

REVISIONS

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ReVisions: Best Student Essays is a publication designed to celebrate the finest nonfiction work composed by undergraduate students at The University of North Carolina at Pembroke. This issue was designed and produced by the students in PRE 3450: Publication Design.

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The cover photo was taken by DeShaunte Stephens, a junior Public Relations major from Saint Pauls. It depicts the front of James A. Thomas Hall, the new home of the School of Business, which opened at the start of the Spring 2022 semester.

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BLACULA AND PETEY WHEATSTRAW: THE DEVIL'S SON IN LAW: ANALYZING BLAXPLOITATION IN AFRICAN AMERICAN CINEMA

By Sara Bunting



Blaxploitation arose in the American entertainment industry during the height of the Civil Rights movement in the early 1970s and relied heavily on stereotypes of black culture in the hopes of reaching a new audience base among African American viewers, who had previously been a relatively untapped source of revenue. Blaxploitation can be defined as “Films made by black and white filmmakers between 1970 and 1975 to capitalize on the long-neglected black movie audience” (Lawrence and Butters 745). This era signified an important point in history for the black community because these films, despite their pitfalls, depicted strong black characters who had agency over their lives and destinies.

Sara Bunting graduated in 2021 with a Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies degree. Working in healthcare for 18 years, she applies the knowledge gained at SPCC to better serve those in need, and she hopes to continue to grow in her field.

While the films *Blacula* and *Pete Wheatstraw: The Devil's Son in Law* helped advance black film makers, they also proved to be both harmful and beneficial to the black community. Evaluating Blaxploitation films is important as this genre challenged the white-dominated narrative of African Americans created by Hollywood. Referencing these traditional Blaxploitation horror films, Harry M. Benshoff takes this definition a step further by saying, “The label ‘blaxploitation horror films’ thus signifies a historically specific subgenre that potentially explores, rather than simply exploits, race and race consciousness as core structuring principles. However, as the meaning of any text is also shaped by its readers, I also include in my definition the historical African American audiences to whom these films were marketed” (32). Most Blaxploitation movies were led and dominated by black actors and actresses, were made for black audiences, and were also regularly made and produced by black filmmakers. Prior to the Blaxploitation movement, it was rare to see confident, self-assured, and authoritative black characters playing the lead in films. Black actors were consistently put in the background as submissive, supporting characters. In fact, black actors playing roles outside the context of slavery, or even fighting against white villains, was almost unheard of at the time. According to Lawrence and Butters, “These movies challenged Hollywood’s racist status quo, depicting strong African American protagonists, black supporting characters, predominantly black urban settings, displays of black sexuality, white villains, violence, black-themed storylines, and funky, rhythm-and-blues soundtracks” (745). Blaxploitation films broke the mold and spanned multiple genres including horror, comedy, drama, and action.

For all the good that Blaxploitation brought to the black film community, it also created implicit damage that was not immediately visible at the time. This damage pertains specifically to the negative stereotypes that were made possible because of the behavior of the heroes and heroines in the films. These behaviors and subsequent stereotypes included

violence, easy sex, and drug dealing as some of the most damaging and pervasive depictions. It is, therefore, important to look critically at the genre and the negative effects that it had on the black community, as well as to be aware of the pitfalls that should be avoided for the future of African-American cinema. One such pitfall, for example, was the careless eagerness of studios that were more interested in profiting from the Blaxploitation movement rather than focusing on accurate and responsible representation. When Blaxploitation lost its popularity in the late 1970s “following protests from the NAACP and . . . pressure groups over negative images and stereotypes,” most film makers acted as if the blatant exploitation never took place (Ryfle 7). Thus, the genre, along with the negative outcomes it created, could be easily erased and forgotten.

Acknowledging the harmful effects of the genre is important, but it is also relevant to study the successful aspects the movement created because these aspects made lasting improvements for African Americans in the film industry. The film *Blacula*, for example, succeeds in acting as an oppositional tool with its use of metaphors as symbols of racism and prejudice which occur in the real world. In the film, the characters Mamuwalde and his wife are well spoken, educated black people who wish to expand their culture; therefore, they are seen as a threat to the white man’s way of life. The Count Dracula character represents white oppression, and his condescending attitude is apparent from the beginning, when he refers to his guests as being from the “black continent.” Mamuwalde and his wife write a proposal calling for an end to slavery. Dracula reacts to this threat by imprisoning them, paralleling a slave’s existence. Furthermore, Dracula turns Mamuwalde into a slave of sorts by making him a vampire, causing him to be a slave to an “unquenchable thirst.” Character elements and interactions such as these symbolize the racial tensions and injustices of the time. Benschoff suggests, “The curse of vampirism becomes the lingering legacy of racism” (38). *Blacula*’s vampirism is an explicit metaphor for slavery historically forced upon African Americans by white men in power. Mamuwalde is a victim of white oppression placed on him out of racism and fear, and the backstory helps communicate his struggle.

Another positive change brought about by *Blacula* was its use of leading women. Female characters in *Blacula* were represented as strong, independent, intelligent, and resourceful women, which was uncharacteristic in cinema at that time. Traditionally, in cinema women were in the background, destined to be supporting characters, sex objects, and damsels in distress. *Blacula*, however, broke this tradition with the characters of Michelle and Tina by having them in the foreground. Choosing a female writer, which was also a novel idea at the time, helped paved the way for women’s future in cinema, both in front of and behind the camera. This film was progressive in many ways as its casting echoed the black feminist’s efforts as well as the Black Power movement of the time, which likely added to the success of the film with the black community. This genre proved to Hollywood that an all-black cast could bring commercial success, and it helped pave the way for future black actors and film makers.

In contrast to the benefits *Blacula* brought to the black community and film makers, *Pete’s Wheatstraw: The Devil’s Son in Law* asserts negative black stereotypes rather than progressing the Black Power movement. There is no lack of “cringe worthy” scenes in the film that support this stance. The opening scene, for example, shows a black woman giving birth to a watermelon prior to a full-grown son emerging. Such an image reinforced the

“Sara’s essay reflects the important social implications when studying how non-White artists adapt classic and contemporary literature from another ethnicity. Her insights reveal how impactful this type of literary and cinematic analysis can be. Sara’s essay also reflects what happens when we begin an intellectual and thoughtful examination of all the forces that inspire artists to produce works that challenge social norms. Her essay is a call to study popular and forgotten non-White media.”

—Michael Berntsen

common stereotype of black people loving watermelon to the point of reproducing them via birth.

The black man having to cower to the white man is another stereotype represented in the film. For example, the white businessman is, literally, named Mr. White, and he controls the black comedy club. The black owners are at his mercy and are stressed about making him happy to avoid his wrath. In the end, the black owners are dragged off by the white men while yelling, "Money is the root of all evil." Their characters are not seen again until the end scene as they are driving Petey to hell with them, which suggests they were killed by the white men. According to Hefner, this scene, "subtly reinforc[es] the white heteronormative patriarchy" (63). Heterosexual white males holding a place of power and control over society is a "norm" faced by many in America, and, unfortunately, it is still a sad reality for those in the black community.

As in most Blaxploitation films of the time, *Petey Wheatstraw: The Devil's Son in Law* takes place in a poor urban area where womanizing and substance abuse run rampant. Such a background was an exaggeration of reality in the urban black community. One of the film's major issues, according to Munby, is that "Like most Blaxploitation films of its time, it was linked to venal attributes, such as exploiting desires for sex and violence, that seemed to compromise other ways in which such filmmaking could have been seen as advancing the interests of the race. Its double crime was that it fed the 'wrong' impression of the race and further ghettoized the economic conditions for the production of black film" (204). Such an embellishment of the African-American experience was detrimental to the community as it perpetuated and solidified stereotypes that African Americans had been fighting to undo for generations.

In conclusion, Benschhoff summarizes the genre perfectly by saying, "Blaxploitation horror films may have attempted to reappropriate the genre for racial advancement, but the genre's deeply embedded structure still worked to reinscribe racist tropes" (43). Blaxploitation films, especially Blaxploitation horror films, illustrated the possibilities of radical critiquing of racist institutions that existed then and that are still prevalent now. Unfortunately, they were unable to fully detangle themselves from the system of racism that is prevalent within the film industry. As a result, some Blaxploitation films unwittingly created more problematic and negative stereotypes about the black community and its people. Films such as *Blacula* and *Petey Wheatstraw: The Devil's Son in Law* are important as they create dialogue about topics that otherwise people may find uncomfortable discussing, as the genre has been an area of controversy with polarizing effects since its boom in the 1970s. Blaxploitation was used as a tool to perpetuate continued harm toward the Black community and to promote pride and strength about one's race.🔗

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THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF HABITAT LOSS ON BIODIVERSITY WITHIN NORTH CAROLINA

By Lauren Holmes

Habitat destruction is often a part of human nature as people look to build safe and secure environments for themselves and their families. As a result, increased land usage has altered natural habitats that were once undisturbed and undeveloped. The immense amount of new development has made assessing land usage trends important so that conservationists can better understand how to protect various regions from the impacts of human activities. When discussing habitat loss, Ross and Henkanathgedara (2019) mention that the human population is predicted to continue to grow over the next several years. Growth in the human population will ultimately increase the negative environmental impacts of habitat degradation as more land and resources will be required to sustain the needs of larger populations. As a result, the extent of urban development and habitat degradation must be evaluated to understand how damages to various habitats and organisms can be mitigated. While urban development is a large portion of the threat to biodiversity within North Carolina, natural habitats have also been negatively impacted by the agriculture industry and the fragmentation of habitats. While there is no singular solution, Ritters et al. (2009) discuss how improving the processes in which land use is assessed can help us understand how to monitor, manage, and prevent further damage to certain regions. Current conservation and restoration efforts, such as habitat reconstruction, strategic zoning, and controlled burns have had noticeable benefits, but expansion of these practices will be necessary as human development continues. More research, as well as citizen engagement and education, will increase the awareness needed to mitigate existing issues and to proceed in the future (Ross & Henkanathgedara, 2019).



Lauren Holmes is a senior majoring in Environmental Science at UNCP. She is from Eastover, North Carolina and is spending her last semester as an undergraduate enjoying her beekeeping class and working on her senior Honors College project, which involves expanding recycling within the Pembroke community. In her time at UNCP, she participated in the marching band, pep band, Honors College, Lambda Sigma National Honor Society, and Sigma Alpha Iota. She enjoys watching trains and birds, longboarding, eating at Taco Bell, hanging out with her loved ones, listening to music, and spending time in nature.

Habitat Loss and Degradation

According to the National Wildlife Federation (NWF, ca. 2021), habitat loss refers to the reduction of the quality of ecosystems due to human infrastructure, construction, and activities. Three major causes of habitat loss in North Carolina are agriculture, urban development, and habitat fragmentation. The agriculture industry over the past 200 years has grown rapidly and a lot of lands have been converted to cropland and pastures to produce the food needed to sustain our current populations. In addition to the establishment of agriculture within North Carolina, urban areas have been continuously expanding and overtaking these farmlands. Urban sprawl refers to the development and expansion of the edges of existing urban areas (Rafferty, 2020). Since much of the development of urban regions is now occurring on its outer boundaries, more habitat loss and destruction is

anticipated. These outer portions of urban regions are often rapidly developed because private landowners are motivated by the profit gained by selling their lands to those eager to use it (Blank et. al, 2002). Urban and agricultural expansion has ultimately led to habitat fragmentation (NWF, ca. 2021). As infrastructure growth increases, the connectivity between developed regions is magnified with the addition of more roads. Every new anthropogenic feature expands the size of urban regions and breaks up natural habitats. This expansion has created serious environmental concerns that are important to understand how to mitigate existing damage and to prevent further environmental damage (Terando et al., 2014).

In the past, as North America became more developed, thousands of acres of natural habitats were transformed to create farmland and pastures for livestock (NWF, ca. 2021). Before these transformations occurred, however, large, undisturbed forests of varying types offered habitable spaces for native species within North Carolina. One significant forest type that, historically, has covered a large portion of the state is the longleaf pine savanna. The majority of the longleaf pine trees that existed in North Carolina, and other regions, were cut down through the 18th and 19th centuries for timber production (Blank et al., 2002). With the loss of forested lands, there is also a decrease in wildlife populations that rely on these areas for their survival (“Going Natural,” ca. 2021). Certain endangered species, like the red-cockaded woodpecker, may suffer more negative impacts from habitat loss since the environments they need to survive are being encroached upon and fragmented (Terando et al., 2014). According to Engstrom (2011), red-cockaded woodpeckers cannot survive outside of a longleaf pine forest since they rely on these living longleaf pine trees for nesting. There are a total of 86 species of birds and 36 species of mammals that are known to reside and thrive in longleaf pine forests (Engstrom, 2011). Even though the bulk of these animals are capable of surviving in other forest types, the loss of acreage puts stress on them as they have to compete for space and resources in smaller tracts of land. More recently, between 1982 and 1997, over 1,000,000 acres of forested land in North Carolina were destroyed because of urban developments (NC State Extension, ca. 2021). Any land loss of this degree is a clear threat to the native biodiversity (number of species) within the state of North Carolina.

“The paper is superbly written, and it explains how human activities have caused the loss of habitats and threatened native biodiversity. It tells us that social awareness and more environmentally friendly ways to build our cities are powerful tools in addressing habitat loss.”

—Lisa Kelly

Data collected on the impacts of increased land use within North Carolina have proven that there are clear, noticeable impacts on biodiversity due to habitat loss (NCWF, ca. 2021a). Youngsteadt et al. (2015) discuss their study in which they found lower survivability in both feral and managed honeybee colonies in more developed regions. This is a result of increased disease spread, which can wipe out entire colonies. Not only does this threaten the diversity of several honeybee populations humans rely on, but it also threatens several other pollinators native to North Carolina, including two types of bumblebees and two types of butterflies (NCWF, 2020). These four pollinators share a common trigger for their falling numbers—habitat loss (NCWF, 2020). This reveals that, in addition to plants, birds, and mammals, the threat to biodiversity also impacts insects.

Urban regions, such as Raleigh and Charlotte, are projected to increase in size and in human population growth because they fall within the favorable lands of the Piedmont (Terando et al., 2014). North Carolina’s biodiversity has seen the most harmful impacts around these major cities (Terando et al., 2014) as well as within the coastal regions (Crawford, 2007). As regions become more urbanized, human activities increase, and these

activities generate harmful impacts within and around them (Buzbee, 2003). All the elements of urbanization contribute to climate change—even at the local level—as the effects that follow it are capable of raising the local temperatures between 0.5 and 1.5 degrees Celsius (Terando et al., 2014). This means that in addition to the removal of habitable lands for native species, the remaining habitats may be altered by human activities in urban areas near them. As with temperature, any other abiotic factors (such as pH, air quality, water quality, etc.) that are modified have the capability of reducing the biodiversity in North Carolina since some species are not as able to adapt to environmental changes as are others (Calizza et al., 2017).

In their studies on bird diversity in North Carolina, Ross and Henkanaththedegara (2019) found that the amount of biodiversity within urban areas was significantly lower than the amount of biodiversity in non-urban areas. The authors noted that a few native bird species, such as turkey vultures and chimney swifts, may benefit from some of the new features that accompany urbanization, but the bulk of the bird species that thrive in urban areas do so because they are exotic and are able to handle a wider variety of environmental conditions. Most population losses occur in native bird species due to their inability to adapt to the newer urban environments. Reductions in native biodiversity associated with urban development are also due to non-native or extremely common species that are able to thrive in these changing urban areas. Consequently, competition between common and sturdy species and the less equipped native species results.

Increased competition resulting from habitat loss also impacts other native species of animals and plants (Calizza et al., 2017). Historically, larger animals and mammals, such as elk, occupied bigger ranges within North Carolina until human development downsized them (NFW, ca. 2021). The division of lands by the development of roads, train tracks, and other structures creates isolated fragments of habitats and more edge habitats (NC State Extension, ca. 2021). This means that any plants and animals reliant on deep forest types with little light penetration will get forced into even smaller tracts of land than what is technically undeveloped as edge habitats will compose a larger portion of this land (NWF, ca. 2021). The impacts of habitat loss and fragmentation have been observed in remaining populations of native elk and red wolves as their current populations are impacted by the altered landscape (NCWF, ca. 2021a). The fragmentation separates organisms from each other, makes ranges smaller, and enables invasive species to get into and to encroach upon remaining habitats more easily (NWF, ca. 2021). If native plants are crowded out or removed by habitat loss, the other native species that rely on them also suffer. Every facet of the environment negatively affected by the loss of biodiversity creates more impacts on the other features of an ecosystem as it begins to become more unbalanced (NC State Extension, ca. 2021).

Current Regulations

In an article about zoning within North Carolina, Gullett (2021) provides important information regarding how land use is regulated. The term “zoning” refers to the regulation of land by determining how it is sectioned off and how it is used. Within North Carolina, zoning laws were first implemented by the state in 1923 and were adopted by most cities by the 1960s. The regulation of land use is relevant to the concern for the amount of biodiversity within North Carolina as it determines how regions of the state are currently and will be altered. As with most states, North Carolina uses a type of residential zoning referred to as R1 zoning. This zoning type permits stand-alone, single-family houses. It is inefficient as it spreads development out and consumes more land, which contributes to habitat loss. The process of zoning within the state is very strict as it requires lengthy, complicated steps to achieve authorization. Gullett (2021) explains that the North Carolina state government is responsible for zoning as opposed to allowing smaller, local governments to make their own decisions.

Gullett (2021) also addresses environmental concerns surrounding zoning decisions, so that they may be considered when moving forward. Numerous conservation groups encourage the state government to keep the environment in mind when creating future zoning plans. The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

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(2008) is responsible for conserving, protecting, and managing various habitat types. The National Wildlife Federation (ca. 2021) and The North Carolina Wildlife Foundation (ca. 2021a) both educate the public about the environmental issues surrounding habitat loss. They also announce that promoting habitat conservation and reducing negative environmental impacts from habitat loss are their missions. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service actively regulates the habitats of certain species through the Endangered Species Act and can overstep the power of the state governments to protect wildlife (Environmental Protection Agency, 2021). All of these organizations protect the environment by using their finances, voices, and powers to fund research and restoration and to persuade officials to make environmentally conscious regulations for land use.

Public Opinion

Fan et al. (2004) argue that since North Carolina has been one of the most rapidly developing states, habitat losses have not happened without people noticing. Due to media attention, the general public has been somewhat informed of the status of the environment in North Carolina, and public concern about the environmental issues has increased. The public is generally invested in combatting the loss of natural habitats and the loss of wildlife biodiversity that results from it. Information collected from the media about urban sprawl also reveals several reasons, aside from biodiversity concerns, that perturb the majority. This is significant because understanding what motivates the public to prevent and reduce habitat loss can help conservationists find ways to get people invested and involved.

Fan et al. (2004) go into depth about nine concerns that the public most commonly has regarding urban sprawl. Environmental concern was one of these, but other concerns included loss of open space and loss of community. This means that conservationists do not solely have to rely on gaining sympathy for habitat loss, but they can also sway the public by using their other concerns.

According to Fan et al. (2004), those who support urban sprawl usually promote the argument that landowners should have the right to do whatever they want with their land. This focus clearly benefits people as opposed to the environment as it disregards any potential environmental impacts. Regardless of the public's specific opinions, though, it is clear that media attention about urbanization, urban sprawl, and habitat loss leads to more investment from the general public.

Moving Forward


In their focus on suburban expansion, Terando et al. (2014) identified the geographically appealing regions that will attract developers in the future. The ecoregion at most risk has been deemed the Piedmont region as it has the smallest amount of geographic conflicts for construction while still being desirable land. Research by Crawford (2007) also reveals that transitional coastal zones are extremely likely regions to see continuous development in the future. The expansion of habitat loss only further contributes to the stress placed on native organisms to survive due to increased competition, which threatens biodiversity (Calizza et al., 2017).

Blank et al. (2002) assert that because the loss of land to urban development is clearly an environmental threat, we must investigate land preservation as a method of protecting the environment. This would mean setting aside areas deemed to need preservation and restricting the development of protected portions of the state. Understanding where the most development will be happening in North Carolina will help scientists predict which tracts of land are in the most immediate danger, so conservationists may fight to protect the regions of most environmental concern before they are developed. Currently, there are numerous land trusts established in North Carolina that help protect and conserve land through landowner donations (Preservation North Carolina, 2014). Continuing to financially support these existing land trusts is one way that North Carolina citizens can help protect and restore crucial habitats within the state.

According to the Center for Urban and Regional Studies (2003), the loss of important habitats can be reduced through ‘Smart Growth,’ which refers to strategic planning for future development. Smart Growth is a method that can be employed to protect the biodiversity within North Carolina as well as the overall health of the environment. The strategic planning that would come from Smart Growth would ultimately reduce the amount of land needed to support new development as it would encourage more efficient land use. This method of strategic planning for development is made possible by setting aside finances for the purpose of investing in sustainable technologies, such as more efficient transportation, and architecture that enables more efficient land use. Smart Growth would aim to continue development in ways that reduce the harmful outward expansions that accompany urban sprawl.

Fan et al. (2004) reveal that an increased wave in media attention surrounding the public’s feelings about urban sprawl sparked a lot of debate between 1995 and 2004. This is significant because it reveals that media attention given to environmental concerns will influence the opinions of the masses as they become educated on the issues. Thus, policymakers are more likely to consider what is deemed socially acceptable before implementing rules about land use. Informing citizens of the economic benefits we see from preserving the natural habitats of North Carolina for the purpose of recreation is another way to encourage people, who are motivated by money and enjoy nature, to support conservation (NCWF, ca. 2021a).

While all of these methods would prevent future habitat loss from agriculture, urban development, and habitat fragmentation, additional methods can be employed to mitigate the existing damage from habitat loss. Blank et al. (2002) noted the benefits of keeping tracts of land undeveloped, and they explained the success of restoration efforts for the historical longleaf pine forests through fire management and land protection. Though undeveloped, the remaining land was not in the best natural state. The forests were overgrown with vegetation that shaded out longleaf pine trees. Blank et al. (2002) revealed that the removal of hardwoods and other pines followed by a burn regimen proved successful in helping restore the longleaf pine forests to a more prime natural state. Programs for reintroducing or regrowing populations of endangered wildlife have also proven successful in restoring a more natural balance in the North Carolina’s food chain (NWF, ca. 2021a). An example of successful reestablishment within North Carolina can be observed with wild elk in the Appalachian Mountains. While wild elk were driven to extinction in North Carolina by the late 18th century, their reestablishment has led to a current population size of over 200 elk despite the modern challenges that have arisen due to urban development and habitat fragmentation (NCWF, ca. 2021). This makes it clear that effort and finances placed towards restoration efforts will continue to protect native biodiversity.

In the final analysis, educating the public will increase funding for more environmentally conscious regulations, for more efficient land use development plans, and for mitigating the negative impacts that have already affected the native biodiversity of North Carolina. Changes resulting from these methods would likely yield several noticeable, positive impacts in the near future. To sustain North Carolina’s biodiversity, the support of all of these methods will produce the best chance at success. 

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By Johannah Ries

As chrismated, active members of the Orthodox faith, my family is particularly blessed with several Byzantine-style icons in our home. In addition to describing these icons, I will examine what a Byzantine icon is, discuss how it should be displayed, and share how emotions are depicted in Byzantine icons. The icons will also be compared to their sources in antiquity. It is essential to understand that “in general, icons do not aim at deliberate emotional effect, which can slide so easily into sentimentality” (Mathewes-Green, 2003, p. 4). However, icons, in their proper context, still express emotions.



The Goals of Emotion

Before defining what an icon is, we must examine what the Orthodox consider the proper place of emotion. Orthodox often speak of “noeticism.” As Freeman (2016) notes, the Orthodox tradition

uses two other words that are important One is *hesychia*, translated ‘silence’ or ‘stillness.’ The second is *nepsis* (adjective, neptic), often translated to ‘sobriety’ or ‘attentiveness.’ These are noetic expressions, describing the stillness and attention that are generally required for the nous [mind] to perceive what is around it. That stillness is not quite the same thing as peace and quiet. It also indicates refraining from our various agendas. Nepsis is an attentiveness that avoids the distractions of the various passions (anger, lust, greed, envy, etc.). (para. 19)

Orthodox worship is one aspect in the constant pursuit of each person seeking to be noetic. In Orthodoxy, the term “noetic” has its own distinctive meaning. Indeed, entire libraries have been written that explain the practice and pursuit of becoming noetic as the Orthodox perceive it. As Whiteford (2015) suggests, the patristic leaders of Orthodoxy took the traditional term nous, which means both intellect (*dianoia*) and speech or reason (*logos*), and gave it a different meaning. They used nous to refer to this noetic energy that functions in the heart of every spiritually healthy person. We do not know when this change in meaning took place because we know that some (of the) Fathers used the same word nous to refer to reason as well as to this noetic energy that descends and functions in the region of the heart. So, from this perspective, noetic activity is an activity essential to the soul. It functions in the brain as the reason; it simultaneously functions in the heart as the nous.

It is important, therefore, to remember that the Byzantine icons that the Orthodox use in worship seem to be just as noetic as the Orthodox fathers exhort followers to become (Freeman, 2016). As Mathewes-Green (2003) notes, “In a way that is hard to define, icons touch a completely different interior level, something below the hectic arena of thought and

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emotion. Deeper down there is a place where we first confront life, before we decide what we think or feel about it. That is the intimate place where icons speak” (p. 23).

Understanding Byzantine Icons

Now that we have defined the goals of emotion in icons, we may begin to ask, “What is a Byzantine icon?” As Papadopoulos (2021) suggests, “Iconography as an art appeared when the Byzantine Empire was established in 330 AD. It is believed that the first works of this form of art are the murals of the catacombs of Rome. But the main characteristics of Byzantine art, they begin to form during the middle Byzantine period (867-1204).” The problem with this time period as a definition is that it ignores the fact that Byzantine icons continued to be written throughout history and indeed continue to this day. As Abernathy (2004) states, “In the Orthodox Christian tradition, icons are said to be written, not painted. The Orthodox consider making icons more a form of prayer than art, and they believe the iconographer’s hand is guided by God.” This belief disagrees with any attempt to portray an icon as art or to place it into a museum. Wecker (2014) also reminds us that, “We need to stop just automatically and unthinkingly turning a religious object into a museum object and an art object into a historical object.” This is strongly rebutted by museum curators who feel “religious viewers may feel more comfortable seeing the sacred objects of their own faith tradition presented in an apologetic rather than critical fashion at museums and galleries affiliated with that tradition, secular art museums also play an important role in educating viewers of other or no faiths about those objects” (Whiteford, 2015).

There is another bit of controversy on what icons are and how they are used. Andresen (2021) asserts, “Explaining iconography to someone who doesn’t pray with icons can be a little daunting. For us Orthodox, it’s as natural and normal as reading the Gospel, and we all sort of instinctively know that we’re not worshipping the icons.” It is not just people outside of the church who need an explanation. According to Andresen (2021), “Some Christians throughout history have interpreted this passage to mean that no religious images or visual art are allowed by God. In fact, the church struggled with this issue throughout the eighth and ninth centuries finally defeating iconoclasm and upholding the use of icons in worship, a day we celebrate every year on the Triumph of Orthodoxy.”

Icons are images or depictions of religious subjects but must not be confused with idols. Icons are not prohibited by Moses’ ten commandments. Although Orthodox adherents feel the controversy settled, some outside of the Orthodox church today still doubt it was resolved correctly. That icons are not idols is clarified by one of the early church fathers, St. John Damascene, who explained, “In former times God, who is without form or body, could never be depicted. But now when God is seen in the flesh conversing with men, I make an image [icon] of the God whom I see” (Damascene, 1980, p. 23).

Icons are not merely to be considered as an art form. Cownie and Cownie (2011) note, “Orthodox icons are painted according to very specific patterns and regulations, which must be followed strictly by the iconographer” (p. 7). Icons continue to have an important role in the Orthodox church today. In fact, icons have always had a prominent position because their use pre-dates the canonization of scriptures by the church and are “a holy Bible for the simple and unlettered, a visual theology for the contemplatives and connoisseurs” (Terzopoulos, 2001, p. xi). As Ciaran (2021) suggests, Orthodox would agree that “In many

“Icons are central for Eastern Orthodoxy, one of the three great branches of Christianity. Johannah’s paper analyzes the distinctive ways that these icons express emotions. Johannah is very knowledgeable about art. In our online discussions of artwork through the various periods of Western art history, Johannah often included images and analysis of other paintings relevant to the ones we were discussing. Her comments were longer and deeper than those of any other student I’ve taught.”

—David Nikkel

respects images are superior to the written word. The highest function of the written word is to allow us to see the image more clearly.”

The icon is much more than just a religious painting, and “the icon is not simply a work of art or a religious picture. It is understood as an indispensable liturgical vessel that sanctifies man and brings him into direct contact with the grace and the hypostasis (person) of the one depicted” (Terzopoulos, 2001, p. 3-4). In fact, icons are never described as painted; icons are described as being “written.”

The Byzantine Icons Described and Displayed

The icons discussed for the purpose of this paper are from the Byzantium iconographical tradition dating from the fourth through the fourteenth centuries (Alfeyev, 2014, p. 115-184). Despite their ancient origins, icons remain the standard of iconography for the Orthodox church today. As Cownie and Cownie (2011) assert, “The prototype of various icons derive from artistic ideals and Christological principles that were established by the Ecumenical Synods and fully developed in Byzantine times” (p. 7). The icons examined in this paper were written following those exact standards. In each case, the published forms of the icons (from which these icons were taken) are shared so that each particular one discussed may be envisioned. After all, “variation is not shown by original arrangements of elements, but through subtly differing use of light, color, perspective, and expression” (Mathewes-Green, 2003, p. 137-138). The statement of “expression” is not one that is commonly used either and to illustrate that, one might consider the fact that “No one smiles in icons not because smiling is a sin or because the Heavenly Kingdom is a sad place, but rather because the icon is a revelation not only about God, but also about man; the human nature of the saints reveals a much greater depth than we are accustomed to perceiving in our everyday world” (Yazykova, 2012). Although there are no smiles in icons, we still sense joy among the subjects of the images.

The icons of the Byzantine church depict emotion through the use of color and symbolism. However, they are also intended to be accompanied by specific prayers and chants that emphasize the emotions that the icon portrays. The Orthodox continue to use a multi-volume text that includes the chants and prayers that are to be used. As the Orthodox Menologion (2018) suggests, “The Menologion is usually a multi volume work. It contains stories of the saints and of the various historical commemorations in the fixed calendar. Each day’s entry may describe all the saints of the day, or only a single saint, and may be expanded with a homily, scriptural quote, or hymn.” These have been carefully preserved and continuously used since Byzantine times (Princeton, 2016).

The connection between the images and the services reminds us that icons are expected to remain within the church. As Mathewes-Green (2003) notes, “They are companions in prayer and won’t make sense outside of a surrendered and seeking life. Icons have their fullest impact on those who are saturated in prayer” (p. 23). Today, as set forth in the teachings of the Orthodox church, icons are allowed to be displayed only in churches or monastic communities or in the homes of Orthodox believers who remain faithful in attendance with their church (Bjeletich & Shoemaker, 2016). They are not to be displayed as or with museum pieces or with other art collections (Teodosijević, 2021). That would be the equivalent of cultural appropriation, which is seen as irreverent and is denounced (Isaak & Peter, 2016). The icons are to be part of the cyclical services of the church. The songs and prayers of the church calendar are integral to the displaying of particular icons. Within this context of special prayers and hymns, the icon synergistically works to depict emotions that are not necessarily apparent outside of the worship service (Isaak & Peter, 2016).

As I previously mentioned, icons are “written,” and the writing of an icon is quite formulated. Papadopoulos (2021) states, “For the Orthodox church, picture is the language of art expressing its dogmas, as well as speech. In Orthodox iconography there is no room for personal inspiration or improvisation. The iconographer while working puts aside entirely his feelings and ideas.” The icon formula is such that “there is no place here for psychologism, vivid facial expression, or the depiction of any affects” (Yazykova, 2012). Despite the fact that there are no smiles

or facial expression, Yazykova (2012) argues,

This does not mean that all emotion should be banished from the icon. Emotion is expressed in iconography through gesture: the joyful, blessing gesture of the Archangel Gabriel in the icon of the Annunciation; the prayerful lifting up of the hands towards heaven in the image of the Theotokos Orans; or the hand pressed to the cheek as an expression of suffering, as the Theotokos is depicted at the Cross, etc. But take note that the countenance remains dispassionate, calm, and clear.



Figure 1. Anonymous, (n.d.), Annunciation

This public domain icon is similar to the one the writer describes in her essay.

The handwritten icon in our home is an original that is known as *The Annunciation*. It was written according to the Orthodox standards of iconography to depict an icon shown in the Orthodox Syaxaristes (Hronas & Hronas, 2016, p.102). This icon is one of the festal icons, and it is displayed prominently during the services held “March 25, exactly nine months before Christmas, so the festal icon on display shows the moment when Gabriel announced to the Virgin Mary that she would bear a child” (Mathewes-Green, 2003, p. 105). The icon follows the exacting standards proscribed by the synods, and alarm is conveyed by the vigorous advancement of Gabriel but “despite the whirl of the immediate moment, both are suspended in the tranquil joy at the timeless enter of God’s will” (Mathewes-Green, 2003, p.106). Gold leaf forms the circular halos indicating saint or holiness (Teodosijevic, 2019). It also indicates glory and joy (Teodosijevic, 2020).

Because the icon is written in order to be used in conjunction with the prayer service, the emotions are conveyed not only by the image itself, but also in the chants that accompany it. In the case of the icon of *The Annunciation*, the chant “Hail, you through whom joy shall shine forth” repeats frequently (Mathewes-Green, 2003, p. 109). Joy is depicted in the color of yellow and gold and is seen in the icon in the background of gold, the robes trimmed in gold, and other golden elements in the icon (Teodosijevic, 2020). The services on March 25 are musically chanted in the joyful sound of the Orthodox tones: Tone 8 (Antiochian Diocese, 2020).

Another series of icons, entitled *Sweet Kissing*, depicts the Virgin Mary and the infant Jesus. These icons all show the infant’s cheek pressed closely to his mother’s lips.



Figure 2. Dacoucou, (2012), Vierge à l’enfant, dite Vierge des étudiants

This public domain icon is similar to the one the writer describes in her essay.

Although “the iconography of the Mother-of-God is marked by more diversity than the iconography of Christ” (Alfeyev, 2014, p. 153), the depiction of the Virgin Mary is strictly controlled by the conventions set forth in Orthodoxy that she is never to be depicted alone, so she is usually depicted with heavenly beings, with the Christ child, or with other saints (Mathewes-Green, 2003, p. 41). The emotion depicted in this icon is a familiar one of a mother kissing her child. As Mathewes-Green (2003) suggests, “Mary, whom Jesus loved like a child loves his mother, is an especially wise and dear Christian friend” (p. 45). The custom of the Orthodox faithful is to ask Mary, who is believed to have already been resurrected and is alive, to pray with them to God just as we would make that request for prayer to our friends when we have something that is troubling us (Ibid.). Icons, such as this one, that show the love between a mother and her child are endearing

and remind those praying that we, too, are loved by Christ (Alfeyev, 2014, p. 154). Following the conventions of the use of gold and yellow as showing joy, the icon depicts the joy of the child loving his mother with the use of gold along the edge of every part of his robe that is touching his mother, the edging on her own robes, and the stars that adorn her clothing.



Figure 3. Ustas/GFDL, (2005) *Icon_03032_Raspyatie_s_predstoyaschimi*

This public domain icon is similar to the one the writer describes in her essay.




Figure 4. Láscar, (2014), *Contemporary mosaic icon of the resurrection at the Resurrection Gate in Moscow*

This public domain icon is similar to the one the writer describes in her essay.

Another icon in our home, known as *The Crucifixion*, depicts Jesus’ crucifixion. It is one of our set of icons that are not handwritten. As a reproduction, it is a lithography purchased from a Russian man we met who helped us to get an entire set of all thirteen festal icons of the Orthodox liturgical calendar. It is a precise copy of the standard festal depiction known as the work of “Emmanuel Lambardos, a native of Crete” (Mathewes-Green, 2003, p. 138). The icon portrays the crucifixion with the sorrow of Jesus’ friends and the amazement of the soldier, but “the use of blood here is restrained, almost delicate” (Mathewes-Green, 2003, p. 139-140) because “icons do not aim at deliberate emotional effect” as we have mentioned earlier (Ibid.). The emotion of sorrow depicted in this icon is reenacted in the way the service—for which this icon is prescribed—proceeds. Along with specific chants, the depiction of the body of Christ, which also matches this icon, is placed on a wooden cross that is on the floor and nails are hammered into the image. As Mathewes-Green (2003) notes, “The emotional power of a crucifixion icon depends less on our empathizing with how much physical pain would have felt to us, and more on our awe-filled recognition of something we cannot understand at all by mere empathy” (p. 141). This annual event of nailing the icon onto the cross is usually accompanied by the sound of crying by those in attendance and the “clear tenor voice” which chants the words heard each year in this service (Mathewes-Green, 2003, p. 142). This reminds us that the Byzantine icons are intended to be accompanied by prayers and chants that emphasize the emotions they depict in the image.

Another handwritten icon in our home is an original that is known alternatively as *The Resurrection* or as *The Harrowing of Hades*. It is the same as that depicted in the photograph from a fresco on a monastery wall (Hatzinikolaou, 2020, p. 488). This icon portrays a sense of victory as Christ is shown with his feet firmly planted on the broken doors of Hades. Gold covers the top third of the icon, once again symbolizing joy, and gold also crowns the saints. The mandorla style of halo is painted a heavenly blue that also reflects humanity but, in this combination, reveals the victory over death that humans can now enjoy (Teodosijević, 2019, 2021). As Mathewes-Green (2003) suggests, “Jesus looks solid and muscular, and everything about Him conveys energy and decisive action” (p. 58). In the Menalogion, this icon is prescribed to be accompanied by the chant, “Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death” (Orthodox Paschal Troparion, 2019) and the triumphant tone of this ancient hymn, together with the display of the icon, is sensational.

DEPICTIONS OF EMOTION IN BYZANTINE ART

The four icons examined are a micro selection among thousands of such icons that express emotion in ways that are foreign to the culture today but which can be understood when one reflects upon these images. The controversy between Orthodox and historians over the era of icons is only slightly more likely to be resolved before the disagreement about whether they can be displayed in museums is settled. Icons lose their depth of meaning when removed from context of the worship rubrics of the Orthodox church. Nevertheless, even divorced from that context, they seem to remain enigmatically compelling to those who choose to take a longer look at them. 

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