



SCHOOL of
GRADUATE STUDIES
EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

East Tennessee State University
Digital Commons @ East Tennessee
State University

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Student Works

5-2019

Evolving Mediums: Over the Garden Wall and the Divine Comedy

Karissa Doughty
East Tennessee State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.etsu.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Other Film and Media Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Doughty, Karissa, "Evolving Mediums: Over the Garden Wall and the Divine Comedy" (2019). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 3577. <https://dc.etsu.edu/etd/3577>

This Thesis - unrestricted is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Works at Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. For more information, please contact digilib@etsu.edu.

Evolving Mediums: *Over the Garden Wall* and the *Divine Comedy*

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Literature and Language

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in English

by

Karissa Doughty

May 2019

Dr. Joshua Reid, Chair

Dr. Michael Cody

Dr. Matthew Holtmeier

Dr. Thomas Crofts

Keywords: Dante, *Over the Garden Wall*, Appropriation, *Divine Comedy*, Beatrice

ABSTRACT

Evolving Mediums: *Over the Garden Wall* and the *Divine Comedy*

by

Karissa Doughty

Dante Alighieri's transcendental work the *Divine Comedy* is masterfully appropriated in this cartoon mini-series titled *Over the Garden Wall* in order to explore the issue of suicidal ideation and depression while contradicting Dante. Through different textual and conceptual appropriations, the show invokes the imagery of the *Divine Comedy* while creating an ending that is the complete opposite of its source text, turning Dante on his head and becoming an anti-*Divine Comedy*. The different characters of the epic poem are reimagined for these purposes, and the result is a work of art that makes the personal into the universal.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	2
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. “TEXTUAL” APPROPRIATIONS OF DANTE IN <i>OVER THE GARDEN WALL</i>	9
Edelwood and the Suicide Forest	11
Dante and Wirt	12
Beatrice	14
Representations of Suicide.....	23
Conclusion.....	25
3. CONCEPTUAL APPROPRIATIONS AND FOUNDATIONS	27
The “Encyclopedia”	27
The Shadow	31
Conclusion	39
4. CONCLUSION	40
WORKS CITED	45
VITA	47

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Technology has propelled society into a cultural evolution. Within this cultural evolution, reading a traditional, linear text is no longer the norm. Storytelling has evolved from oral and written traditions to encompass what technology has created: movies, television, and other visual arts. These new and intelligent mediums have created a new line in academia for “high-brow” and “low-brow” culture, but the divide between the two is historical. Studying the relationship between these two cultures is beneficial to understanding how we relate to one another through the power of literature and art.

Over the Garden Wall (OTGW) is one such “low-brow” cultural product that appropriates and challenges its main “high-brow” source, Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. First released on *Cartoon Network* in November of 2014, *OTGW* is an animated mini-series that contains rich literary and cultural references while confronting concepts from the *Divine Comedy*. The show makes itself unique while appropriating the *Divine Comedy* because the story seeks to challenge Dante rather than channel him simply for the love of Dante. The appropriation has a purpose, and the show transforms Dante’s concepts to become an anti-*Divine Comedy*. By remediating figures in the poem such as Dante himself and Beatrice, the show explores suicidal ideation and ends in darkness rather than light, turning Dante completely on his head.

OTGW is the powerful story of a dark journey. Two half-brothers, Greg and Wirt, find themselves lost in the middle of the woods, a place called the Unknown. While trying to find their way home, the brothers meet several lively characters, including Beatrice the bluebird, and often help those they come across in the Unknown. By the end, the boys face the mysterious

villain of the show, the Beast. His melodic voice and dark lullabies trap lost souls in the woods, turning them into trees for his forest. By confronting the Beast, Wirt completes his journey inward and saves his brother's life. It is then revealed that their adventures took place in a realm outside of their world. The Unknown served as purgatory while the brothers were drowning in a lake they had fallen into after avoiding a train on Halloween night.

Terminology became a burden while conducting this close reading of the show and the text. Originally, the show appeared to take the form of an adaptation. The definition of adaptation vs. appropriation often fluctuates depending on what field of literary criticism is studying the material. Some scholars, such as Julie Sanders, even admit that some works qualify as both. She cites *West Side Story* and *Kiss Me Kate* as adaptations and appropriations, depending from which angle a scholar analyzes the two works (37-38). However, after careful consideration, *OTGW* is an appropriation. For this context, an "appropriation frequently effects a more decisive journey away from the informing text into a wholly new cultural product and domain, often through the actions of interpolation and critique as much as through the movement from one genre to others" (Sanders 35). *OTGW* takes a very clear and decisive turn away from the *Divine Comedy*. After all, the ending of the show is the opposite of the ending for the poem. Through these actions, the show becomes a "new cultural product and domain." *OTGW* has a cult following, unlike the *Divine Comedy* which has a wider and more academic audience. Additionally, the show moves from the genre of poetry to the genre of animation.

Currently, there is no scholarship on *OTGW*. This could be due to the previously discussed line between "high-brow" and "low-brow" cultural products. Animation is not considered "high-brow," but the medium is telling a story appropriated from "high-brow" literature. This relationship could be considered yet another appropriation from Dante. After all,

Dante wrote the *Divine Comedy* in Italian, the vernacular, rather than Latin. Using the “low-brow” to tell the story of meeting God was a poetic achievement for Dante and for Italy. Charles Davis, a Dante scholar, recognizes this feat: “The poet’s achievement furnished a linguistic standard which could serve as a basis for developing cultural unity” (200). Dante’s linguistic decision merged the “high-brow” and “low-brow” brilliantly. By using the cartoon medium, *OTGW* performs this same function. The complicated themes and characters are explored through this “low-brow” medium that showcases the power of appropriation and the distillation of epic literature into vastly different genres and mediums.

While the appropriations are fascinating in their own right, their purposes and implications are even more intriguing. The show uses appropriated concepts and themes from the poem to create an “upside-down,” so to speak. Other animated Dante adaptations and appropriations have appeared to use Dante simply as a foundation for their own story. Dante serves as profound inspiration and instigates exploration, but *OTGW* is doing something completely different. Rather than use the imagery of Dante’s hell for horrific images to inspire hellish landscapes and scare the audience or use artwork to pay homage to the great artistic works the poem inspired, the show explores suicidal ideation by building on the representation of suicide that Dante created. However, the show challenges that representation. Instead of passing judgment on suicidal thoughts or depression, the show works through those thoughts and provides a positive message for viewers: suicide is not the only option, and no one has to wander the dark wood forever.

Part of reimagining Dante when exploring this difficult and dark topic involves Carl Jung and his theories of archetypes. Looking to Jung is rather appropriate considering his own love for Dante and his views on what makes literature transcendental. While referring to the *Divine*

Comedy, Jos van Meurs quotes Jung on this subject: “Whoever speaks in primordial images speaks with a thousand voices” (238). In this context, Jung’s shadow archetype allows for a thorough discussion of the show’s main villain, the Beast. The Beast is merely a shadow. The viewer sees only one flash of his true body towards the end of the series, and the rest of the time he is merely a silhouette with a haunting and melodic voice. Because of the Dante appropriations, calling the Beast a Shadow provides a deeper comprehension of the characters and the main point of the show.

OTGW is brilliant in that Dante is not the only source the show appropriates. Different animation styles pay homage to the birth of animation itself. There are various instances or lines of dialogues that invoke biblical imagery, Victorian poets, famous artwork, and even an early cartoon sequence featuring Betty Boop and Cab Calloway. By mainly appropriating Dante and then referencing these other varied sources, the show appears to think about the concept of originality and the recycling of literature. After all, a basic understanding of Joseph Campbell reveals that every story is the same with repeated tropes, archetypes, and journeys. A television show appropriating various parts of “high-brow” and “low-brow” culture does not seem to be any different than the various stories we have been consuming for almost all of human history, except for the creator seems to be aware of this fact. Instead of focusing on creating a story that does not reference previous works in an attempt to be as original as possible, the creator follows these formulas, recycles them, and creates this story of two brothers trying to escape the dark wood, the story becoming an allegory for accepting oneself and overcoming dark events such as suicide and depression.

The show appropriates Dante in two distinct fashions. There are “textual” appropriations and “conceptual” appropriations in the show. The “textual” refers to characters, events, or any

specific instances within *OTGW* that directly correlate with lines from the *Divine Comedy*. For example, Wirt and Dante's similarities would be considered textual since evidence for their correlation can be found in the lines of poetry. However, the "conceptual" refers to concepts or philosophies within the poem that are not explicitly stated, and they are remediated through *OTGW*. These different appropriations work together to invoke Dante, wrestle with his poetry, and create a cultural product that can speak to a multitude of viewers.

CHAPTER 2

“TEXTUAL” APPROPRIATIONS OF DANTE IN *OVER THE GARDEN WALL*

At once, the show begins to appropriate its source material by reimagining the dark woods in Canto 1 of the *Inferno*. The reader is plunged into a dream-like vision in Canto 1: “In the middle of the journey of our life, I came to / myself in a dark wood, for the straight way was lost” (1. 1-2). The initial fear of being lost is created for the reader, but the image is unclear and up to the reader’s imagination. The Canto continues with, “Ah, how hard a thing it is to say what that wood / was, so savage and harsh and strong that the / thought of it renews my fear” (1. 3-5). The reader is sucked into the terror of suddenly finding themselves lost in this fearful place, unsure and alone. The visualization of the text is made the responsibility of the reader, obviously. All the reader can surmise about the circumstances is contained within the textual evidence provided. The dream becomes a nightmare based on the experience of this speaker rather than the reader’s experiencing the “dark wood” objectively. The reader is operating within a mental space rather than a physical space.

Recreating that “dark wood” in the first episode of *Over the Garden Wall* reveals a different feeling. The first episode opens with an original music number against a series of images depicting characters and scenes from the series, followed by the deep voice of a narrator: “Somewhere, lost in the clouded annals of history, lies a place that few have seen, a mysterious place called the Unknown where long-forgotten stories are revealed to those who travel through the wood” (1:00-1:18). This voice-over fades as the “dark wood” is revealed, a gray and misty place broken up only by the primary colors of the outfits of Greg and Wirt emerging from the mist and walking along the path. Greg is listing off various names while holding a frog and Wirt

simply walks along and listens. Suddenly, Wirt silences his brother and says, “Wait, wait a second. Uh, Greg, where are we?” (1:31-1:42). Similar to the speaker of the *Divine Comedy*, the boys have found themselves lost in a “dark wood.” The dream-like vision is recreated here through the visuals. The woods are misty, the trees are large and gnarled, and the landscape is washed in gray. When they realize they are lost, they look around and see faces frozen in terror in the trunks of the trees, owls glaring menacingly from the branches, and black cats watching from their high roosts. The viewer is treated to an objective view of the woods before the brothers realize they are lost, and then the viewer can experience what Wirt sees as the images change to the dark and menacing rather than the gray and dull. This dual perspective is a great appropriation that provides different perspectives for the audience.

A viewer familiar with Dante can appreciate this opening of the episode and recognize the differences and similarities between the opening lines of *Inferno* and the opening of the show. Rather than occupy the mental space of the woods that Dante captured, the Dante reader now has the opportunity to see a visual representation as interpreted by another artist. They can then compare the show’s dark wood to their own and search for connections. Additionally, this opening establishes a firm connection with the source text. The very beginning of the show is the closest *OTGW* comes to adapting Dante rather than just appropriating him, and this close comparison serves as a signifier for the deviance from the source text. Now that the Dante-familiar viewer has seen Wirt’s point of view, they can better analyze the relationship between Dante and Wirt as well as the other characters.

Edelwood and the Suicide Forest

Canto XIII of the *Inferno* brings the reader to a frightening sub-circle: the place for those who have done violence to themselves. Suicidal ideation is a prevalent theme in the show, but one of the ways it most strikingly depicts this theme is through the edelwood tree. Within the very first episode of *OTGW*, the viewer sees the woodsman gathering the wood from the tree before taking it to his mill to grind into oil. This oil in turn feeds the lantern he bears. As the show progresses, the viewer learns that these trees grow from the souls of those who gave up on ever escaping the woods. They became lost and had no hope for return, creating the terrifying edelwood with carved faces of horror in the trunk, the black oil dripping like dark blood when extracted. While the edelwood trees do not speak as the forest in *Inferno*, they are remarkably similar. After Vigil suggests that Dante break a twig off one of those poisonous trees, the plant cries out in pain and explains their origin, whining, “We were men, and now we have become plants . . .” (13.37). Virgil encourages the injured plant to introduce himself, and he describes how he came to be in this world: “My spirit, at the taste of disdain, believing by / death to flee disdain, made me unjust against my just / self” (13.70-72). Through suicide, this lost soul found himself rooted with gnarled branches, bleeding should one of his branches be snapped off, the thick blood like the oil of the edelwood tree.

This appropriation lends weight to *OTGW*'s containing the theme of suicide. These closely related elements are used in the show to lead to one of the other great challenges with Dante's representations. The lost souls that give up hope of ever returning home represent suicide victims, and a key clue to this interpretation comes from the Beast himself. In the last episode titled “The Unknown,” he sings one of his haunting melodies as Greg slowly transforms into an edelwood tree, the price he pays for sacrificing himself for Wirt. If the viewer is not

paying close attention or does not have their subtitles turned on, they may miss these disturbing lines, “Hard woe and fear are easily forgotten when you submit to the soil of the earth” (00:02:58 – 00:03:16). The Beast convinces the lost souls that have turned into edelwood that this dark slumber is the answer for overcoming the “woe and fear” of the real world. The Beast is responsible for these suicides in the woods, and he relies on these trees to survive. Throughout the show, the viewer is reminded that the woodsman grinds the edelwood trees into oil to feed the lantern, keeping it lit. While the woodsman thinks he is keeping the lantern lit to save his daughter’s soul, the Beast lies. The lost and suicidal souls are his energy source.

Dante and Wirt

Viewers of *OTGW* can make connections between the main character Wirt and Dante rather quickly. Those who are familiar with artwork depicting Dante can see physical similarities between the two. Like Dante, Wirt has his own red hood, and the camera often shows side profiles of Wirt to strengthen this visual connection. Looking at the two side by side, viewers can easily begin to make comparisons. This only continues as the viewer becomes more familiar with Wirt’s personality. He is a poet himself, his first recitation a response to his brother’s offering to leave a trail of candy to help them find their way home: “Though I am lost, my wounded heart resides back home, in pieces, strewn about the graveyard of my lost love, for only” (00:01:55 – 00:02:03). He is prevented from finishing when they hear the sound of the woodsman chopping down trees.

A much stronger and more interesting connection between Dante and Wirt happens in episode four of the show titled “Songs of the Dark Lantern.” Wirt, Greg, and Beatrice the bluebird end up at a tavern hoping to obtain directions to Adelaide of the Pasture, a woman that

Beatrice has promised will help Greg and Wirt return home. While Wirt tries to ask for directions, the people of the tavern are distracted by determining who he is, meaning they want to know his role in life. The tavern keeper introduces everyone by their role in their society rather than their names. There is the baker, the butcher, the tailor, the midwife, the master and apprentice, and the highwayman. Wirt does not know who he is and is unable to respond. As he tries to ask for the way to Adelaide's, the people of the tavern insist he is the young lover, searching for his true love. After a musical number and Wirt breaking out into his own song, he finally makes them understand that he is travelling and needs directions. However, the butcher then finds another label for him: the pilgrim. He takes Wirt upon his shoulders and says, "You're a traveler on a sacred journey," while the master says, "You're a master of your own destiny," and the baker concludes with, "The hero of your own story" (00:07:14 – 00:07:20). Wirt is satisfied by this label, embracing his identity as a pilgrim.

Calling Wirt a pilgrim not only creates a more connected relationship with Dante but makes Wirt part of the class of pilgrims who have to journey into the afterlife in order to realize a kind of truth. Just as Dante compares himself to Aeneas and Paul in Canto II of the *Inferno*, Wirt could also be compared to them. Francis Fergusson says it best when he explores the analogy of the journey: "But the journey has a double movement, the literal narrative and the movement of understanding, which is always going from the make-believe of the visionary scene to the truth beneath it: to the human spirit . . ." (3). By the end of the series, Wirt gains an understanding of the Unknown as he confronts the Beast and finally escapes. Since the conflict with the Beast is a metaphor for depression and suicidal ideation, Wirt's actions revolve around finding and healing that "human spirit" in an attempt to challenge preconceived notions of

suicide that some viewers may have. Like Dante's journey, Wirt's journey is a metaphor intended for a universal audience to learn and benefit from.

Making Wirt's journey universal for today's audience requires different tools than Dante's. Perhaps the reason why Wirt is a lonely high school boy mooning over a girl (instead of an adult poet like Dante) is because that is the most recognized trope of "coming-of-age" stories. Teen movies such as *Can't Buy Me Love*, *Ten Things I Hate About You*, *The Princess Diaries*, and countless others feature the shy and quiet boy that creates art for a girl he does not feel worthy of. Our current generations are incredibly nostalgic and connect most with reminiscing on those painful moments of adolescence. Additionally, most of the audience that watched the show when it first aired were probably in high school themselves at the time. This method to reach as many people as possible not only creates that personal-to-universal path for the audience but also explains why Beatrice the bluebird is so completely opposite of her source character and why she plays a much different role.

Beatrice

In the first episode, Greg and Wirt meet a bluebird. She offers to help them, but when the woodsman surprises them and comes across as dangerous and menacing, she quickly flies away. This is the first time she abandons the brothers. In the second episode, the boys are more thoroughly introduced to her. The bird is trapped in a bush, and Greg sets her free. Because of this, she offers to do him a favor. She tells the boys that she can take them to "Adelaide of the Pasture, the Good Woman of the Woods." Wirt is immediately doubtful, but the bluebird stays with them anyway, claiming to be "honor bound" to help them since Greg freed her from the bush. She introduces herself as Beatrice, and she soon suggests to Greg that they ditch Wirt and

go to Adelaide while he goes to Pottsville, the town they saw a sign for. This is the second time she attempts to abandon one or both of the boys. When the boys wander into the barn and interrupt the harvest festival, the citizens of Pottsville are angry with the boys. Again, Beatrice tries to fly away and leave them behind to deal with the danger. When the citizens catch her, Beatrice even insists, "Let me go! I don't know these clowns!" (00:06:37 – 00:06:39). Later on, the show reveals that Adelaide wants to enslave Greg and Wirt. Beatrice planned to trade them for a pair of scissors she could use to cut her wings away to break her family's curse and become human again. However, the boys find out about her deceit because she attempts to fly ahead of them and call the deal off with Adelaide, and she offers herself as a servant instead, so she can still free her family but spare the boys. However, Wirt only sees her actions as betrayal and leaves her behind when he and Greg manage to escape.

The relationship between Beatrice and Wirt is rather complicated. To understand the intricacies of their respective character developments, a close analysis of the relationship between Dante and Beatrice and their intricacies is important. Kevin Brownlee explores this Dante and Beatrice relationship as an adaptation of Aeneas and Dido in the *Aeneid*. His study on this subject relates to their animated analogues and helps in understanding how Beatrice the bluebird is the antithesis of her source character while also recognizing some similarities. Brownlee's two strongest conclusions about the two couples informs us about *Over the Garden Wall*:

. . . Aeneas is unmoved by Dido's accusation and by her plea . . . [T]he roles are reversed and it is Dido who is unmoved by Aeneas's tearful plea . . . Dante responds to Beatrice's reproaches in *Purgatorio* 30-31 with contrition, confession and repentance. In *Paradiso*

31 Beatrice (in a final corrective Christian rewriting of Dido in the afterlife) responds favorably to Dante's words – his prayer – with her last smile in the poem. (13)

Dante the poet corrects the conflict between Aeneas and Dido when Dante the character listens to Beatrice and is receptive to her corrections of him. Beatrice in turn responds positively to Dante. However, both of these relationships are two different extremes, the pair wrought with stubbornness and the pair perfectly communicating. Since Dante is engaging with the *Aeneid* in this way, *OTGW* is also indirectly engaging with these parallels.

Rather than going the way of Aeneas or Dante, Wirt and Beatrice have a more balanced relationship. The show does not “correct” Dante and Beatrice necessarily, but they are rather an extension of the two. Wirt and Beatrice the bluebird are appropriating Dante and Beatrice, but their experiences together are more relatable for an audience of this time period. Plus, it is never clear what Beatrice’s age is, but Wirt is in high school. For him to have the same feelings towards Beatrice the bluebird that his source character has towards his Beatrice would not make sense. Their relationship is closer to friendship despite the rough beginning. Beatrice constantly tries to abandon Wirt in the beginning, but Wirt is not thrilled at the prospect of traveling with her either. He tries to dismiss her in the second episode, but Beatrice insists that the “bluebird rules” dictate that she has to travel with them until her debt is repaid. After they both decide they cannot be rid of each other, the relationship enters the next stage.

While Dante’s Beatrice is reproachful because of his betrayal of her, Wirt’s Beatrice has her own criticisms that she shares vehemently in episode three titled “Schooltown Follies.” She identifies Wirt’s character flaws and points them out without hesitation. While chastising Greg for having too much energy, she says, “Greg, don’t you want to be more like your brother? Just always doing what you’re told, just a pathetic pushover who relies on others to make all his

decisions?” (00:01:11 – 00:01:18). Beatrice’s criticism of Wirt is vital because these flaws contribute to the situation the boys find themselves in at the end of the show. Wirt constantly blames his brother for everything that goes wrong. He blames Greg for being lost in the first place, blames him for their not being able to go back home, and Wirt eventually gives up and loses his faith, causing Greg to sacrifice himself to the Beast so that Wirt can go home. Wirt’s inability to make his own decisions or do anything unless he is instructed to do so instigates the entire situation. As Dante’s Beatrice and as Dido, Wirt’s Beatrice performs the function of a moral guide, attempting to address Wirt’s flaws and help him grow.

However, Wirt does not respond well to Beatrice when she addresses those flaws. In retaliation, Wirt decides to take Beatrice’s criticisms literally. As the boys walk along, they happen upon a school for animals, where the teacher Ms. Langtree is hoping to teach these animals how to count and spell. When Wirt approaches the entrance, Ms. Langtree assumes he is a student and tells him to take a seat. Beatrice tries to extract Wirt from the situation, but he defies her and takes his seat, referencing the flaws Beatrice pointed out so easily a few moments before. The majority of the episode consists of the two of them at odds. Wirt continues to attend the school, doing everything he is told despite Beatrice’s asking him to cease. Instead of trying to prove her wrong, Wirt does everything in his power to be stubborn and over-exaggerate his qualities. Beatrice is frustrated, but as she fights him on this issue, her attitude changes.

By the end of the episode, there is a quiet resolution. Instead of fighting against Wirt and rushing Greg, Beatrice softens. Greg hosts a concert of the school animals, singing a song he created earlier in the episode. When Wirt asks Beatrice if he should tell Greg it is time to go, she says, “Nah, let him have his fun” (00:10:58 – 00:11:00). They do not verbally apologize or discuss the way they behaved towards each other. Beatrice simply accepts the boys for who they

are. The viewer can see that she is beginning to care for them when she follows up by telling Wirt to tie his shoe in almost a motherly way. Even though Wirt is still doing as he is told, the dynamic has changed. They have come to a wordless understanding with each other.

Wirt and Beatrice are responding to Dante and Beatrice as Dante responded to the *Aeneid*. As Brownlee states in his article, Beatrice is a “correction” of Dido. Thinking about these relationships in those terms, Wirt and Beatrice are not a correction but a more realistic representation that would be more relatable for a modern audience. Wirt’s Beatrice scolds him for his personality, but this backfires as he continually defies her throughout the episode. They do not communicate about this issue, though. While there is a shift in how they feel about each other, Wirt still does as he is told when she tells him to tie his shoe. She accepts this as part of his personality instead of encouraging him to change for the better. Wirt has to make these developments and realizations on his own when his brother’s life is at stake in the final episode. This is perhaps Beatrice’s greatest deviation from her source character. She is not the reason that Wirt becomes his best self. She helps Wirt, but he ultimately is responsible for his own salvation.

Another crucial difference between Dante’s Beatrice and Beatrice the bluebird is their role as romantic figures. As the later episodes explain, Wirt has a crush on a girl named Sara. She is the mascot for his high school, and the events that transpire in the Unknown happen because of his actions towards Sara on Halloween night. Wirt attempts to give Sara a tape he has made for her. He has recorded himself playing clarinet and reciting poetry for her. At the school football game, he watches her from the other side of the chain-link fence. Greg approaches and asks about the tape in his normal, sweet way. When Greg tries to give the tape to Sara, thinking he is being helpful, Wirt’s friends approach and they receive the tape instead. Wirt’s feelings are revealed even though Greg was just trying to be helpful. Wirt tries to get the tape back, following

Sara to a party where they speak very briefly, and she is invited out to the graveyard with her friends. Wirt and Greg follow them there, but a police officer having fun scares the children out of the graveyard. Wirt and Greg end up over the wall of the cemetery (named the Eternal Garden, thus they are literally going over the garden wall), where they avoid an oncoming train by jumping the tracks, resulting in their drowning in a lake and traveling into the Unknown.

Beatrice the bluebird is thus deprived of a central attribute her source character possesses. She is not the object of Wirt's affections, not his true love. When Dante sees Beatrice in Canto XXX of *Purgatorio*, his love for her is undeniable and powerful:

I have sometimes seen, at the beginning of the
day, the eastern sky all rosy, and the rest adorned
with cloudless blue,
and the face of the sun rising shadowed, so that
by the tempering of vapors the eye endured it for a long while:
so, within a cloud of flowers that from the
hands of the angels was rising and falling back
within and without . . .

And my spirit, which already for so long a time
had not known in her presence the awe that
overcame it with trembling . . .

. . . felt the great force of ancient love.

As soon as my sight was struck by that high
power that had transfixed me before I was out of
boyhood,

I turned to the left . . .
to say to Virgil: “Less than a dram of blood is left
me that is not trembling: I recognize the signs of
the ancient flame!” (22-48)

This level of devotion and love is not common in a teenager such as Wirt. For Wirt to feel this way about anyone, but especially Beatrice the bluebird, would not be believable or relatable. In order to resolve this issue and make Wirt’s journey a metaphor that the audience could connect to, Beatrice had to be appropriated differently. The show appropriates her by using her name, but they completely recreate and divide that Beatrice. This “ancient love” that Dante feels for Beatrice is then redirected to Wirt’s love for Sara.

Wirt’s previously mentioned first recitation of poetry is in reference to Sara. At first, those lines do not appear to make sense: “Though I am lost, my wounded heart resides back home, in pieces, strewn about the graveyard of my lost love, for only” (00:01:55 – 00:02:03). After finishing the entire show, the viewer then understands that this poetry is for Sara. This “graveyard of my lost love” refers to the graveyard he was in with Sara as he tried to retrieve the tape he had made for her. However, Wirt is convinced that she does not have feelings for him and instead wants to be with someone he claims to be the “total package,” Jason Funderberker (which funnily enough is the name Greg decides is perfect for his frog in the last episode). When this love is put in terms of a high school crush, the viewers can find their own high school crushes in Sara.

Perhaps the most surprising and critical difference between Beatrice and Beatrice the bluebird is the way the show flips Dante’s Beatrice. In the poem, Beatrice scolds Dante for

betraying her. In Canto XXX, she has quite a grievance with his behavior after her death. She remarks on all the potential Dante had, but then details her disappointment in him:

For a time I sustained him with my
countenance: showing him my youthful eyes, I led
him with me, turned in the right direction.

When I was on the threshold of my second age
and changed lives, he took himself from me and
gave himself to another:

when I had risen from flesh to spirit, and beauty
and power had increased in me, I was to him less
dear and less pleasing,

and he turned his steps along a way not true,
following false images of good, which keep no
promise fully . . .

He fell so low that all means for his salvation
had already fallen short, except to show him the
lost people.

For this I visited the threshold of the dead, and
to the one who has guided him up here, my
prayers, weeping, were carried. (121-141)

Beatrice is forthcoming and blunt about her displeasure with Dante, just as Beatrice the bluebird is with Wirt. However, Dante's Beatrice shows an active effort in bringing Dante to salvation. Her "prayers, weeping, were carried" by Dante's guide so that he may see "the lost people" and

reach that salvation. Even though he betrayed her, “gave himself to another,” Beatrice puts forth this effort to guide him and help him. This is nothing like Beatrice the bluebird, who not only attempts to abandon the boys on multiple occasions but originally planned to betray them for her own purposes. Sara is ultimately the reason Wirt and Greg end up in the Unknown, but not by any direct action of her own. Additionally, neither of these female characters bring Wirt to “salvation.”

This re-writing of Dante’s Beatrice contributes to the overall message explored in a later section: the theme of depression and suicide. If Beatrice stayed truer to her source character, the conclusion would not be as powerful. When someone experiences depression or suicidal thoughts, their support system is vital to their surviving those dark times, but they have to decide for themselves to leave the “dark wood” behind. They have to make the decision to ignore the Beast. If Sara or Beatrice were Wirt’s “salvation,” the point of the show would be null and void. No one should feel responsible for another person’s life in this context. This is one of the major ways the show challenges Dante while appropriating his material. A divine being such as Beatrice may be capable of visiting “the threshold of the dead” for Dante’s salvation, but, in reality, a regular human cannot. Thus, Beatrice’s role is split in two. The romantic partner is left behind in the physical world instead of guiding Wirt through his journey. Furthermore, instead of a guide, he receives a reproachful companion in Beatrice the bluebird. She aids in his success, but only when Wirt is willing to be successful himself.

Throughout the *Divine Comedy*, Dante travels through the realms at the behest of his guides. He follows rather than leads. In *OTGW*, Wirt does not have the benefit of a guide to take him through the Unknown and help him find his way home. Because of Beatrice’s various attempts at abandoning the boys and her intended betrayal, she becomes an anti-guide. Greg

would also not qualify as a guide. He has a happy-go-lucky attitude, resulting in a fearless and naïve reaction to every danger they encounter. Even the Latin origin of Greg's name means "flock," insinuating that he cannot guide or lead. Wirt must be the one to navigate their adventures, find their path home, and discover the Beast's lies. Beatrice's role allows for this leadership to manifest within Wirt. Making Beatrice the anti-guide is necessary to explore the themes of suicide and depression and to convey the message that one has to make the decision to seek help for oneself.

Representations of Suicide

The representation of suicide is complicated in Dante's poem. While *Inferno* shows the brutal and violent fate of the souls who ended their own lives, there is another instance of suicide in *Purgatorio* that is viewed differently. The first representation is the traditional Christian understanding of suicide. Those who commit violence against their bodies are doomed to hell, pain, and torture. However, there are other famous figures who have committed suicide throughout the *Divine Comedy*, and they are not in the suicide forest of Canto XIII but assigned different levels depending on their situation. The most surprising instance of this occurs in *Purgatorio* when Dante meets Marcus Porcius Cato. John A. Scott is also fascinated by these seemingly contradictory representations. Scott introduces Cato as an "idealized figure" that opposed Caesar and "the Stoic defender of the Roman Republic who committed suicide at Utica" (69). The reader is shocked to see Cato in the role Dante has given him. As Scott points out later, Cato has a "triple handicap as a candidate for salvation [:] . . . he had committed suicide; he was a pagan; and he was an implacable opponent of Julius Caesar . . . -" (69). However, his suicide is considered virtuous, almost martyr-like, rather than the sin the reader has seen such harsh

punishment for. Scott continues speaking about this elevation of the suicide, naming it an act of “*bonum honestum*,” a concept referring to virtues or virtuous work.

Cato’s position in Purgatory has caused many readers to question Dante’s decision in this. In his translation of *Purgatorio*, Robert Durling goes into depth about Dante’s view on Cato in the *Convivio* and the *Monarchia*. As John A. Scott pointed out, Durling says that Cato’s appearance is challenging because he is “an apparent pagan, a suicide, and an enemy of Caesar, founder of the Empire” (591). Durling also points out that in the *Monarchia*, “Dante makes Cato not only the ‘stern guardian’ of liberty, but praises his suicide as an *inenarrabile sacrificium* [ineffable sacrifice] for the common good . . .” (591). Dante’s stance on this matter calls into question the definition of sacrifice and whether or not it can be considered suicide. However, his granting Cato the position of guardian of Purgatory and thus revealing him capable of salvation despite that crime implies that this act of suicide is also an act of virtue. Whether or not that was his intention, the interpretation is there for the reader to make, and that interpretation is addressed in *OTGW*.

Determining that some suicides are virtuous depending on the causes would be considered highly inappropriate in today’s rhetoric, especially considering how much effort is put into preventing suicide through various programs, mental health outreach, public service announcements, and popular culture. However, the “virtuous suicide” is appropriated in *OTGW* and presents a problem. While some viewers would focus on Wirt’s recognition of the Beast’s lies (the metaphor being that suicide is not the only option), there is potential for viewers to receive the wrong message from Greg’s act of sacrifice. If the process of becoming an edelwood tree is a metaphor for the act of suicide, then Greg’s offering to take Wirt’s place is a sacrificial type of suicide, making Greg a martyr. What reinforces this interpretation is the way Greg is

positioned in the tree growing around him in the last episode. His arms are outstretched as if on a cross, reminiscent of Jesus and his act of martyrdom in Christianity. Greg becomes a Christ-like figure, sacrificing himself for his brother, trapped in this situation because of his brother's "sins." A viewer could possibly interpret suicide as an act of virtue depending on why the viewer is experiencing suicidal ideation. Again, Dante's intentions are not necessarily relevant here. What is relevant is that the way *OTGW* presents Greg's act is not vague or subtle. The edelwood tree can be interpreted as a symbolic act of suicide because of the appropriation of Canto XIII of *Inferno*. If Greg is becoming an edelwood, he is symbolically committing suicide for his brother. The viewer's/reader's opinion on this matter involves their own moral considerations, but this is how the appropriation and symbolism are working in this particular scene.

Conclusion

These major textual appropriations are significant because they directly challenge the source material. Dante and Wirt are both pilgrim poets, but they direct their worshipful love to different sources, and they come to terms with their "sins" in drastically different ways. Beatrice, the ever-complicated divine figure, meets her antithesis in Beatrice of *OTGW*. They are both guides and reproachful of their Dante, but the Beatrice of the poem is Dante's salvation, an impossibility for the Beatrice of the show. Suicide and virtuous suicide are both appropriated in the show, but they have different implications for the modern viewer. These appropriations allow the viewer to see a correlation between more subtle and abstract concepts and philosophies that both the show and the poem explore. Additionally, the show uses the Dante appropriations to provide a foundation for other concepts, allowing the show to rise above the Dante appropriation status into that wholly new cultural product that engages with society and the audience. Moving

from these “textual” appropriations that refer to specific events or elements, we can now begin to understand and apply the “conceptual” appropriations.

CHAPTER 3
CONCEPTUAL APPROPRIATIONS AND FOUNDATIONS

Dante is of course known for his use of allegory, and *OTGW* does not shy away from this. The show encompasses several themes, metaphors, and motifs that are lifted by the foundational Dante appropriations. These shared elements elevate *OTGW*, so the show can achieve the same personal-to-universal goal that Dante himself achieved with the *Divine Comedy*.

The “Encyclopedia”

Giuseppe Mazzotta begins his Yale open course series *Reading Dante* with a thorough introduction and explanation of the “circularity” of the *Divine Comedy*:

Perhaps the best term for it is *encyclopedia*, a word that means a “circle of knowledge,” representing a classical idea that derives from Vitruvius, who wrote of the genre. This idea of circularity is crucial, in the sense that to know something you have to have a point of departure, from which you will pass through all the various disciplines of the liberal arts, only to arrive right back where you started. The beginning and the ending in a liberal education must coincide, but you will find out things along the way that allow you to see with a different viewpoint or perspective. (1)

The importance of circles in the *Divine Comedy* is obvious in that each level Dante visits is a circle, but in this respect, the meaning goes a little deeper. The best examples of this “circle of knowledge” happens as Dante traverses the different realms. When he grabs hold of Satan’s *villi culi* (rough and shaggy buttock hairs), the direction changes from climbing down to climbing up.

The orientation completely flips. Again, Dante and Virgil are at the beginning, but they have a “point of departure” to refer to. The first canto of *Purgatorio* accomplishes this perspective.

While this is a new beginning for the pilgrim poet, he is also able to recognize what he learned in Hell: “To run through better waters the little ship of / my wit now hoists its sails, leaving behind it a sea / so cruel” (1-3). Everything is circling back again and *Purgatorio* will continue to parallel with *Inferno*, but there will be “a different viewpoint or perspective.”

We often use colloquial phrases such as “did a 180” to describe the change in another person’s behaviors, outlooks, or opinions, a direct reference to the degrees in a circle. This kind of relationship between the human personality and the circle may come from this concept of the “circle of knowledge,” but this concept and the human connection with circles both help the viewer to understand the opening title sequence in the first episode of *OTGW* and the end sequence in the final episode. However, for the sake of brevity, only some of these images are important to analyze.

The first image of the title sequence is Greg’s frog playing a piano as the piano circles and closes in on the camera. After hitting a solitary note on the piano, the next image appears and depicts a young girl in a blue dress with her dog while sitting outside among autumn-colored leaves and trees. The viewer later learns that this is Beatrice in human form. This is withheld until the closing sequence, the only other time the viewer has a glimpse of this young girl. The move from this initial image of Beatrice to the final image demonstrates her development and the passing of time. In the final image, Beatrice is inside, gazing out a window into a snowstorm while her dog sits next to her. They turn at the sound of her mother’s voice and her family teasing her about their time as bluebirds because of her actions. While the images are similar and

mark the “point of departure,” Beatrice has a different perspective and has changed a lot through the course of the show.

The next image in the opening sequence shows a black cat driving a cart load of pumpkins pulled by two turkeys. This image is especially intriguing because of how the black cat and the turkeys relate to the events of the show and what its parallel image in the closing sequence implies. In the second episode titled “Hard Times at the Huskin’ Bee,” Greg and Wirt enter Pottsville, Wirt determined to find a phone or some other way to get home. Pottsville at first seems abandoned. Wirt opens the door and a turkey looks up without any discernible expression or emotion before dropping its head once more when Wirt leaves. They soon discover that the citizens of Pottsville are gathered in the barn around a maypole to celebrate the harvest. When they begin to question the citizens on how to leave, Enoch, the leader of Pottsville, reveals himself to be the maypole with a giant pumpkin head. In the parallel image, the black cat is pictured again, this time emerging from the pumpkin head of Enoch. This implies that the cat was Enoch all along. The significance of this is unclear, but it marks the changing of perspective that Mazzotta’s “encyclopedia” definition describes.

The next most important parallel concerns Greg. In the opening sequence, the viewer sees Greg’s hands remove a rock with a face painted on it from underneath a bush. Throughout the show, Greg will sometimes speak a “truth” and confirm as such by following up with, “That’s a rock fact!” while waving the rock in the air. In the final episode, Greg admits to Wirt that he stole the rock from their neighbor’s garden. He feels guilty for this and asks Wirt to return it for him. Of course, Wirt tells Greg he can return it himself. In the final shot of the series, Greg does return that rock himself, repenting for probably the only “sin” he commits.

The woodsman is one of the most mysterious aspects of *OTGW*. His name is never revealed. Even the Beast calls him “woodsman” rather than a name. He is the next character the boys meet after their brief initial run-in with Beatrice the bluebird. In the opening sequence, the woodsman can be seen chopping wood while a young girl stands at a well, looking out into the scenery at an object not in view of the camera. The viewer learns through the episodes that the Beast uses the woodsman’s daughter (the girl in the opening sequence) to bend the woodsman to his will. The Beast lies and claims that the daughter’s spirit is within the flame of the lantern and the only way to keep her alive is to keep that lantern lit from the oil of the edelwood tree. In this image’s parallel, the woodsman has returned home after extinguishing the lantern, amazed to see his daughter alive and well. This parallel significantly marks the changes the woodsman experienced and how his perspective altered. The woodsman wandered the woods for an undisclosed amount of time, bearing the lantern as his burden. Since wandering the dark wood is considered an allusion to depression, emerging from the state and letting go of the Beast is a formidable task. His perspective at realizing the Beast’s lies was not just changed but completely overthrown. The phrase “did a 180” would be most appropriate here.

Complying to the “circle of knowledge,” the opening and ending title sequences are closely related. They are almost the same, but the ending sequence reflects on the changes that happened as Greg and Wirt traveled through the Unknown. There is a clear “point of departure” in the opening, and the characters clearly “arrive back where they started.” As Mazzotta explains, this “circle of knowledge” has a beginning and end that coincide, yet there are crucial changes that provide a different viewpoint or perspective. Just as Dante accomplishes this in the *Divine Comedy*, *OTGW* completes the same task. This concept is best exemplified within Wirt. He had to learn to take responsibility for his actions, and he had to learn how to navigate those

dark woods. As the ending of the show proves, he did come out of this experience with a different perspective. When he wakes up in the hospital, the first thing he wants to know is if Greg is all right. Before, he would never take responsibility for his brother, and he always blamed his woes on Greg. After he is sure Greg is alive and well, he is able to talk to Sara about his feelings for her and finally feels comfortable taking charge rather than moping in his room creating sad poems and clarinet compositions. He wants to move on with life now that he has met the darkness. Greg continues to be the same: happy, fearless, and innocent.

The Shadow

Giuseppe Mazzotta has another great summation of the *Divine Comedy*: “The *Comedy* is the story of nothing less than seeing God face to face and coming back to tell the tale. Seeing God, being overwhelmed and dazzled by God, places the text squarely in a tradition of visionary literature . . . ” (1). In the poem, meeting God is represented by the light that Dante sees in Canto 33 of *Paradiso*. The pilgrim’s journey ends with this vision:

I remember that therefore I became bolder to
endure it, so much that I joined my gaze with the
infinite Worth.

Oh overflowing grace whence I presumed to
probe with my eyes the eternal Light, so deeply
that I fulfilled all my seeing there!

In its depths I saw internalized, bound with
love in one volume, what through the universe
becomes unsewn quires. . . .

. . . Thus my mind, entirely lifted up, gazed fixedly,
immobile and intent, and became ever more
aflame to gaze.

In that Light one becomes such that it is
impossible ever to consent to turn away from it
toward any other sight. . . . (*Paradiso* 33.79-102)

Wirt, however, does not experience this same incredible ending to his journey. In the final episode “The Unknown,” he rushes through the ice and snow to save his brother from the Beast. He does encounter a light that he uses to find his brother: the fallen lantern from the woodsman lying in the snow. He takes the lantern and finds Greg in the process of becoming an edelwood, the branches growing around him and thick, black oil beginning to drip from the tips. Wirt plans to free Greg and use the lantern to guide them home, but this is the moment *OTGW* turns Dante on his head.

As Wirt frantically tries to pull the branches apart and free his brother, the woodsman falls near them, the Beast looming over him. The camera zooms in on the Beast’s glowing eyes, and he addresses Wirt with a demand: “Give me my lantern” (00:05:57 – 00:05:59). This confuses Wirt, but Beatrice intervenes, “No way, we need this thing” (00:05:59 – 00:06:00). Wirt quickly agrees with her, insisting that he will use the lantern to take them home. The Beast insists that Greg is too weak to return, and he will become part of the Beast’s forest. When Wirt refuses to let this happen, the Beast raises his hands and says, “Well then, perhaps we better make a deal” (00:06:10 – 00:06:14). This is the climax of the show, the moment when the Beast offers to put Greg’s soul in the lantern, the moment he gives Wirt the false dilemma: “Take on the task of lantern bearer or watch your brother perish” (00:06:23 – 00:06:29). For just a

moment, Wirt believes the Beast. He approaches him, ready to offer the lantern and take the deal. Then, the soft sound of a ringing bell coincides with an expression of realization on Wirt's face. He finally understands that this is a lie. The Beast lied not only to him but to the woodsman. No one's soul was ever put into the lantern. The only reason the Beast wants the lantern to stay lit from the oil of the edelwood trees is because the lantern is the only thing that keeps the Beast alive.

Wirt makes this connection and confronts the Beast with the truth. The Beast shakes uncontrollably, and multiple images of him are superimposed on one another. The ring of light the lantern casts quickly retreats into the lantern, bathing the scene in darkness as the viewer only sees a close-up of Wirt's face, the Beast not shown on screen as he asks Wirt in a deep voice, "Are you ready to see true darkness?" (00:07:00 – 00:07:03). Wirt challenges him by threatening to extinguish the lantern. When he does this, the circle of light appears again as the Beast weakens, holding out his hand and begging Wirt not to do it. The truth is revealed to the woodsman, and he finally understands that his daughter's spirit was never in the lantern. As Wirt gives the lantern back to the woodsman and breaks Greg free from the edelwood tree, the characters come to their journey's end. Wirt will not use the lantern to find their way home. Wirt, Greg, Beatrice, and Greg's frog leave the clarity of the light, disappearing into the darkness beyond this confrontation to go home. Then, darkness completely envelops the scene as the woodsman puts an end to it all, blowing out the lantern and destroying the Beast. After the screen goes black, the viewer hears Beatrice and Wirt bid each other farewell, and then Wirt awakens in the lake. He grabs his brother and pulls them from the water, preventing them from drowning. The journey has ended, and they have come home.

This final confrontation challenges Dante in a most brilliant way. The Light represents God in the *Divine Comedy*, and this Light is Dante's salvation. Even though the vision ends, his journey is completed and finished by the vision of Light. For Wirt, his journey is completed by the vision of darkness, the complete opposite. Only by extinguishing the lantern can Wirt and company truly defeat the Beast; the light is not salvation. This incredible alternative to the end of Dante's journey conveys the most important message of the show: suicide is not the only option. To understand how the show accomplishes this feat in just these few minutes, we must rely on Carl Jung and his theory of the archetype of the shadow. Only by analyzing and labelling the Beast can we comprehend what Wirt experiences in these final moments of the show and reach the conclusion that this ending is a metaphor for resisting suicide.

Carl Jung thoroughly addresses the Shadow in *Aion*, the second part of volume nine in his collected works. He describes the Shadow as being one of those archetypes that has "the most frequent and the most disturbing influence on the ego" (8). He continues to explain that the Shadow is "the easiest to experience . . . for its nature can in large measure be inferred from the contents of the personal unconscious" (8). The Shadow consists of all the flaws we attempt to deny exist, making projections of the darkest sides of our personalities. These projections create a unique Shadow for everyone, a foe to be vanquished in the quest for self-acceptance. Jung writes that "with insight and good will, the shadow can to some extent be assimilated into the conscious personality . . ." (9). In order for the figures created by self-denial to be defeated, a manner of assimilation or acceptance must occur. To even recognize the Shadow in the first place takes "considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance" (8). Throughout

most of *OTGW*, Wirt is constantly at war with his own personality. He tries to repress or hide the flaws that contribute to his peril. An excellent example would be the previously discussed episode “Schooltown Follies,” when Wirt and Beatrice are at odds with each other over Wirt’s being a “pushover.” Instead of refuting her in a more effective manner, he only proves her point by taking on a more extreme version of this flaw. By doing everything that is commanded of him, Wirt thinks that he is negating the unfortunate fact that he is only capable of doing what he is told. Even after this act, Beatrice’s point is solidified when she tells Wirt to tie his shoe, and he does this without question, defiance, or any recognition of his blind obedience. Beatrice accepts this flaw in Wirt, but he cannot accept this flaw within himself. He remains unaware, thinking his exaggerated efforts through most of the episode made him the winner of the disagreement.

This continued denial escalates into Greg’s “virtuous suicide.” Wirt comes to terms with the parts of himself he has tried so fiercely to deny only when he has no choice but to do so in order to save his brother’s life. When he first finds Greg wrapped in the growing branches of the edelwood, Wirt finally takes the first step and admits his faults. Instead of blaming his brother for their misfortune, he acknowledges his part while addressing his brother: “No, no, Greg. It’s my fault we ended up here. Everything’s been my fault” (00:05:00 – 00:05:06). Taking ownership allows Wirt to confront the Beast. When the Beast gives Wirt the false dilemma, Wirt at first agrees to it, that “pushover” side of his personality guiding his actions. Without much question or any sort of challenge, he is ready to accept his fate. Then, that ringing of the bell occurs and Wirt can no longer be pushed over. He challenges the Beast and says, “Wait, that’s dumb” (00:06:38 – 00:06:41). The Beast expresses his shock at this, but Wirt continues, “That’s dumb. I’m not just gonna wander around in the woods for the rest of my life” (00:06:42 – 00:06:46). This is when the viewer can see the merging and self-acceptance within Wirt. There

are still elements of his “pushover” behaviors. When the Beast asks him if he is ready to see “true darkness,” Wirt attempts to ask him, “Are you?” The first time he tries, his voice is weak, and he has to clear his throat before asking again in a more confident voice. Wirt has accepted himself in this instance. He is not suddenly a brave warrior than can no longer be pushed around, nor will he suddenly cease his obedient behaviors. However, he has accepted that part of himself as he stands up to the Beast anyway. Accepting his responsibilities and accepting the flaw Beatrice so candidly pointed out previously allows Wirt to reveal the Beast for what he truly is, a simple projection that can be disintegrated.

The Beast’s different qualities and characteristics support this interpretation of him as the Shadow. First, he is quite literally a shadow. Until the woodsman flashes the lantern light upon him for just a brief second, the Beast is nothing but a silhouette. Secondly, his only goal is to continually find lost souls to add to his forest of edelwood trees. The Beast stops at nothing to obtain the oil that must feed the lantern. His obsession with keeping the lantern lit could be explained by Jung’s description of the Shadow’s emotional behaviors: “Closer examination of the dark characteristics . . . reveals that they have an *emotional* nature, a kind of autonomy, and accordingly an obsessive or, better, possessive quality” (8). When the Beast appears before Greg and Wirt in the end, the first thing he says to Wirt is “Give me my lantern” (00:05:57 – 00:05:59). At this moment, the Beast claims ownership of the lantern, the first hint that only his spirit resides in the flames. His reliance on the light in order to survive is another symbolic way to hint at his true nature. Shadows cannot exist without light. Naturally, the Beast as Shadow cannot exist without the light of the lantern, hence his “obsessive” and “possessive” nature when it comes to the lantern.

Furthermore, if the Beast is the Shadow acting as a projection, then the subjects projecting the Beast fall under Jung's descriptions of those who cannot come to terms with their projections. Wirt is the greatest example of this. As Jung describes this person, "It is often tragic to see how blatantly a man bungles his own life and the lives of others yet remains totally incapable of seeing how much the whole tragedy originates in himself, and how he continually feeds it and keeps it going" (10). Wirt's own self-denial and refusal to take responsibility for his actions lead to the ending catastrophe. Taking ownership of his faults resolves the conflict. Every character's owning their own wrongdoings and problems leads to the Beast's defeat. When Wirt reveals the Beast for what he is, he hands the lantern to the woodsman, saying, "I got my own problems to take care of. This one's yours. My brother and I are going home" (00:07:22 – 00:07:26). Wirt has taken on his own conflicts and has given the woodsman power over his own. Immediately following, Wirt asks Beatrice to go with him, and she says she cannot. She has to go home to her family and admit that she is the reason they are all bluebirds. When she finally accepts the consequences for her actions instead of trying to sell children off in exchange for magical scissors, Wirt reveals that he took the scissors when they left Adelaide's and he rewards her with them. Before the Beast arrived, Greg admitted to his only "sin" in the show, stealing the rock from their neighbor's garden. All these characters are capable of recognizing the tragedy within themselves and resolving those tragedies, and this is how the Beast is finally defeated.

The Beast is the Shadow archetype, and he obtains this status by a crucial measure. This is not always the case, but the devil is a common form for the Shadow archetype to occupy. In *The Symbolic Quest*, Edward Whitmont explores the various aspects of analytical psychology, including in-depth discussions of the archetypes. When writing about the Shadow, he describes the projections of the Shadow:

The shadow is projected in two forms: individually, in the shape of the people to whom we ascribe all the evil; and collectively, in its most general form, as the Enemy, the personification of evil. Its mythological representations are the devil, archenemy, tempter, fiend or double; or the dark or evil one of a pair of brothers or sisters. (163)

The Beast represents the devil in a variety of ways, mostly importantly through Dante appropriation. In Canto XXXIII of the *Inferno*, Dante and Virgil come to the deepest layer of Hell, a frozen place where Satan is a monstrous beast caught in a layer of ice, similar to the Beast's centering in a cold, frozen landscape that Wirt has to travel through to reach Greg. There are other various characteristics of the Beast that make him a representation of Satan. His antlers are versions of the devil's horns. He also offers deals to his victims, and the currency he uses for those deals are souls. These are all devilish qualities. The most convincing connection is found in an interview conducted with the creator of the show, Patrick McHale. When asked which character was the hardest to create, McHale says it was the Beast. He says, "Early on, he was just the devil himself," but the Beast kept changing before they finally settled on this devil-like persona, this Shadow. Wrapped in this symbolism and appropriation, the Beast is Satan.

Instead of meeting God face-to-face and returning to tell the tale, Wirt meets Satan and overcomes him. When he returns, Greg is the one dancing around the hospital room with his frog while telling Wirt's friends about their adventures in the Unknown. Wirt learns the greatest knowledge, self-knowledge, as he chooses no longer to wander the dark wood, not to "submit to the soil of the earth."

Conclusion

OTGW is a unique creation because of the concepts it appropriates and how those appropriations wrestle with the source text. These choices appear deliberate and calculated. Unlike other Dante adaptations/appropriations, the show does not want to perpetuate concepts from the *Divine Comedy* but repurpose them, recycle them. The self-acceptance of the dark qualities in the structure of the Shadow archetype conflicts with the divine ending of the *Divine Comedy*, perhaps conflicting with Christian ideology. Jung works so well in this context to dissect these issues because the show is dissecting its source. Furthermore, when the show acts in this way, that glaring issue of depression is highlighted. Just as Wirt insists, it is “dumb” to wander around the woods for the rest of our lives. By taking responsibility and accepting the existence of this Shadow, Wirt is able to make the conscious decision to leave the woods. Translated, the viewers have to accept their darkness and make the decision to seek help. These elements work together to demonstrate that salvation is within oneself, not within the guidance of a divine figure, or by the guiding lantern of a higher being, but within the difficult yet simple effort of self-acceptance.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Personally, I believe one of the strongest attributes of *OTGW* that echoes Dante more than any of its other appropriations is its relatability to the viewer. Just as Dante strove to make the personal universal, Patrick McHale created a show in which almost any viewer could find something to hold dear. When asked about the various references in the show, McHale often gives vague answers. He does not want to reveal what influenced him, and he does not want to tell viewers what he intended. In an interview with *The Dot and Line*, McHale was asked if there were any symbols that fans had picked up on that he did not intend. His answer, while vague, is helpful in understanding his intentions for the show:

Almost everything fans have picked up on was something that we considered while making the show. We considered a LOT of things, and layered in a lot of things. We often purposefully kept things vague, because I wanted people to be able to interpret things in more than one way.

Perhaps the “anxiety of influence” keeps McHale from revealing his secrets, but it is more likely that he wanted to create a piece of art that Jung would approve of, art that could project the “primordial images” that would allow him to “speak with a thousand voices.”

This interpretation becomes more likely after reviewing an interview with McHale conducted by Stephen Kozeniewski. Following several questions about McHale’s interests and influences, Kozeniewski offers McHale his interpretation of the “Unknown” before asking if his interpretation is correct. McHale’s answer is borderline poetic:

But maybe it's not only about life and death, maybe it's also about reality versus fantasy, and about dreams versus wakefulness. The Unknown is literally the unknown. There are stories that were once told, and are gone forever. Words that have been spoken and forgotten. Ideas that have been thought, but lost. And there's plenty of stuff mankind has never thought of, and will never think of. The Unknown is all that stuff. If there is more to the universe than what humans can perceive (and of course there is) then maybe everything that can ever be conceived is floating around somewhere unseen and unknown in some abstract way. So maybe Wirt and Greg get a glimpse of it, and make sense of these abstract concepts the best way they can understand it (goofy cartoon stories). Or maybe Wirt and Greg, and everyone else in the show, are just some made up characters used to express some ideas that would have otherwise disappeared. Maybe everything on TV is a lie. Maybe all of your memories are lies. Maybe everything you perceive is a lie. But you have to believe in something, right?

His response reveals his intentions for the show so beautifully, but this answer also helps explain why such a dark and haunting story was told through a cartoon. Animation is perhaps the best if not the only way to capture these various abstractions and portray the Unknown in a way that allows viewers to make their own interpretations. The art allowed McHale to portray these intricate characters without losing that ability to touch a large audience. His answer here encapsulates Dante's final call to the Light:

O highest Light that rise so far beyond our
mortal thought, lend again to my memory a little
of how you appeared,
and make my tongue so powerful that it may

leave a single spark of your glory to the people
yet to be,
for, if it comes back somewhat to my memory
and resounds a little these verses, more will be
conceived of your victory. (33.67-75)

McHale's answer is just an elaboration of Dante's final wish: to reach out to the multitude and speak of something glorious, intangible, and significantly human. The purpose of the show is to touch that human spirit and relate a journey that we all experience.

Our society evolves faster than we can comprehend. The changes of the past two hundred years have been especially hard for civilization to adjust to. Writing about Dante and the way artists interpret him now only causes further thought and consideration for the general human spirit. If one takes to Carl Jung's ideologies and believes everyone is connected through that unconscious well of imagery and experience, considering the collective human soul that creates and consumes this art comes naturally. Humans have achieved great feats, but one cannot help but wonder what are the costs of those feats? One of the minor points of this entire project is welcoming and embracing the cultural evolutions, but are we mindful of our souls?

Over the Garden Wall was introduced to me by a friend who could never stop talking about how much he loves the show. After we watched it, he told me that he had been considering suicide when the show aired. When he saw Wirt confront the Beast and understand the false dilemma, my friend realized he had another choice. Depression and suicidal ideation are complicated human conditions, but something about this show inspired him to seek help and find beauty in the world. He did not want to listen to the Beast's haunting temptations to "submit to the soil," that Satanic voice. After noticing all the appropriations and intricacies of the show,

writing about the way this new medium so often considered “low-brow” wrestles with these themes became critical.

The *Divine Comedy* will always remain a transcendental and essential work of literature. Dante did something incredible when he composed this allegorical journey. He was able to relate to the human spirit in such a way that he has inspired art hundreds of years later. Even if my friend is the only one who had this experience with *Over the Garden Wall*, Dante’s work indirectly saved a soul. This medium was able to distill the human experience into an entire show that can be watched in an hour and a half. While this is only proof of our society’s evolving into screens, literature is still vitally important. None of this could have been accomplished without Dante, without his desire to speak to the universe.

Returning to the earlier question, the mindfulness of our souls, academia would benefit from opening its doors to works such as this. Studying the relationship between the “low-brow” and the “high-brow” could help us understand Dante’s journey together. Not everyone that views the show can recognize the appropriations and references. My friend certainly did not. However, this work of art did for him what Dante has done for others. Studying how these mediums operate could be the key to society’s surviving through the quickening transitions of technology. Being mindful of how these new stories connect us and hold as much power as their source texts could be a way for the humanities to save the day, especially since this show stresses the self-acceptance of our shadows and encourages us to leave the “dark wood.”

Over the Garden Wall is complex, rich, detailed, and worthy of scholarship. Stories have always been repeated through archetypes and tropes, the hero’s journey unchanging, but the world is changing the mediums in which we express these elements. This is the power of

literature, and this power continues to find new footholds in our society. We are not abandoning the written word; the written word is evolving.

WORKS CITED

- Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. Edited and translated by Robert M. Durling, vol. 1, Oxford UP, 1996.
- Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. Edited and translated by Robert M. Durling, vol. 2, Oxford UP, 1996.
- Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. Edited and translated by Robert M. Durling, vol. 3, Oxford UP, 1996.
- Brownlee, Kevin. "Dante, Beatrice, and the Two Departures from Dido." *MLN*, vol. 108, no. 1, 1993, pp. 1–14. JSTOR, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/2904686.
- Davis, Charles T. "Dante and Italian Nationalism." *A Dante Symposium in Commemoration of the 700th Anniversary of the Poet's Birth (1265-1965)*, edited by William De Sua and Gino Rizzo, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1965, pp. 199–213. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469647265_rizzo.16.
- Fergusson, Francis. "The Metaphor of the Journey." *Dante's Drama of the Mind: A Modern Reading of the Purgatorio*, Princeton UP, 1953, pp. 3–13. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt183pj5t.4.
- Hawkins, Peter S. "All Smiles: Poetry and Theology in Dante." *PMLA*, vol. 121, no. 2, 2006, pp. 371–387. JSTOR, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/25486320.
- Jung, Carl G. *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*. 2nd ed., Translated by R.F.C. Hull, vol. 9, part 2, Princeton UP, 1968.
- Mazzotta, Giuseppe. *Reading Dante*. Yale UP, 2014.
- McHale, Patrick and Katie Krentz, creators. *Over the Garden Wall*. Cartoon Network Studios, 2014.

- McHale, Patrick. *The Dot and Line*, 25 Oct. 2016, <https://dotandline.net/patrick-mchale-over-the-garden-wall-interview-292f5661cc23>. Accessed 15 Jan. 2019.
- McHale, Patrick. Interview by Stephen Kozeniewski. *Manuscript Burns*, 13 Feb. 2015, <http://manuscriptsburn.blogspot.com/2015/02/behind-potatoes-and-molasses-interview.html>. Accessed 27 Feb. 2019.
- Sanders, Julie. "Adaptation and Appropriation." *The New Critical Idiom*, edited by John Drakakis, Routledge, 2015.
- Scott, John A. "Cato: A Pagan Suicide in Purgatory." *Dante's Political Purgatory*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1996, pp. 69–84. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv4s7k77.9.
- Van Meurs, Jos. "A Survey of Jungian Literary Criticism in English." *C.G. Jung and the Humanities: Toward a Hermeneutics of Culture*, edited by Karin Barnaby and Pellegrino D'Acierno, Princeton UP, Princeton, New Jersey, 1990, pp. 238–250. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv3hh569.28.
- Whitmont, Edward C. *The Symbolic Quest: Basic Concepts of Analytical Psychology*, Princeton UP, 1991. Hallelujah

VITA

KARISSA DOUGHTY

- Education: B.A. English, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City,
TN 2017
M.A. English, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City,
TN 2019
- Professional Experience: Graduate Assistant, East Tennessee State University, College of
Arts and Sciences, 2017-2019