social-isolation-lgbtq.html>.

<sup>45</sup> Brotman et al., “The Impacts of Coming Out,” 7.

<sup>46</sup> Brotman et al., 7.

<sup>47</sup> Jennifer M. Putney et al., “Fear Runs Deep: The Anticipated Needs of LGBT Older Adults in Long-Term Care,” *Journal of Gerontological Social Work* 61, no. 8 (November 17, 2018): 887–907, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01634372.2018.1508109>.

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because of the discriminatory policies and practices that continue to render them invisible in these spaces. Standardized care practices overlook individual physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. LTC homes have not done their due diligence to make 2S-LGBTQ+ seniors feel welcome and safe. Due to these unsafe living conditions, 2S-LGBTQ+ seniors often rely on informal care networks to get their needs met.

2S-LGBTQ+ seniors regularly rely on chosen family members for social support. Kath Weston explains that “families we choose” define relationships that move beyond blood relations.<sup>48</sup> These individuals are often not recognized by the LTC homes as family. leZlie lee kam (preferred way of spelling her full name), a predominant activist for 2S-LGBTQ+ seniors in the Toronto Queer Community shared her experience with trying to deliver a gift to her good friend Alf Roberts during the pandemic. Roberts was an only child whose parents passed years ago, so lee kam is someone who provided him with social support.<sup>49</sup> lee kam was notified of his death when trying to drop off a gift one afternoon. The administration or staff did not recognize chosen family as legitimate relatives; thus, as a key member of Alf’s *chosen* family, lee kam was not notified of his

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<sup>48</sup> Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (Columbia University Press, 1997), 29.

<sup>49</sup> Sherina Harris, “The Pandemic is Highlighting a Huge Disadvantage for LGBTQ Long-Term Care Residents,” HuffPost Canada, September 14, 2020, [https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/canada-lgbtq-seniors-covid\\_ca\\_5f5b7c53c5b6b48507ff7fd7?guccounter=1](https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/canada-lgbtq-seniors-covid_ca_5f5b7c53c5b6b48507ff7fd7?guccounter=1).



declining health prior to her visit.<sup>50</sup> This is one of many tragic stories being shared by community members who fear for their loved ones living in LTC. Prior to COVID-19, 2S-LGBTQ+ seniors asked LTC facilities to rethink their policies on chosen families.<sup>51</sup> To date, changes have not been made and 2S-LGBTQ+ seniors continue to suffer.

The OSP report recommends action the government needs to take to improve LTC facilities. Journalists claim that the second-wave was worse for LTC homes than the first. Government ministries failed to adequately respond to the LTC crises, concerning both workers and public health officials.<sup>52</sup> To date, the Long-Term Care Homes Act (2007)<sup>53</sup> does not recognize gender and sexual diversity in their Resident Bill of Rights. The OSP LTC commissioner report recommends the government reform this act to recognize gender and sexual diversity in LTC.<sup>54</sup> This means adopting inclusive, non-discriminatory policies that protect all persons regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. These policies must be enforced amongst all staff, volunteers, and residents in LTC homes. LTC administrators are

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<sup>50</sup> Harris, “Huge Disadvantage for LGBTQ Long-Term Care Residents.”

<sup>51</sup> Kimberly Wilson, et al., “Staying Out of the Closet: LGBT Older Adults’ Hopes and Fears in Considering End-of-Life,” *Canadian Journal on Aging / La Revue Canadienne Du Vieillessement* 37, no. 1 (March 2018): 22–31, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0714980817000514>.

<sup>52</sup> Miller, “Canada Failed to Protect Elderly.”

<sup>53</sup> “Long Term Care Homes Act,” Ontario, (S.O. 2007, C.8), Accessed 2021, <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/07l08>

<sup>54</sup> “Long-Term Care,” Ontario Senior Pride, 1-32.

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responsible for designating a 2S-LGBTQ+ friendly staff member or a neutral party in the home that 2S-LGBTQ+ residents can report to if they experience discrimination, harassment, or neglect. This is simply a recommendation, and not all LTC homes designate a 2S-LGBTQ+ friendly staff member. I suggest this liaison be enrolled in intersectional diversity training with a clear understanding of the diverse needs of 2S-LGBTQ+ seniors. The LTC commissioner report stresses the need to train all staff and volunteers in LTC homes using a cultural sensitivity approach that dismantles dominant assumptions about sex, gender, sexuality, and age.

The OSP asserts that Ontario LTC homes should be mandated through government regulation to implement inclusion and diversity training that uses a cultural sensitivity approach. All staff, administrators, volunteers, and service providers should complete this training upon being hired by a LTC home.<sup>55</sup> According to researchers, training must include ways of confronting internal biases and must address faith-based discrimination.<sup>56,57</sup> To improve how care is provided, LTC homes need to understand the diversity of their 2S-LGBTQ+ residents and how their experiences differ based

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<sup>55</sup> Tamara Sussman et al., "Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, & Transgender Inclusivity in Long-Term Care Homes: A Canadian Perspective," *Canadian Journal on Aging* 37, no. 2 (2018): 121-132,

<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.1017/S0714980818000077>.

<sup>56</sup> "Long-Term Care," Ontario Senior Pride, 1-32.

<sup>57</sup> City of Toronto, Long-Term Care homes and Services, "LGBT Tool Kit: Creating Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans-Inclusive and Affirming Care and Services," Ontario Centres for Learning, Research and Innovation in Long-Term Care, February 12, 2018.

on their race, class, gender, sex, sexuality, and ethnicity. This can reduce both health complications and barriers to accessing care as 2S-LGBTQ+ people get older.<sup>58</sup> Ongoing training is required because of the frequent turnovers of staff and volunteers in LTC homes.<sup>59</sup> The LTC Commissioner report identifies the need for less precarious employment in LTC homes, more funding for 2S-LGBTQ+ inclusivity training and accountability of LTC homes to ensure they are welcoming environments for 2S-LGBTQ+ staff, volunteers and residents.<sup>60</sup>

Finally, the OSP coalition recognizes the importance of using an intersectional framework to better understand the unique experiences of 2S-LGBTQ+ older adults and their support networks.<sup>61</sup> The OSP acknowledges that “many [2S-LGBTQ+] elders, seniors and older persons, including [2S-LGBTQ+] elders, seniors and older persons who identify as Black, Indigenous, people of color, lesbians, transgender and people with disabilities, or who came to Canada as immigrants or refugees, live at the intersections of two or more of these identities.”<sup>62</sup> When accessing Western health care systems, racialized 2S-LGBTQ+ older adults encounter discrimination, “on both their status as [gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, - two-spirit] people and on their status as ethno-‘racial’ minorities.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Brotman et al., “The Impacts of Coming Out,” 11.

<sup>59</sup> Brotman et al., 11.

<sup>60</sup> “Long-Term Care,” Ontario Senior Pride, 1-32.

<sup>61</sup> “Long-Term Care,” Ontario Senior Pride, 1-32.

<sup>62</sup> “Long-Term Care,” Ontario Senior Pride, 1-32.

<sup>63</sup> Brotman et al., 15.

More research is required to fully understand the experiences of queer Indigenous and two-spirit people. For this reason, Indigenous elders' experiences with LTC must be examined through a de-colonial framework separately from 2S-LGBTQ+ settlers' experiences, which is not possible within the scope of this paper. Continuing research on COVID-19's impact on seniors must be done from an intersectional framework; ensuring concerns relating to social isolation and loneliness are not taken up through a monolithic lens.

### **Conclusion:**

All seniors in LTC are experiencing some level of social isolation and loneliness; as such, resources that connect them with their family and community in a safe way are necessary for their overall well-being.<sup>64</sup> I contend that concrete actions can be taken by Government ministries to reform LTC homes and provide these resources. First, the proper technological supports and devices need to be provided for seniors to connect virtually and reduce social isolation. Second, LTC administrators should expand their definition of family to include non-biological chosen family that 2S-LGBTQ+ seniors may rely on for support. Third, LTC homes must be adequately staffed with caregivers who can ensure residents are having their physical, social, spiritual, and psychological needs met. Finally, patient-centred care plans with cultural sensitivity training must be

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<sup>64</sup> Brooke and Jackson, "Older People and COVID-19."

incorporated to improve how LTC providers treat residents, specifically 2S-LGBTQ+ seniors.

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# Neil Gaiman and The Rare Phenomenon of Creative Autonomy for Fiction Writers

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In a 1999 interview, self-described “undisciplined writer” Neil Gaiman said: “I’m the kind of writer who, if a deadline is looming and I’m not there yet, will go off and take a room for a couple of weeks in a cheap hotel somewhere I don’t know anybody, and do nothing but put my head down and finish the book.”<sup>1</sup> Gaiman’s need for solitude to write continues to this day, but now he has a place of his own to escape to: a gazebo he built in the woods of upstate New York with nothing but a chair and a desk, and nothing to look at but rows of trees.<sup>2</sup> This second office is presumably where he is going in 2016 when he tells *Instagram*: “I am falling off the world to write. No cell service and almost no internet. Wish me well.”<sup>3</sup>

With his tall frame, stylishly disheveled hair, and wardrobe of weather-beaten black clothing, Neil Gaiman might just be the living embodiment of the literary genius in the Western

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<sup>1</sup> Claire E. White, “A Conversation with Neil Gaiman,” *The Internet Writing Journal* 3, no. 3 (1999), <https://www.writerswrite.com/journal/neil-gaiman-3991>.

<sup>2</sup> Danielle Turchiano, “Inside Neil Gaiman’s Rural Writing Retreat,” *Variety*, June 13, 2019, <https://variety.com/2019/tv/features/neil-gaiman-american-gods-good-omens-writers-office-interview-1203238915/>.

<sup>3</sup> Neil Gaiman (@neilhimsel), Instagram, June 29, 2016, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BHPInC0jw4s/>.

cultural imagination: he who escapes the noise of everyday life to write what has never been written nor conceived and who re-emerges with the sacred texts. His prolific literary career spans across genres and even media; despite his many novels and their screen adaptations, he is most known in some circles for his DC Comics series *The Sandman*. Gaiman's public persona as a hermit-like literary genius fuels what Nick Levey calls our "fantasy that isolation is the engine of literary production and the serious artist remains shut off from market concerns."<sup>4</sup> The keyword, of course, is fantasy. It is impossible to disentangle Gaiman's ability to write in solitude from his massive success and wealth. Neil Gaiman is not just any writer, nor just any successful author – he is a member of an elite group of celebrity authors. His net worth is \$17.28US million, and his combined body of work brings in an average of \$2.88US million every year.<sup>5</sup> The ability to isolate oneself – literally and metaphorically – from the noise of the literary marketplace to write fiction is a privilege only available to those who no longer need to concern themselves with material survival.

This essay argues that sustaining oneself on the craft of fiction writing requires taking an interest in the very material concerns

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<sup>4</sup> Nick Levey, "Post-Press Literature: Self-Published Authors in the Literary Field," *Post45*, February 2016, <http://post45.org/2016/02/post-press-literature-self-published-authors-in-the-literary-field-3/>.

<sup>5</sup> "How Much Money Does Neil Gaiman Make? Latest Income Salary," *Latest Celebrity Net Worth*, accessed December 13, 2020, <https://www.celebworth.net/2018/07/how-much-money-does-neil-gaiman-make.html>.

which run counter to the cultural imagination of the Author as financially disinterested and creatively autonomous. The concept of creative autonomy implies creative restrictions. For writers, creative restrictions are material. This is the basis of Virginia Woolf's famous assertion that "a woman must have money and a room of one's own if she is to write fiction."<sup>6</sup> Woolf's argument, made in relation to women's literary production, touches upon something more universal about the craft of writing: that one's ability to engage freely with the creative, immaterial realm of fiction writing is contingent upon the stability of one's mundane, material conditions. The irony of making a living as a fiction writer is that to free one's literary production from material concerns, one must be financially secure, but to achieve financial security, a writer must align their desire to tell stories with the industry's demands to generate profits from sales.

That Virginia Woolf felt the need to draw attention to the material limitations imposed upon writers speaks to the way that the Author is perceived as being a special individual who has transcended the material and is solely preoccupied with art. Roland Barthes' portrait of the modern author in his essay "The Death of the Author" corroborates this idea. According to Barthes, modern literary culture, which is indebted to the rise of "the prestige of the individual," is "tyrannically centered on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his

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<sup>6</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Hogarth Press, 1991), 4.

passions.”<sup>7</sup> From Barthes’ portrayal of the Author as the focus of literary culture and Woolf’s call to re-contextualize the Author within the material world emerges an image of the Author as an individual who embodies a standard of creative integrity as opposed to a worker who needs to eat. This notion is supported by the research of Ewan Mackenzie and Alan McKinlay into the psychic lives of artists or “cultural workers.” The working artist is perceived as “an individualised and competitive entrepreneurial subject” whose special talent, passion, and dedication will manifest in a successful career.<sup>8</sup> Through this lens, responsibility for the artist’s livelihood shifts from the institutions which support them to the artist themselves. An artist’s failure to make a living in their craft is perceived as the artist’s fault, not a failure of the industry.

For the purpose of this essay, creative autonomy in the literary marketplace is defined as the alignment of widespread consumption of the author’s writing (economic value) with the author’s personal pride in their writing (artistic value). Without artistic value, the writer’s creative ambitions are unfulfilled, and without economic value, the writer cannot pursue a full-time career in fiction writing. The conditions for creative autonomy are that the writer can pursue work of artistic value because its economic value is

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<sup>7</sup> Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Authorship: From Plato To Postmodern*, ed. Sean Burke (Edinburgh, University Press, 1995), 126.

<sup>8</sup> Ewan Mackenzie and Alan McKinlay, “Hope Labour and the Psychic Life of Cultural Work,” *Human Relations*, (July 15, 2020): 12.

nearly assured. Following this logic, obtaining creative autonomy is inextricably linked to popularity; the publishing industry is designed to compensate authors based on sales, and sales are increasingly concentrated among an elite group of celebrity authors of which Neil Gaiman is a member. A report commissioned by Arts Council England (ACE) reveals that in 2017, “the top 1% of authors accounted for 32.8% of all sales and within this, the top 0.1% accounted for 13% of total sales.”<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, only the sales of the top 1000 bestselling books provide enough income to support their authors’ livelihoods; since authors may have multiple books on this list, even fewer than 1000 authors in England can make a full-time career of writing every year.<sup>10</sup> A generous estimate suggests that the 1000<sup>th</sup> bestselling book will sell 4000 copies and make £24000 (\$32000US) in a year.<sup>11</sup> For reference, based on Gaiman’s annual income, this is still less than he might make in any given week. A writer does not need Gaiman’s surplus of income to make a living, but an author who makes a living is not necessarily an author who can forgo market interests to pursue unconventional or risky creative ambitions. The “serious bifurcation in the market between a few successful stars and a struggling mainstream” demonstrates how the

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<sup>9</sup> Arts Council England, *Literature in the 21st Century: Understanding Models of Support for Literary Fiction* (2017), 19, [https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Literature in the 21st Century report.pdf](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Literature%20in%20the%2021st%20Century%20report.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Arts Council England, *Literature in the 21st Century*, 17.

<sup>11</sup> Arts Council England, 17.

publishing industry does not sufficiently support the majority of published authors, let alone aspiring writers.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, a career like Gaiman's is universally sought, if not in his sales and visibility, then in his freedom to be flippant towards sales and visibility in service of higher artistic callings. After all, the image of the Author as described by Barthes is expected to prize the freedom of creative expression and integrity above all things; otherwise, why would they bother to write fiction in the first place? However, the precarity of the publishing industry makes this an unrealistic expectation for most writers.

Since the inception of the literary marketplace in the eighteenth-century, when writers began making their living from sales instead of patronage, difficult economic conditions have made it hard for authors to retain their creative autonomy. As described by Martha Woodmansee, when a literate middle class began to emerge in the eighteenth-century, the "demand for reading material increased steadily, enticing writers to try and earn a livelihood from the sale of their writings to a buying public."<sup>13</sup> Most writers, however, found themselves struggling financially instead of earning a stable income as they had expected. Woodmansee attributes these conditions of struggle to the numerous interlocking institutions which were unprepared to "support the large number of artists who came

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<sup>12</sup> Arts Council England, *Literature in the 21st Century*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> Martha Woodmansee, "The Genius and the Copyright," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 17, no. 4 (1984): 433.

forward.”<sup>14</sup> One would hope that three centuries and a dramatic increase in literacy later, the publishing industry would be more proficient in supporting writers; however, ACE’s report shows that the number of published authors who can earn a full-time living has dropped significantly between 2005 and 2013, from a mildly hopeful 40% to a devastating 11.5%.<sup>15</sup> To this day, the publishing industry is unable to sufficiently support as many full-time careers as there are published writers.

Woodmansee’s research on the eighteenth-century literary marketplace also highlights a lasting connection between financial strife and creative autonomy: “The vast majority of writers, many of them succumbing to...commercial pressures...churned out imitations and variations on proven popular themes with unprecedented rapidity. Those who did not...sold poorly.”<sup>16</sup> To make a living, most writers had to abandon their creative ambitions in favour of appealing to the masses. This shows that writers have been pressured to compromise their creative autonomy to turn a profit ever since the career of fiction writing entered the marketplace. More poignantly, this demonstrates that it was seen as the individual’s responsibility to adapt to the harsh realities of the marketplace, not the marketplace’s

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<sup>14</sup> Woodmansee, “The Genius and the Copyright,” 433.

<sup>15</sup> Arts Council England, *Literature in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 20.

<sup>16</sup> Martha Woodmansee, “The Interests in Disinterestedness,” in *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics* (Columbia University Press, 1994), 27.

responsibility to adapt to strengthen the individual's creative autonomy.

Those who *did* demand more of the literary marketplace looked not to the institutions, but to their audience. In eighteenth-century Germany, authors who sold poorly became known as the *Aufklärer*. They were ideologues who turned against the very reading public on whom their livelihood depended, criticizing their would-be audience as only being interested in simple entertainment.<sup>17</sup> Because the creative ambitions of the *Aufklärer* did not fit into the commercial formula for success, many of them were forced to find other sources of income. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing swore that he would not turn his back on the marketplace, but after struggling as a writer for twelve years, he accepted “a position as court librarian.”<sup>18</sup> Friedrich Schiller “just barely succeeded in making ends meet,” suffered a severe health decline due to overwork, and re-embraced aristocratic patronage “with much the same enthusiasm that he had displayed in commending himself to the public less than a decade before.”<sup>19</sup> Karl Philipp Moritz persevered in his craft, but at a price. Moritz “sought to escape his humble beginnings” through the upward mobility that authorship offered, but was so burdened by financial strain that his writing suffered: he always had to work on several projects at once, his writing was never polished to his liking,

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<sup>17</sup> Woodmansee, “The Interests in Disinterestedness,” 29.

<sup>18</sup> Woodmansee, “The Genius and the Copyright,” 431.

<sup>19</sup> Woodmansee, “The Genius and the Copyright,” 432.



and he unintentionally became a frequent self-plagiarist.<sup>20</sup> All three examples speak to the challenges of making a living as a sales-based author without compromising the creative aspirations that fuel the urge to write in the first place.

It is ironic that fiction writing, a craft of the imagination, as a career has historically privileged writers who prioritize familiarity and popularity over originality and artistry. The challenge of choosing inspiration over a profitable formula, according to Romanticist poet William Wordsworth, is this: “every Author, as far as he is great and at the same time *original*, has had the task of *creating* the taste by which he is to be enjoyed.”<sup>21</sup> Like the *Aufklärer*, Wordsworth attributed the risk of pursuing his unconventional creative ambitions to the reader, who instinctively wished “to be pleased in that particular way in which we have been accustomed to be pleased.”<sup>22</sup> The question of who can afford to take on this risk reveals something insidious about the structure of the literary marketplace. As Pierre Bourdieu has argued, the writer who is most prepared to withstand the precarity of the publishing industry is the writer who *already has* money:

The propensity to move towards the economically most risky positions, and above all the capacity to persist in them...even when

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<sup>20</sup> Woodmansee, “The Interests in Disinterestedness,” 30.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Woodmansee, “The Genius and the Copyright,” 429.

<sup>22</sup> William Wordsworth, “Preface,” in *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. Michael Mason (Longman, 1992), 87.

they secure no short-term economic profit, seem to depend to a large extent on possession of substantial economic and social capital. This is firstly because economic capital provides the conditions for freedom from economic necessity, a private income (*la rente*) being one of the best substitutes for sales (*la vente*).<sup>23</sup>

The material survival of the independently wealthy writer is guaranteed whether or not their writing sells to the masses, so they are not required to take an interest in the marketplace or mass popularity. They write with the reassurance that even if only a select few readers appreciate their creative risks and unconventional novelties, they have at least been true to their artistic vision, and there will still be food on the table. Writers who are not independently wealthy need to acquire financial security in order to pursue a full-time career as a writer, which is hard given the precarity which has been consistent throughout the history of the literary marketplace.

Neil Gaiman, like most of the *Aufklärer*, was not born into wealth, and had to rely on his writing to survive. Like most authors, writing fiction was not immediately fruitful for him, either. Reflecting on the beginning of his writing career, Gaiman said: “I was failing to sell stuff and I was getting lots of rejection slips back...I said Ok, either I have no talent – which I do not choose to believe for reasons

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<sup>23</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed,” *Poetics* 12, no. 4-5, trans. Richard Nice (1983): 349.

of personal pride – or I am going about this the wrong way.”<sup>24</sup> Unlike most authors, when asked if he has ever paid the bills with non-writing jobs, he can say, “no, my day jobs were writing too.”<sup>25</sup> Neil Gaiman attributes his early survival as a writer to the handsome pay attached to his years in freelance journalism which led to the publication of two high-profile non-fiction books: a biography of Duran Duran in 1984 and *Don't Panic: The Official Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy Companion* in 1988. Gaiman admits to his great fortune of coming into the journalism scene when opportunities were plentiful and the value of his writing was high enough to sustain him:

I was very lucky because I made this decision at a time in England when lots and lots of magazines and newspapers were getting stuff done by freelancers. Coincidentally, around the time that I stopped, they stopped. There was no freelance work in England for around five years. These days there's lots and lots of freelance work, although they are still getting paid the same amount we were back in 1984. Remembering how hard it was to make a living back then, I wonder how do these people do it now?<sup>26</sup>

This analysis of the world of writing was accurate in 1999 and continues to be so. The data from a compendium of rates for

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<sup>24</sup> Claire White, “A Conversation with Neil Gaiman,” *The Internet Writing Journal* 3, no. 3 (1999) accessed December 13, 2020, <https://www.writerswrite.com/journal/neil-gaiman-3991>.

<sup>25</sup> Neil Gaiman (@neilhimsel), *Twitter*, October 26, 2020, <https://twitter.com/neilhimsel/status/1320675472469069825>.

<sup>26</sup> White, “A Conversation with Neil Gaiman.”

freelance writing in the UK shows that, between 1999 and 2020, the average magazine article pays £343,<sup>27</sup> while the average online article pays £221.<sup>28</sup> It is worth noting that throughout the years, some rates were much higher, while some jobs, even in the past five years, offered the low rate of “exposure.” Disturbingly, these rates are on par with how much money Gaiman earned from his writing in 1984, which he shares on Twitter:

@sannevman: Writing prompt: You will run out of money entirely in three months and your only skill is writing.

@neilhimsel: That was my original writing prompt. ‘You have no other skills and you have no money. But you have an old manual typewriter. If you sell an article you’ll get £300. And your rent is £25 a week. Go.’<sup>29</sup>

The value of writing may not have risen in the 40 years since Gaiman was living paycheck-to-paycheck, but the cost of rent has, significantly. Currently, the lowest cost of a one-bedroom apartment in London is £236 a month; however, on average, today’s renter pays £756 a month.<sup>30</sup> Gaiman’s freelance journalism survival guide, which

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<sup>27</sup> “Words, per 1000 / mags,” NUJ Rate for the Job, accessed December 13, 2020, <http://www.londonfreelance.org/rates/index.php?work=Words,+per+1000&sect=mags&arch=N>.

<sup>28</sup> “Words, per 1000 / online,” NUJ Rate for the Job.

<sup>29</sup> Sandra Newman (@sannevman) and Neil Gaiman (@neilhimsel), Twitter, July 9, 2014, <https://twitter.com/neilhimsel/status/1074352067521769472>.

<sup>30</sup> Sam Bromley, “London rent prices: which areas have the highest and lowest average prices?,” Simply Business, accessed December 13, 2020.

worked despite “how hard it was to make a living back then,” would not be enough to sustain most writers today.

When comparing the beginning of Gaiman’s career to the economic conditions of today’s aspiring writers, some degree of his success might be attributed to fortunate timing. Some consider the period of time in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century when Gaiman began his career as a Golden Age for writers. The business model for publishing fiction, which was relatively new for the time, according to Arts Council England, supported authors with generous advances that rendered sales “if not irrelevant, then not an immediate financial concern.”<sup>31</sup> This benefited Gaiman immensely as he secured non-fiction book deals and worked towards publishing his own stories. When asked why he wrote a Duran Duran biography, Gaiman’s response was: “I was 23 and the £2000 advance paid for an electric typewriter and covered my rent and food for several months.”<sup>32</sup> This business model evidently supported Gaiman while he worked to publish the unconventional fantasy fiction for which he is now known. One year after his second non-fiction book *Don’t Panic* was released, Gaiman began publishing *The Sandman*, which would run in DC Comics for 26 years. The year after, in 1990, he published

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<sup>31</sup> Arts Council England, *Literature in the 21st Century*, 38.

<sup>32</sup> Neil Gaiman (@neilhimsel), Twitter, October 10, 2018, <https://twitter.com/neilhimsel/status/1050108542483619840>.

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*Good Omens* with renowned fantasy author Terry Pratchett (though at the time they were, in their own words, “just a couple of guys”).<sup>33</sup>

This business model is still in place, but it no longer has the equalizing and livelihood-sustaining power it did for Neil Gaiman. The economic conditions of the publishing industry have been recently impacted by the 2008 recession. ACE’s report shows that sales of print fiction were showing positive growth until 2008 and have never recovered; this instability has only been compounded by the rise of digital sales and “perhaps most worryingly, a shift in consumer habits.”<sup>34</sup> The selling price for books has also gone down, even with inflation, resulting in the “double whammy” of “falling book sales overall, and falling dividends for the sales they are making.”<sup>35</sup> To make matters worse, ACE reveals that “no less than 98% of our respondents believed that advances were falling...advances for literary fiction in particular are going down.”<sup>36</sup> Advances no longer have the power to insulate writers from the whims of the marketplace. Under these conditions, even the author of a bestselling novel is not guaranteed to have lasting financial stability. The profit from a breakout hit is not what it used to be; once that book drops off bestseller lists, sales might slow to a stop, as would the author’s

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<sup>33</sup> Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman, *Good Omens* (London: Corgi Books, 1990), 11.

<sup>34</sup> Arts Council England, *Literature in the 21st Century*, 10-12.

<sup>35</sup> Arts Council England, 12.

<sup>36</sup> Arts Council England, 38.

income.<sup>37</sup> The bestselling author will still have to fret about future income, save up in case sales suddenly drop, and strive to write the next book before money runs out, all the while marketing their book in an effort to keep sales up and building relationships with readers online in an effort to secure future sales. This report reveals a bleak reality for today's aspiring writers: publishing a novel does not guarantee a stable living and publishing a successful novel does not guarantee a stable future.

It is not unreasonable to consider that Neil Gaiman, writing in another era, might have remained a nameless writer who, unable to pay rent with his early publications or sustain himself on his advances, was forced to abandon his creative ambitions and find a “real job” (a fate he often jokes with relief he has avoided). It is also not unreasonable to consider that had many writers today made their debut at the same time as Gaiman, their respective bodies of work would have earned them more financial stability, and thus more creative autonomy – or that writers with day jobs today may have sustained full-time careers in writing 40 years ago. ACE cautions against this kind of speculation, however; after all, their report begins with the bolded words: “It’s easy to believe there was once a Golden Age for literary fiction, but the history of publishing tells us otherwise. It has rarely, if ever, been easy to support literary

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<sup>37</sup> Arts Council England, *Literature in the 21st Century*, 19.

writing.”<sup>38</sup> Another lens through which to view the beginning of Neil Gaiman’s career is this: no writer (barring the independently wealthy) can enter the literary marketplace exerting complete creative autonomy.

A writer cannot afford to be disinterested in profit until they have made enough profit to pursue creative projects with unconventional artistic value that might put its economic value at risk. Creative risks require financial security, and the gap between the financially secure and insecure author is only widening as the publishing industry offers its dwindling funds to celebrity authors whose books reliably accumulate massive sales. Book advances are going down across the board, but with the glaring exception of the 1% for whom advances are spiraling upwards.<sup>39</sup> Speaking events provide wonderful opportunities for exposure, but many writers appear for nothing more, while appearances by celebrity authors are generously compensated.<sup>40</sup> The publishing industry’s unequal distribution of its resources makes it much more difficult for most authors to be disinterested in the economic value of their writing.

To emphasize the publishing industry’s inability to support its writers, a common turning point for an author’s financial situation is the first time they are approached about having their writing adapted for the screen. Screen adaptations supplement an author’s

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<sup>38</sup> Arts Council England, *Literature in the 21st Century*, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Arts Council England, 40.

<sup>40</sup> Arts Council England, 45-46.



income, and therefore their creative autonomy. In a 2001 interview, Gaiman drew a direct connection between his Hollywood income and his freedom to work on esoteric creative projects:

I still find it very difficult to treat anything that happens in Hollywood seriously. The money is always nice though...I was asked to contribute a poem to this anthology. I wrote a poem, which at one point was five pages long. By the time it was finished, I had cut it down to about sixteen lines. I was very proud of it, and it had gone through several transformations...Finally it ended up as a weird little iambic thing that worked and had a really haunting little ending. It was about three days' work to produce this one little poem, for which I will probably be paid about \$15. If it's picked up as a best of the year, I might get another \$20 out of it. I look at Hollywood as the entity which subsidizes my being able to spend three days working on this one little poem...Which is really a puzzling and bemusing kind of thing.<sup>41</sup>

The length of this quote in relation to the little poem in question indicates how much time and attention Gaiman paid to a poem of ultimately very little monetary value. This example illustrates the discrepancy between the thoughtfulness of the creative process (artistic value) and the economic value of the finished product. More importantly, Gaiman admits that he was only able to devote three days' time to a weird little haunting poem because he had Hollywood

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<sup>41</sup> Claire E. White, "Interview with Neil Gaiman," *The Internet Writing Journal* 5, no. 6 (2001), <https://www.writerswrite.com/journal/neil-gaiman-7011>.

as a source of income. Most writers do not have three days to dedicate to one little poem worth \$15 – not without working on other projects or attending to a day job between drafts – because most full-time writers do not experience the windfall which Hollywood provides.

A screen adaptation of a novel – or better yet, a series – is a rare (albeit increasing) opportunity that is difficult for an author to turn down. This is how one author describes how she felt when she was approached about turning her debut novel into a movie: “I really wanted my writing to reach a new audience. Actually, I really wanted to be able to afford furniture.”<sup>42</sup> Both of these comments imply that the author was drawn to the material benefits of a screen adaptation: the chance to attract new readers and sales to her books, and the money to furnish her home. Adaptations of books are beneficial to studios as well, as studios can manage risks by taking on a fully-developed story that usually comes with its own fanbase.<sup>43</sup> The risk, however, gets shifted over to the author who must relinquish control over their creative vision at the risk of their story being, as Neil Gaiman phrases it, “unnecessarily screwed up by other people.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Caren Lissner, “How My First Novel Became A Movie,” *The Atlantic*, September 17, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/09/how-my-first-novel-became-a-movie/539430/>.

<sup>43</sup> Andrew Liptak, “Why Hollywood is turning to books for its biggest productions,” *The Verge*, January 26, 2017, <https://www.theverge.com/2017/1/26/14326356/hollywood-movie-book-adaptations-2017-expanse-game-of-thrones>.

Screen adaptations risk being unfaithful to their source material because of budget and time constraints, as well as creative complications, such as losing the emotional core that initially drew readers to the book.<sup>45</sup> The latter often happens because authors are unlikely to be formally included in their book's screen adaptation; once again, this privilege tends to be reserved for a small percentage of successful authors.<sup>46</sup> Though the repeated adage of “the book is better than the movie” is intended as a compliment to the author, it also highlights the powerlessness of the author to retain the integrity of their story in a screen adaptation. Nonetheless, for the majority of authors, it is *worth* the risk of disappointing loyal readers with an adaptation that feels disjointed from the novel if they can receive enough money to work on another book. In other words, screen adaptations are frequently an exchange of creative autonomy in the present for the increased likelihood of creative autonomy in the future.

Neil Gaiman is one of a few fortunate authors whose screen adaptations span beyond one movie, trilogy, or TV series. More importantly, he has exerted an uncommon and rather remarkable amount of creative control over these adaptations. Gaiman's very first

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<sup>44</sup> Lidija Haas, “Neil Gaiman: ‘Good Omens feels more apt now than it did 30 years ago,’” *The Guardian*, May 24, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/may/24/neil-gaiman-interview-good-omens>.

<sup>45</sup> Liptak, “Why Hollywood is turning to books for its biggest productions.”

<sup>46</sup> Lissner, “How My First Novel Became A Movie.”

solo novel *Neverwhere* was technically an adaptation of the 1996 TV series for which Gaiman wrote the script. As scenes were cut and creative compromises were made in the show, Gaiman was in a unique position to reassert control by writing every loss into the book.<sup>47</sup> Since then, the only screen adaptation of his writing for which he has had no involvement is the stop-motion animated film *Coraline*. Warner Bros. spent twenty years trying to convince Gaiman to sign on to a film adaptation of *The Sandman*, but Gaiman insisted it was impossible to condense his comic series into a movie without horribly disfiguring the story; he rejected unsatisfying film scripts until he finally made a deal with Netflix to adapt *The Sandman* into a TV series which began filming in 2020.<sup>48</sup> Gaiman's formal involvement in the TV adaptation of *American Gods*, meant he had the power to replace its showrunners when he was unhappy with the direction they had in mind for its second season.<sup>49</sup> Because his livelihood does not depend on the adaptation of his stories, he is in a rare position to decline screen adaptations of his work and demand creative control from Hollywood. While most authors are forced to forfeit creative autonomy for a screen adaptation of their writing, screen adaptations only *enhance* Neil Gaiman's creative autonomy.

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<sup>47</sup> White, "A Conversation with Neil Gaiman."

<sup>48</sup> Seth Meyers, "Neil Gaiman Compares Quarantine to Being Locked in a Cellar with a Bomb," Late Night With Seth Meyers, January 13, 2021, Video, 5:00, <https://youtu.be/8GrQFZ5IDVg>.

<sup>49</sup> Lesley Goldberg, "'American Gods' Hires New Showrunner for Season 2," The Hollywood Reporter, February 2, 2018, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/american-gods-hires-new-showrunner-season-2-1080813>.

Neil Gaiman’s uncommon creative autonomy in Hollywood is no more evident than in the 2019 limited series *Good Omens*. Bringing *Good Omens* to the screen was precious to Gaiman because it was the dying wish of his co-author, Terry Pratchett, that an adaptation was done right. Gaiman has said “All I wanted to do was to make something Terry would have liked...That was the only rule.”<sup>50</sup> This is undeniably heartwarming; it is also bittersweet when one considers the rarity of a situation in which an author is signed onto a screen adaptation as writer, producer, and showrunner. Although Gaiman says the studio was relatively flexible when the show went beyond budget early on, he was very blunt about the challenges of being a showrunner.<sup>51</sup> By the time *Good Omens* was ready for release, he stated he would likely never be a showrunner again because “I was not put on this planet to have to argue with someone about fucking budgets.”<sup>52</sup> This bold claim surely struck a chord with those who want to write for a living precisely because their creative aspirations run in opposition to concerns of budget and profit. It also gives the impression that the Author is always in a position to prioritize artistic value over economic value, when in reality, creative autonomy is limited to those few celebrity authors

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<sup>50</sup> Liz Shannon Miller, “Neil Gaiman had one rule for the *Good Omens* adaptation: Making Terry Pratchett happy,” *The Verge*, May 30, 2019, <https://www.theverge.com/2019/5/30/18645935/neil-gaiman-interview-good-omens-amazon-adaptation-terry-pratchett-michael-sheen-david-tennant>.

<sup>51</sup> Miller, “Neil Gaiman had one rule for the *Good Omens* adaptation.”

<sup>52</sup> Miller.

who shape the overall cultural imagination of the Author. In the cultural imagination, the Author is successful because they exert creative autonomy, even though the reverse is true: the Author can exert creative autonomy because they are successful.

The emphasis in the cultural imagination on the Author as a special, self-empowered individual partially explains why the literary marketplace continues to overflow with aspiring writers despite the precarity of the industry. Writers are encouraged to see themselves as the Author, an individual who succeeds through sheer talent, dedication, and disinterest in profit. This narrative prioritizes the importance of creative integrity over the reality of the need for financial compensation. As Levey warns, “the positioning of creative writing as a special domain, detached from business considerations, allows for writers’ exploitation by pressuring them to be disinterested in their economic situation.”<sup>53</sup> Mackenzie and McKinlay find this to be true across creative and cultural work; notions of fulfilment and empowerment through one’s craft is a Trojan Horse which sneaks in “deteriorating funding and support, employment conditions and pay.”<sup>54</sup> The literary production of the creative writer may be perceived as valuable and important, but barring a select few writers, their contributions to literary culture do not follow through to consistent financial security.

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<sup>53</sup> Levey, “Post-Press Literature.”

<sup>54</sup> Mackenzie and McKinlay, “Hope labour,” 2.

Because the Author occupies a special position in the cultural imagination, writers knowingly consent to navigating the precarity of the literary marketplace for the opportunity to make a living on the written word. According to Mackenzie and McKinlay, the struggle of making a living in the arts is valorized for its liberation from “the bounds of waged labour”, and artists are likely to take pride in their ability to withstand financial insecurity for the sake of pursuing their passion.<sup>55</sup> As a result, the world of fiction writing is dominated by “hope labour”, a term Mackenzie and McKinlay use to describe the phenomenon of artists being under-compensated for their work while they persevere in hopes that talent and dedication will open up higher-paying work opportunities to them in the future.<sup>56</sup> Hope labour also encapsulates free labour, which is a way “for those able to afford it” to demonstrate their artistic value in order to prove their economic value.<sup>57</sup> This links back to Bourdieu’s claim that the independently wealthy are more likely to withstand the precarity of the publishing industry, and to Woolf’s observation that the writer is expected to surmount material needs to pursue their craft.

Hope labour thrives in the world of fiction writing today through the rise of independent presses, self-publishing, and online literary magazines. The traditional publishing industry can only take on so many writers, but an aspiring writer is never left without a place

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<sup>55</sup> Mackenzie and McKinlay, 5.

<sup>56</sup> Mackenzie and McKinlay, 2.

<sup>57</sup> Mackenzie and McKinlay, 12.

to submit their work. Online literary magazines and journals accept a wide array of unconventional written works, but many cannot afford to pay their contributors. Submitting manuscripts to independent presses could be construed as a form of hope labour since, according to ACE, “it is questionable” whether or not independent presses “can afford to fully support writers”; it is not unreasonable to suggest that many independently-published writers are holding out hopes of being noticed by a better-funded traditional publishing house.<sup>58</sup> Self-publishing can be seen as hope labour for similar reasons, as Levey finds “many post-pressers are...working only transitionally within this domain, while holding out for traditional validation.”<sup>59</sup> There are more than enough spaces for writers to submit their unpublished work, but fair compensation is another thing. Adequate compensation that frees up time and energy for creative autonomy is, increasingly, in another world. One could even argue that a writer with unconventional creative ambitions working within a popular genre – the kind of writer the *Aufklärer* sneered at – is also engaging in hope labour. The publishing industry today, by design, does not offer a pathway to creative autonomy for many writers at all, but hope labour encourages aspiring writers to work hard while obfuscating their chances at success.

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<sup>58</sup> Arts Council England, *Literature in the 21st Century*, 23.

<sup>59</sup> Levey, “Post-Press Literature.”



Insidiously, the *labour* of hope labour is not the creative kind that Gaiman experiences – that is, locking himself in a room to meet a deadline or fighting valiantly for his artistic vision. For most writers, time they would spend on the labours of creative life is frequently stolen by time spent on survival. To ensure their material survival, writers must exert time and energy engaging with the literary marketplace. As previously established, even a writer with a bestselling novel needs to be mindful of their sales, which can taper off dramatically once their novels drop off bestseller lists. Self-publishing platforms give authors the opportunity to monitor algorithms and maneuver prices to maximize the profit from their sales but, according to Timothy Lacquintano, “the activity and the perceived need to constantly keep abreast of changes also [induces] anxiety and exhaustion.”<sup>60</sup> The rare writer like Gaiman, meanwhile, does not need to spend time monitoring his sales because they are all but guaranteed:

It’s important to the publishers that the books make the bestseller lists, of course. But in terms of how my sales patterns work, *Neverwhere* didn’t hit any bestseller lists. But I’ve probably sold more copies of *Neverwhere* than the average New York Times bestseller. They come out and they sell all their books in the first few weeks and

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<sup>60</sup> Timothy Lacquintano, “Amazon as a New Intermediary: Experimental Self-Publishing and Popular Fiction Writing,” in *Mass Authorship and the Rise of Self-Publishing* (University of Iowa Press, 2016), 113.

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that's it. Whereas, *Neverwhere* sells the same number of copies every month. My sales patterns tend to be perennial sellers.<sup>61</sup>

The certainty of Gaiman's book sales gives him the freedom to distance himself from the interests of his publishers, which reinforces the cultural perception of the Author as being interested in their craft over their sales. Unfortunately the consistency of his sales, which enhances his autonomy, is inherently rare; he is referred to by his editors as "that unicorn" whose works sell routinely years after their release just "by word of mouth."<sup>62</sup> Meanwhile, most authors are forced to take an interest in their sales and marketing if they are to make a living, even if it means they are left with less time and energy for their craft.

More concerning than the energy diverted from writing to selling is the way in which the marketplace infiltrates the writing process itself. It is common for writers to use social media to market their work and cultivate intimate fanbases, but Lacquintano finds that increased proximity to readers can put pressure for writers to increase the speed of their literary production:

The interaction with fans led to constant requests for new writing. The writers knew they had to keep feeding the beast, and they worried that this would dilute the quality of their work. Those

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<sup>61</sup> Mia Funk, "Other Worlds Inches Away: An Interview with Neil Gaiman," *Michigan Quarterly Review*, July 16, 2018, <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/mqr/2018/07/other-worlds-inches-away-an-interview-with-neil-gaiman/>.

<sup>62</sup> Haas, "Neil Gaiman: 'Good Omens' feels more apt now than it did 30 years ago."

who took time to craft their stories lamented the missed opportunities to exploit audience interest in their work.<sup>63</sup>

Being directly exposed to reader interest in one's work can be motivating for a writer, but it can be a double-edged sword in the world of self-publishing. When an author's livelihood is dependent on the continued (financial) support of their readers, it is tempting to foreground the interests of the reader over the best interests of their work. This tension between expectations of creative integrity and literary output has been ingrained in the publishing industry since its inception; recall the career of Karl Philipp Moritz, who was frequently forced to publish his work before it could be polished to his satisfaction in order to break even.<sup>64</sup> The publishing industry has been structured so that the demands of material survival place the career of the writer at odds with the creative autonomy and integrity of the writer.

Today's writers also continue to be constrained by the burden of expectation that Wordsworth, along with the *Aufklärer*, resented. Wordsworth argued that the common reader's preference to enjoy the kind of books "which have long continued to please them" made it difficult for writers who wished to experiment with their work to succeed in the marketplace.<sup>65</sup> Today, Lacquintano's research finds that it is not uncommon for writers who frequently market their

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<sup>63</sup> Lacquintano, "Experimental Self-Publishing," 113.

<sup>64</sup> Woodmansee, "The Interests in Disinterestedness," 30.

<sup>65</sup> Wordsworth, "Preface," 87.

writing on social media to feel stifled by an awareness of what is expected of their writing, sometimes finding it difficult “to write the kinds of texts that mattered to them.”<sup>66</sup> According to Neil Gaiman, this pressure can even be amplified among bestselling authors. Gaiman says he intentionally wrote across genres early in his career because he realized that “‘bestselling authors had a weirdly limited power’ as show ponies rewarded only ‘as long as they did the same thing.’”<sup>67</sup> This statement carries the worrying implication that even successful authors have restricted creative autonomy because they are held to the standards of their earlier writing. An author’s obedience to the marketplace often works in opposition to the artistic drive which draws them to a career in fiction writing in the first place.

In conclusion, the creative autonomy of the writer and the means of making a living as an author are often incompatible with one another. It is increasingly difficult for an author to forge a career guided by creative autonomy, freed of the pressures of the marketplace, without the kind of financial security which is only attainable by a small minority of authors. Because the publishing industry cannot sufficiently support the majority of authors, it is only possible for a small group of celebrity authors to exert creative autonomy in their careers. Nonetheless, masses of aspiring writers are sold the narrative that pursuing a career in the craft they are passionate

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<sup>66</sup> Lacquintano, “Experimental Self-Publishing,” 113.

<sup>67</sup> Haas, “Neil Gaiman: ‘Good Omens feels more apt now than it did 30 years ago.’”

about is, in itself, creative autonomy, and the publishing industry is never short of new authors to publish. These authors find themselves compromising their creative autonomy to tend to material concerns because their writing needs to make them money if they are to continue writing for a living at all. The Author is not some special individual who can sustain themselves on the integrity of their art; storytelling, on the other hand, *is* special. The publishing industry might inhibit the creative autonomy of most writers, but it can never destroy the fundamental human impulse to tell stories, which existed before it became a career, and would persevere even if there was not a single cent to be made from it.

Meanwhile, a month into the explosion of the COVID-19 global pandemic, Neil Gaiman found another space of solitude to write in his temporary New Zealand lodging: “Today I have gone to the cave to write. Literally. The house we are renting has a small cave, with a table in it, at the top of the hill the house is on. I feel very hobbit.”<sup>68</sup> In a safe country, surrounded by his family, whom he has always been able to financially support with the written word, Neil Gaiman gets to write—to live—as most writers will only ever dream of.

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<sup>68</sup> Neil Gaiman (@neilhimsel), Instagram, April 15, 2020, [https://www.instagram.com/p/B-\\_OrGVHjXP/](https://www.instagram.com/p/B-_OrGVHjXP/).

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photo by Robert de Boer

## **Isolation, Interpretation and Instinct - An interview with photographer Robert de Boer**

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Robert de Boer is a photographer with a special feel for finding space amidst the clutter of the world. I first met de Boer on a flight from Abu Dhabi to Amsterdam, and since then, I have been following his work and have been inspired by his ability to share the world the way he sees it, as beautiful, soulful, isolated and vast. That is the way his photos appear to me. I was fortunate to catch up with de Boer for a phone interview as he was in transit, heading from his home in the South of Spain to Amsterdam for a family visit. I was curious to find out how isolation plays into his work.

**TBD\*:** *Does isolation factor into your artistic process?*

**RDB:** It's a big part of it actually, and in a few different ways. If you look at my photos, I am always isolating some part of the bigger picture. For example, the man walking alone past the mural in Portugal is isolated from the rest of the street by the photo, but in reality, there were other people around there as well.

*Isolation, Interpretation and Instinct*

**TBD\*:** *Oh wow, I wasn't thinking of it that way! So you isolate him!*

**RDB:** Yes, I isolate him... I create the isolation in the photo. I spent three hours on that street pretty much to get that photo, with the right person, with nobody else in it, and without cars coming. I think it was a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, so there were others around, but it is the isolation that makes the photo more powerful.

**TBD\*:** *Many of your photographs portray a solitary figure, do you intend to convey loneliness?*

**RDB:** Well, loneliness sounds a little bit negative. What I'm looking for is some sort of simplicity, I don't personally see it as loneliness. This brings me back to the other aspect of isolation, the photos I take are not intentionally lonely, but when I take them, I am isolated, walking in the street, or in nature somewhere. I have a vision, but I can only put it into a photograph when I am by myself. Like, if I am hiking with someone else, or doing something with other people, then it doesn't work as well because the other person is not necessarily there for taking photos, they want to be outside or to spend time together. So, it's really hard to create your vision while being with someone because they may not share the vision or realize how long it takes to take a photo. Like for the photograph of the man in Portugal, I was there for three hours, and that was actually the second day that I was there. For the one in China, I was on the street for an hour or an hour and a half at seven o'clock in the morning. Well, nobody

wants to go with you out at seven o'clock in the morning when it's foggy because they would feel, well, this is not fun. So in that sense I have to seclude myself, I have to be on my own to do it. Because people don't understand what you are creating, and they don't know what you are waiting for. And maybe even when I see something, and I take the photo, then they look at me like, "what did you take the photo of? There is nothing there to see."

I was in the mountains with a friend of mine, I think it was two years ago, before the Corona, and we went in the mountains. It was completely foggy and we could hardly see anything. We were about twelve hundred meters high, and suddenly I stopped and I saw trees and fog and the road. And he said "what are you doing?" I said, "I'm gonna take a photo," and he said "what's there to see? You can't see anything, it's like misty and everything." I took the photo, and when we came back, I processed the photo quickly on the computer and then I showed it to him, and he said "Oh wow, that's a really cool photo." So I thought it was interesting that he didn't see what I saw, but still appreciated the photo. So when I'm on a road like that by myself, I can take many hours, and dozens of photos, but when I'm with somebody else, then it's like, ok, I'll do it quick because he doesn't understand my vision or what I'm doing. And there's nothing wrong with that! So usually I have to be on my own to create something like that.

## *Isolation, Interpretation and Instinct*

**TBD\*:** *Do you intend for your work to elicit an emotional response from the viewer?*

**RDB:** Yeah I do. Whenever you take a photo, you are looking for something special, something unique, and you want to get the viewer to have some kind of feeling with it. But it's funny because people look at photos in different ways, so you can get very different reactions.

Sometimes people say a photo tells a thousand words, or that the photo speaks for itself, but a photo doesn't really speak for itself because everyone creates their own story for the photo. For example, the man and the mural - some people could see it as a stroll, some as a man going to church, some as sad or lonely. But I want to create a photo which has a feeling, because if a person doesn't have a feeling from the photo, then they can't or don't interact with it. When I take a photo, I can make my own story about it and have that emotional response, but if people see something else in the photo, then they will have a different emotion with it.

The street photo in China was taken at about seven o'clock in the morning on a very misty day, and I was really looking for this, or something like this. The man is really going for something, and I see the colours next to him, that was my whole mission, to capture the colours next to him with the emptiness of the bare misty trees on the other side. It's interesting to me to hear what others see in this photo, sometimes different than my original intent.

**TBD\*:** *Does the response from the public inspire future work?*

**RDB:** Yes, it does. It inspires you when people are excited about your photos. When people are not excited then it can demotivate you. So what happened with me when I started photography was that when I showed people my first ten photos, then, ahh, they liked some, others they didn't like so much. Then I would show them to other people and they would say "yeah, I like that one but I don't like that one or that one," so you get all these mixed reactions. And for me it was difficult because I liked all ten photos. There was one person who didn't like all ten photos, and I thought that if they didn't like the photos, then the photos were not good. Why did someone like the first one and not the fourth one? And it took me awhile to realize that not everybody can like every photo. Because it's a preference. Like Rembrandt, he was a great painter, his paintings go for 20 million Euros, but some people don't like the 20 million euro painting. But they might like something else that is really cheap, by an unknown person... so do you get motivation out of it? Yes, you do, but you shouldn't be too much affected because not everybody can like everything you make. But if people are excited about my work, then yes, definitely I get excited and I'm happy and I talk about it and share it. And there are plenty of people who like what I do so I keep on making and sharing what I do.

*Isolation, Interpretation and Instinct*

**TBD\*:** *What inspires your work, are you motivated by ideas? or circumstance?*

**RDB:** I work with ideas. But I want them to be natural, so I have to wait for the right circumstances. So, like the guy in China with the fog. I'd seen something like that, and I wanted to create that, but I had to find a day when it was foggy, and to walk into a guy who was actually walking towards me and then I could actually create that image. Same with the guy on the street in Portugal, - you have something in mind and you want to create that, but because it's natural - I don't use artists in my photographs, or models - so you have to wait for the right circumstances. So circumstances are important, but it is mostly ideas, because without the ideas, you can't create. Even if you want to work with circumstances, or create a circumstance, then you need to have the idea.

**TBD\*:** *So it's not chance? You usually have an idea of what you want to take?*

**RDB:** Well, I always have an idea, but it doesn't always work. The opportunity doesn't always come when you want it. So, with nature photography, you can't control the weather, and with street photography, you can't control the people, so there is a big chance factor in it as well.



**TBD\*:** *How do the street and city inspire you? How does nature and landscape inspire you?*

**RBD:** With street and city, I'm interested in people. I am an observer. I like to see how people move around, what they do, how they react and respond to things. So it's the interest in people.

With nature, it is so different from city life. I like cities, I can be there a few days a week, but I prefer to spend more time in nature, and I don't think we see enough of nature, because most people live and work in the city, and maybe on the weekend they can go to nature. I prefer to be five days of the week in nature, and two days a week in the city. Because a lot of people don't see that much nature, I like to show what I find. For example, where I live in Spain, I live close to the beach, but we have mountains and hills around us. A lot of people think that when you go to the South of Spain, there's beach and there's holiday and it's fun, but when you show them what the countryside is, and it's literally only ten kilometers straight inwards from the ocean, it's quite different. You have mountains and hills and little rivers, even some still have water running through them when it's over 35 or 40 degrees in the summer. And people don't expect to see that. So I like to take photos of that and bring them to the people. Many people don't know that Spain has that.

## *Isolation, Interpretation and Instinct*

**TBD\*:** *How does your subject affect your approach and your process? Do you have a consistent method?*

**RDB:** Well, with the street photos, it's difficult to do, to take photos like that, especially these days with privacy laws, and figuring out what you can take photos of. I don't like to be the person who jumps out of the bushes and pushes a lens straight into your face, and yet, I still want to get a natural looking photo, not a posed photo. But it goes a lot by feeling because you always have to adapt to the subject. Every situation is new, so I work mostly by feel.

There is no consistency in it. I have done the photography courses, where you learn the rule of thirds and how everything should be in certain areas of your frame. And I get it, but I do it my own way. Although if you put the divisions on top of my frame, then probably most of the time it will line up according to the rules, but if you only think of the rules, how you should do it, then I believe you lose your creative capabilities, because you get limited by thinking only about what is right. I think in the end it's more about feeling.

**TBD\*:** *Thank you so much for the interview! Is there anything you would like to say in conclusion?*

**RDB:** Well, I can say that there are no wrong photos. Sometimes people like things, or they don't, but it's a matter of preference. Yes, there are rules on how to do things and how it should be, but it doesn't necessarily mean that it is right. I have had questions from people

about what kind of gear you need, like, this guy wanted to do a photo tour with me, and he was like, “I only have this camera...” But I am a firm believer that it doesn’t matter what you shoot on, it’s about capturing the moment, and whether that’s with a camera on a mobile phone or whether that’s on a five thousand euro photo-camera, to me it doesn’t matter. As long as you can capture the moment, and bring out a certain feeling to the viewer, then I really think you’ve taken a good photo.

To see more of Robert de Boer’s work visit <https://www.robertdeboer.nl/>  
And you can follow him on instagram @robertdeboer.nl



**The Evolution of Moral Progress: A Biocultural Theory**  
**Allen Buchanan and Russell Powell**  
**Oxford University Press, 2018**

Review by Guido Calderini  
MA student – Philosophy  
University of Ottawa

In their 2018 book, *The Evolution of Moral Progress*, Allen Buchanan and Russell Powell set out to reanimate the debate on the nature of moral progress, which was a central concern of the field of philosophy for most of its history. By moral progress, the authors refer to the overall “improvement of our moral capacities”<sup>1</sup> as reflected by the widespread adoption of beliefs and behaviour that better take into consideration the interests of out-groups and other sentient beings. The authors claim that this important debate on the nature of moral progress has died down due to the general acceptance of evolutionarily driven parochial morality, that is the belief that human beings are evolutionarily hard-wired to disregard or heavily discount the moral status of people outside their group. The authors argue that the evidence used by defenders of parochial morality to support their view is also compatible with an adaptably plastic view of morality,<sup>2</sup> which has better explanatory power and aligns with new developments in

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<sup>1</sup> Allen E. Buchanan and Russell Powell, *The Evolution of Moral Progress: a Biocultural Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 45.

<sup>2</sup> Buchanan and Powell, 37.

## *The Evolution of Moral Progress*

theories of culture-gene coevolution,<sup>3</sup> archeological and ethnographic accounts of hunter-gatherer tribes, and studies in neuroeconomics.

In the first chapters of their book, Buchanan and Powell draw our attention to the work of authors such as Peter Singer<sup>4</sup> and Steven Pinker,<sup>5</sup> who have documented changes in moral attitudes and behaviour throughout the last few centuries. Buchanan and Powell synthesize these changes into two major moral revolutions or expansions of the circle of moral regard. The first great expansion of the circle of moral regard consists in the adoption by a considerable amount of people (and the institutions of the countries where they reside) of the belief in the equality of all human beings. This expansion is described as fueling social movements such as abolitionism, women's suffrage, and civil rights. The second great expansion consists in a trend towards greater consideration of the interests of non-human animals as shown by attitudes and changes in laws in many countries concerning the use of animals in the testing of cosmetics, medical research, and their consumption as meat.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Buchanan and Powell, *The Evolution of Moral Progress*, 409; Joseph Patrick Henrich, *The Secret of Our Success: How Culture Is Driving Human Evolution, Domesticating Our Species, and Making Us Smarter* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Buchanan and Powell, *The Evolution of Moral Progress*, 62; Peter Singer, *The Expanding Circle: Ethics, Evolution, and Moral Progress* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Buchanan and Powell, *The Evolution of Moral Progress*, 127; Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York City: Viking, 2011); Steven Pinker, *Enlightenment Now: the Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress* (London: Penguin Books, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Buchanan and Powell, *The Evolution of Moral Progress*, 214.

According to Buchanan and Powell, the standard tribalistic account of morality is unable to explain these two moral revolutions since they require concern for out-group members or beings that cannot reciprocate.<sup>7</sup>

The authors spend the second half of the book explaining the standard parochial account of morality and its shortcomings. These theories have existed since the publication of *The Descent of Man* by Charles Darwin in 1871 and are an attempt to explain the fact that humans have a propensity to sacrifice resources for others in ways that do not increase their own fitness, a trait that would seem *prima facie* to be disfavored by evolutionary theory. Based on the seminal works of Robert Axelrod and W.D. Hamilton, the parochial naturalistic conception of moral progress attempts to solve the paradox by conceptualizing morality as an evolutionary adaptation that facilitates cooperation among members of a group of people, usually united by ties of kinship.<sup>8</sup> Such a morality would be favored evolutionarily by increasing the chances of one's genes to live on through offspring or closely related relatives. The flipside of this limited altruism towards family members and close cooperators is the development of distrust and moral disregard for outsiders. In other words, due to the harsh reality of the Environment of Evolutionary Adaptation (EEA) in the middle to late Pleistocene era, the moral

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<sup>7</sup> Buchanan and Powell, *The Evolution of Moral Progress*, 273

<sup>8</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene: 40th Anniversary Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 264

mind of hunter-gatherer tribes would have been evolutionarily shaped to be tribalistic, because groups that lacked such moral emotions (by selfish behavior towards members of the same group or excessive altruism towards outsiders) were weeded out over millennia of natural selection, leading to the development in humans of a parochial morality that has remained unchanged since then. Buchanan and Powell accuse contemporary authors interested in questions of moral development such as Cristopher Boehm, Joshua Greene, and Michael Tomasello, of uncritically espousing parochial morality<sup>9</sup> to support the belief that social and political institutions can only keep in check our most tribalistic outbursts or try to project them on bigger “imaginary” tribes, such as the nation, without ever being able to change this hardwired morality. The very last chapter of the book is specifically addressed to more “optimistic” authors such as Ingmar Persson and Julian Savulescu, who propose that we overcome our natural limits through biomedical interventions. According to Buchanan and Powell, these authors also share (wrongly) in the assumption that our moral mind, having been shaped at an earlier evolutionary stage, is now unalterably tribal.<sup>10</sup>

Having presented the tribalistic view of morality in addition to overwhelming evidence of moral progress over time, the authors argue that the tribalistic view of morality must be modified to account not only for the reality of ancient hunter-gatherer tribes, but also

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<sup>9</sup> Buchanan and Powell, *The Evolution of Moral Progress*, 120

<sup>10</sup> Buchanan and Powell, *The Evolution of Moral Progress*, 345



contemporary societies. They then present new evidence from evolutionary psychology, which gives cultural evolution a more important role in shaping our moral minds to support a naturalistic theory of human moral development that is not fixedly tribalistic, but *adaptably plastic*.<sup>11</sup> This means that morality in particular humans can develop to be tribalistic or inclusive depending on certain cues (e.g. resource scarcity, signs of disease) that were important during the late Pleistocene era, when morality was shaped through natural selection. This new theory of moral progress allows for the explanation of the two recent expansions of morality, while providing a naturalistic account of morality that accommodates the dominance of tribalistic moralities in pre-historic societies.

Buchanan and Powell's framework has the advantage of being able to better accommodate the seeming moral development of the last two centuries in a way that is compatible with the hegemony of tribalistic moralities in the tribes of the late Pleistocene as well as in modern-day hunter-gatherers. However, their proposal is only put forward as a potential avenue for further research, not as a complete theory. The authors draw from a variety of sources to hypothesize about the selective pressures that would have favored a plastically adaptive morality over a fixed tribalistic one. One possibility is that trade and exogamy (i.e., marriage outside of one's tribe) played a bigger role than previously thought in pre-historic times, giving an

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<sup>11</sup> Buchanan and Powell, *The Evolution of Moral Progress*, 396; Henrich, *The Secrets of Our success*, 2015.

advantage to tribes that could modulate their aggression to outsiders<sup>12</sup>. A second possibility explored by the authors is that the dynamic environmental context of the late Pleistocene favored tribes that were able to modulate the inclusivity of their morality, dissolving and rebuilding certain social groups (tribes and even family) according to resource abundance.<sup>13</sup> Buchanan and Powell dismiss Peter Singer's explanation that morality is adaptive because it is based on reason, which would work independently from material evolutionary pressures. The problem with Singer's theory, according to the authors, is that it is unable to explain why morality sometimes stops progressing for large periods of time and even regresses to a more exclusive kind at times.<sup>14</sup>

The theory of moral progress presented by Allen Buchanan and Russell Powell in *The Evolution of Moral Progress* presents a novel naturalistic understanding of morality that gives an important role to the context in which it develops, rekindling interest in the role institutions play on the morality of people. Since the publication of this book in 2018, many articles have been written in response to the theory of plastic morality and Allen Buchanan has continued to publish on this subject.<sup>15</sup> This avenue of research is particularly promising at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic continues to

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<sup>12</sup> Buchanan and Powell, *The Evolution of Moral Progress*, 134

<sup>13</sup> Buchanan and Powell, *The Evolution of Moral Progress*, 134

<sup>14</sup> Buchanan and Powell, *The Evolution of Moral Progress*, 148

<sup>15</sup> Allen Buchanan, *Our Moral Fate: Evolution and the Escape from Tribalism* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2020).

exacerbate the prevalence and intensity of sickness and resource scarcity cues. Indeed, the last few months have been marked by an eruption of anti-social behaviour, ranging from individuals hoarding essential goods, to governments halting mask and vaccine exports. Beyond the economic and sanitary advantages associated with, for example, a responsible reopening of borders or a distribution of vaccines based on necessity, pursuing these policies may also prevent increases in xenophobia, selfishness, and the breakdown of social cohesion. Having witnessed the lack of international leadership and solidarity throughout the pandemic, now more than ever we must seriously consider the effect that our policies may have on the morality of citizens.

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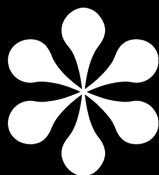
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