

Western Illinois University
2021 Thomas E. Helm Undergraduate Research Conference

Abstract

Live Scholarly Presentation

Major: English

Faculty Mentor: Everett Hamner

The Protagonist of Pamela Zoline's "The Heat Death of the Universe" Interprets Pat Cadigan's "Pretty Boy Crossover": A Work of Creative Literary Criticism

Jack Sellers

Apart from their shared status as science fiction short stories, Pat Cadigan's "Pretty Boy Crossover" (1986) and Pamela Zoline's "The Heat Death of the Universe" (1967) might seem like an odd pairing for an ordinary argumentative paper, but they function even more strangely in this work of creative literary criticism. Taking on the voice of protagonist Sarah Boyle from Zoline's story in order to analyze Cadigan's, this paper blends creative writing with literary analysis in order to achieve a greater understanding of both pieces of fiction, as well as their subject matter. Through the eyes of Sarah Boyle – whose existential crisis has led her to a nearly complete mental breakdown (evidenced, for example, by purchasing nearly every cleaning item at her local grocery) – "Pretty Boy Crossover" becomes both a fascinating and painful story about individual freedom and escape. Using the voice of a character who has lost all sense of purpose in her life, this essay demonstrates the vanity and narrowmindedness of the characters in "Pretty Boy Crossover." The latter seek to use revolutionary technology only to stay young and popular, but in channeling Boyle, I suggest how digital culture might address much more enduring injustices around misogyny, patriarchy, and global capitalism's constant commodification of human life.