

November 2016

Editors' Introduction

Andy Verboom
verboom.ac@gmail.com

Meghan O'Hara
The University of Western Ontario, mohara4@uwo.ca

Emily Kring
The University of Western Ontario, ekring@uwo.ca

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/wordhoard>

 Part of the [Digital Humanities Commons](#), [English Language and Literature Commons](#), [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), [Fiction Commons](#), [Film and Media Studies Commons](#), [Fine Arts Commons](#), [Nonfiction Commons](#), [Philosophy Commons](#), [Poetry Commons](#), and the [Theatre and Performance Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Verboom, Andy; O'Hara, Meghan; and Kring, Emily (2016) "Editors' Introduction," *The Word Hoard*: Vol. 1: Iss. 5, Article 2.
Available at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/wordhoard/vol1/iss5/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Word Hoard by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact tadam@uwo.ca.

{ EDITORS' INTRODUCTION }

You will never find a more wretched hive of scum and villainy. We must be cautious.

—Alec Guinness as Obi-Wan Kenobi, *Star Wars: Episode IV — A New Hope*

	Yes	No
[...]	[...]	[...]
I/we have visited a farm and will be going to a farm in Canada.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
—Canadian Border Services Agency, “Declaration Card”		

I/we have recently visited an iconic film. I/we have had contact with an iconic film line. No matter how often a phrase has been repurposed, I/we risk failure that repurposing. No matter how far a phrase is carried, I/we risk carrying with it its local, incubating muck. I/we would like to get this out of the way: my/our purpose in importing “scum and villainy” to *Word Hoard* was not to crystalize an issue around *Star Wars*, sci-fi, or even filmic villainy, but to prompt you/you to think about how the phrase might explode/implode with meaning when shuttled within geographically, temporally, textually, or contextually broader circuits.

Our own explosion of the phrase, fertilizer-bomb style, began in the waste of etymology: the phrase’s fascinating yoking of the Germanic (*schuum*, froth, dirt, the lowest of humanity) and Latinate (*villanus*, farmhand, yokel, the urban outcast). We proceeded to ask how this yoking—both a joining-together and a holding-at-appropriate-distance—persists in the association of the opportunistic (muggers, grifters, the debased) and the conniving (psychopaths, traitors, the corrupt) or the anti-social abject (the undesirable by-product) and the anti-social agent (the threatening excess). As ever, we are incredibly pleased with the range of

responses to this, *Word Hoard*'s fifth, call for submissions.

Your answers begin with selections from Trevor Abes's prose poetry sequence, "The New Frontiers of Conceptual Art." These three pieces of notional ekphrasis are commissioned, it seems, by the very art industrialists whose canvasses he slashes, including auction houses, private collectors, and British conceptual artist Damien Hirst. Despite Abes's pointed satire, he shows an unmistakable tenderness toward the quotidian scum of his media. Tom Cull, Poet Laureate of London, Ontario, responds with his own trilogy of poems, "Untitled Series (flies, shark, sap)." Cull refocuses and refigures each of Abes's pieces through the lens of Hirst's infamous *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*—which may be considered, if nothing else, a successful yoking of the scummy (formaldehydic decay; the physical mind; con art) and the villainous (shark; death; Hirst).

In the issue's first essay, "Bandits and Biopolitics: Power, Control, and Exploitation in *Cidade dos Homens* (2007)," Stephan A. Cruikshank deploys Foucauldian biopolitics to examine the link between scum (poverty, disenfranchisement) and villainy (violence, banditry) in the

favelas of Rio de Janeiro. Cruikshank argues that the favela's *bando* ("bandit") is best understood through its relation to Agamben's *homo sacer*, a figure paradoxically both cursed and sacred. Kate Lawless responds with her own essay, "Beyond the Bandit: Dispossession and Recovery in Paulo Morelli's *City of Men*," by insisting on the opacity of *Cidade dos Homens*' medium. With Benjaminian scepticism toward Cruikshank's reading of the film as emancipatory, Lawless insists that it participates in the maintenance of the biopolitical status quo by obscuring material dispossession beneath a tale of villainous, and heroic, fatherhoods.

David Huebert returns us to poetry with "The Renegade Poets," a sensorially thick villanelle. Through a disorienting, high-speed montage of past (and possibly future) British imperial aesthetics, Huebert suggests that villainy is less the malevolence of a witch stirring a cauldron than it is a swirling pattern in the rubbish of history. *Word Hoard* editor Andy Verboom responds with his own villanelle, "There Emigrate Bullets." Employing the practice of deliberate and thorough mishearing developed in his and Huebert's recent chapbook, *Full Mondegreens*, Verboom replaces each board and nail in Huebert's poem with its phonetic doppelganger. The

resulting poem lampoons a world without villainy, one in which the phrase “guns don’t kill people, bullets do” has been elevated to eschatological policy.

Justyna Stiepanow’s essay “The Personally Ugly and Socially Unacceptable: Villains by Choice, Nature, or Circumstances?” considers the vilification of “public enemies,” especially in the context of American capital punishment, as a campaign of dehumanization required by the social contract logic around which Western criminal justice systems are built. Arguments for the moral depravity of criminals, Stiepanow suggests, are deployed post facto to justify the punishments imposed on them. But the very biographical detritus deployed to confirm criminals’ depravity, Stiepanow insists, can also function as the occasion for compassion. *Word Hoard* editor Meghan O’Hara responds in the form of an interview with Georgia Innocence Project intern Sarah Marshall, focusing on the trend in popular narrative media toward this very *re*-humanization of the monstrous criminal, such as the Netflix series *Making a Murderer*. O’Hara and Marshall’s interview, “Archetype, Fantasy, and Vital Outrage,” explores the tangled temporality of vilification and re-humanization through questions about popular fascination with the psychopathic,

doubt in the criminal justice system, the intersections of vilification and race, and social media engagement with redemption narratives.

In the issue’s first fiction piece, “Gutless,” Bridget Canning sends us on a drive with her soliloquizing narrator, whose gastrectomy-induced crime spree implies a deeply embodied relation between abjection and petty criminality. But if her narrator is pathologically criminal—a loss of gut bacteria leading to a loss of inhibitions—then Canning’s true villain is disconcertingly socially acceptable, suggesting our conception of mental health might include not only obeisance to social order but also participation in “tolerable” violence. Philip Glennie’s two-part response, “The Trouble with Jerry,” provides insight into Canning’s “post-gut resistance.” Blending critical and personal essay, Glennie delves beneath the revenge fantasy at the story’s surface to consider how Canning’s story might participate in feminist thought about masculinities and the labour required of feminist men in undermining their own privilege.

Elizabeth Johnston offers the issue’s fifth and final poem, “Vegas, Stripped: On Returning for a National Teacher’s Conference,” itself a response to Romantic poet Charlotte Turner Smith’s

“Thirty-Eight.” Meditating on Johnston’s return to Las Vegas after a decade and a half, the poem begins with a re-vision of Sin City’s extravagances as poverties. But the poem quickly turns to self-indictment, suggesting that the privilege of theoretical distance and the easy disdain of *mea non cupla* render academic critics of capitalism complicit with the villainy they think to unseat. Ross Bullen responds with “The AdjunctPod,” a George Saundersesque short story that, conversely, considers academics as the scum of the universe. Extrapolating the current exploitation of adjunct faculty, Bullen envisions a future in which the corporate university has abolished salaries, the wireless classroom has cyborgized professors, and the first tenure-track job in fifty years might still go to a medievalist.

The issue’s final academic essay, David Christopher’s “The Dialectic of Fantasy Displacement and Uncanny Allegory in the *Star Wars* Prequel Trilogy,” returns us (almost) to our theme’s place of birth. Deploying notions of Žižekian paranoid fantasy and Benjaminian allegory, Christopher argues that while *Episodes I – III* seek to create a comforting distance between the American-body-politic-as-benevolent-Republic and the American-political-administration-as-evil-Empire,

such an uncanny distinction only confirms the democratic anxiety it might relieve. Taking issue with the reduction of sci-fi (or, rather, “SF”) to psychoanalytical fantasy, Greg Bechtel’s personal essay “Our Villains, Ourselves: On SF, Villainy, and... Margaret Atwood?” explores the relation between the love-hate felt for SF villains and the vilification of certain authors within SF literary communities. Interrogating his own vilification of Atwood for her denigration of SF as lowbrow literature, Bechtel examines the backlash against “social justice warrior” SF by those who would figure themselves as the genre-fiction-scum of the literary scene.

Closing out the issue are three reviews, each exploring the relation between the “scum” of embodied life and “villainy” of a different type—political, social, and ecological. Nathan Tebokkel critiques John Ibbitson’s pseudo-biography *Stephen Harper* for burying traces of Harper the Man beneath celebrations of Harper the Politician. Jacob Evoy recommends Breanne Fahs’ rigorous and recuperative biography *Valerie Solanas: The Defiant Life of the Woman Who Wrote SCUM (And Shot Andy Warhol)* and applauds the artists behind *The Inspirational Scum Manifesto Calendar* for

reinvigorating passages from Solanas's *SCUM Manifesto*. Finally, Riley McDonald commends Heather Houser's literary study *Ecosickness in American Fiction: Environment and Affect* for describing the interactions between places and bodies as ambient and evanescent rather than relying on oversimplified models of environmental cause and demographic effect.

As with any collection of cultural criticism, this issue of *Word Hoard* risks entering the world immediately out-dated. While our contributors wrote and revised during the recent American presidential campaign, none of us could have foreseen the final shape of that new constellation of scum and villainy that rose above the horizon on the night of November 8, 2016. There's certainly nothing new about politicized for-profit hate, but the role of social media in its promulgation has turned everyone, across the political spectrum, into scum of one sort or another. And it has turned quite a few of us, American or not, into villains through our consent, complicity, or contempt.

We hope that, as you read this issue, you bear in mind the work of our veteran cover artist, Hinson Calabrese. With prescience, his cover for this issue depicts Statler and Waldorf—the curmudgeonly, heckling Muppet theatre critics who scorn

every entertainment as “terrible” but who never fail to return for another show—in the apotheosis of their self-involved disdain. In our drift from consumer culture into producer culture, this image should remind us that we are what we make. We all love to hate.

Andy Verboom, Content Editor-in-Chief
with Meghan O'Hara
and Emily Kring

Works Cited

Canada. Canadian Border Services Agency. "Declaration Card." [Ottawa]: Canadian Border Services Agency, 2016. *Canadian Border Services Agency*. Web. 15 Oct. 2016.

Guinness, Alec, actor. *Star Wars: Episode IV — A New Hope*. Directed and written by George Lucas. 20th Century Fox, 1977.