

The
Harper
Anthology



issue xi

Student Writers

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Alejandra Esparza

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Katie Gillies

John Gross

Alejandra Guerrero

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Natalia Kida

Brenda Kitchka

Becky Klosowski

Amber Knoll

Adele Krueger

Joe Kyle-DiPietro

Susan Leverenz

Mike Mannard

Sandra McKown

Brian Moore

Merry Moran

Kathleen O'Connor

Shannon Plate

Catherine Quigg

Christine A. Schubkegel

JoDee E. Swanson

Max Szlagor

Isabella Tenerelli

Julie Threlfall

Joy Tranel

Arwen Tyler

John Wiese

Cassell Wong



The
Harper Anthology
of Academic Writing

Issue XI

1999

William Rainey Harper College

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Foreword

I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail.

—William Faulkner

Poets, those dead and those still alive, have lamented the ever-progressive flex and rise of technology. In many poetic circles (if such circles yet remain in any healthy human state, if such circles have not yet faded in the white-washing blaze of a thousand technological suns), it is thought that technology drives us, the (once-social?) human race, toward unnatural obsessions with gadgetry. In such circles it is assumed that technology finally leaves us anesthetized, jacklighted, zombified, bereft not only of spirit but also of our actual, physical senses. As the time we spend fretting over the wonders of the internet waxes like a newly blackened eye, our moments of face-to-face (or human-to-human) contact presumably become scarcer and scarcer... for there we sit, not in fleshy society but in seclusion, in the company of gray computers. As our cars grow more and more sophisticated with respect to things like climate control and the average driver's wish to feel as little of the road's texture as possible, our skins become papery, our bellies soften and roll, and we forget what a pleasure it is to be wind-blown; we lock our car doors, breathe the vitiated air of rolled-up windows, preset radio stations, and isolation. As one American poet observes, "Everywhere, / giant finned cars nose forward like fish; / a savage servility / slides by on grease."¹

I welcome you to the eleventh issue of the *Harper Anthology*, and it is with particular happiness that I do so because this issue is, I think, one that serves to deliver the poets from their dread by projecting a foundational truth: despite the impressive technological advances of the human race, and despite the fact that many humans have given (and will continue, in the next millennium, to give) themselves up to technology's siren call, it will never be that all people will fully succumb to spiritual anesthesia and sensual zombidom. Always, for example, there will be those who seek the healing power of nature, knowing that the ability to "read the leaves" (so to speak) is as important to one's salvation as the ability to read scripture (see pp. 38 to 43 of this anthology). There will be those who believe in teaching "leaf reading" and star gazing to their children (see pp. 69 to 70), or those who simply discover (or *re*-discover) that they *have* children and that those children need their society (not their technological expertise); there will be those, in other words, who stand by the credo that says technological expertise is, at the end of each day, immaterial in comparison to human fellowship in the simple form of a parent-child bond (see pp. 21 to 23). In fact, the next millennium will feature individuals who rail outright against technology (see pp. 129 to 130), those who will try and try again (as the poets have) to remind their hearers/readers that while technological marvels are often beautiful and beautifully efficient—attesting as they do to human intelligence and even, at times, human creativity—what matters more in this life is our attentiveness to the fulfillment of the body's five senses, our cultivation of face-to-face camaraderie, our collective literacy (both literal literacy and figurative/soul-related literacy).

¹See "For the Union Dead," written in 1959 by Robert Lowell (1917-1977).

Foreword

So again, welcome. And if you are a lamenting poet of the aforementioned variety, be of good cheer. The writings in the following pages are good writings, sometimes concerned with the practical/concrete facts of our homes and lives (fuse boxes [see pp. 4 to 10] and broken-down automobiles [see pp. 24 to 25], for example), and sometimes concerned with more ethereal chronicles of what the American novelist William Faulkner called "the human heart in conflict with itself."² If they prove anything, the writings in this anthology prove that technology has neither sterilized us nor deadened our quest for deeper meanings just yet. How lucky you are, then, if you commonly find yourself to be a lamenter (an anxious poet, a prophet of technocratic doom). Lucky because you've come to the right place (this publication). Lucky because you hold in your hands this anthology, which is, by definition, a "gathering of flowers" (see the back cover, definition #2). I shall risk sentimentality and say that this anthology is indeed just that: a kind of bouquet to the worried poets at the brink of another thousand years. Hopefully, it is Harper's way of saying to them (the worried but wonderful poets), "The human spirit is yet alive, and the quest for meaning—through literary interpretation and personal, physical, untechnological discovery—still breathes; there are still people with vibrant senses, capable of reception, occasionally rendered breathless at the beauty and power of themselves, their families, Illinois...all that lies beyond the technological sphere.

Putting the *Harper Anthology* together is rewarding and even fun, but it is also sort of elephant-like; one cannot easily do so alone, and I have not had to. I am grateful for the good help and support of the following *Anthology* Committee members: Tony Trigilio, Kurt Neumann, Jack Dodds, Barbara Hickey, Peter Sherer, Joe Sternberg, Rich Johnson, and Kris Piepenburg. Thanks to Greg Herriges for writing this issue's Afterword (see pp. 140 to 143). Thanks to the student aides in the Liberal Arts Division (especially Scott Murphy), who helped me with photocopying and organizing/collating the submissions. Thanks to Lisa Larsen, the impossibly nice administrative assistant in the Liberal Arts Division office. Thanks to Mike Knudsen, Joan Young, and Anne Frost from the Marketing Services Center. Thanks, also, to Peter Gart and the staff of Harper's Print Shop. Harley Chapman, Dean of Harper's Liberal Arts Division, deserves thanks for his support of the *Anthology*, and Deanna Torres of the Marketing Services Center's typesetting office deserves a very special thanks for her patience (with my last-minute changes) and her precision.

Best wishes to all readers.

Andrew Wilson
Chair, *Harper Anthology* Committee

²See Faulkner's Nobel Prize acceptance speech ("Speech of Acceptance upon the Award of the Nobel Prize for Literature," delivered in 1950); this foreword's epigraph is also from Faulkner's Nobel Prize speech.

Bob the Fishman

Cheryl M. Anderson
Course: English 101
Instructor: Kris Piepenburg

Assignment:
*Write a profile of an interesting
person, place, event, or entity,
using observation and interviews.*

To the casual observer, Bob looks like any other suburbanite. He drives a red SUV and has a nine to five job. When recently married to Laura, he immediately became "dad" to a stepdaughter, and they live together in a duplex home. He serves as a Director of the home owners' association. However, that is where Bob's ordinary lifestyle comparison ends.

Bob collects fish as a hobby. If anyone asks to see his fish, Bob's dark, animated eyes immediately light up, with excited, electric sparks seeming to emanate from them. He is always happy to exhibit his fish to anyone interested. You are about to enter the aquatic realm of "Bob the Fishman," a title emblazoned across the chest of his tee-shirt.

Upon entering his home, my initial focus is drawn to the three huge fish tanks that occupy all three walls of what normally is the dining area. In the center of the room, instead of a dining table, is a large, stuffed easy chair, faced toward the tanks, for sitting and letting your mind drift into the water with the fish.

Bob leads me down an invisible path, separating the living room and the dining area, to what he calls the fish room, at the rear of the house. It's hard to describe what my immediate reactions are. Indeed, the humidity of the room could rival a sultry summer night in Miami, Florida. My eyes are dazzled by walls of Caribbean blue fish tanks, reminding me of a miniature Shedd Aquarium. The wallpaper border is inspired by fishes. There is a paper fish mobile suspended from the ceiling. Where there are no fish tanks, the walls are covered with plaques and ribbons won as prizes at competitions.

Bob says his interest in fish began eight years ago, when a roommate from California brought a fish tank into their home. When the friend moved, Bob realized that he missed the fish, so he bought his own aquarium. Over time, he added more to his collection, so that now he has 26 aquariums at home and one at work. In all, he maintains a total of 1,063 gallons of water.

As noticed when first entering his home, his display tanks are in the "dining area" — one 200-gallon and two 125-gallon tanks. The larger tank contains a variety of African Cichlids, numbering more than 125, and five catfish. These fish originate from Lake Malawi, Africa, a large lake, 60 by 80 miles across and 900 feet deep. Because this tank is so chock full of fish, it looks like a solid blur, with the many fish chasing back and forth endlessly, mesmerizing anyone who may be watching. There are striped fish, spotted fish, neon fish and too many others to describe, all in beautiful colors. For those who are unfamiliar with fish, a dictionary defines a cichlid as "any of various tropical freshwater fishes of the many Cichlidae, many of which are popular as aquarium fish."

Bob explains that one 125-gallon tank houses his largest fish, a giraffe nose catfish, which is 28 inches long, weighs 8 pounds, and is only one-third grown. He shares the tank with one other fish. Bob's favorite is the larger one, because of its unique personality. Bob says he enjoys hand feeding and petting him when he comes to the surface. Bob continues with a funny story. "One night, while Laura and I were sleeping," he says, "the larger fish was playing so boisterously that it awakened us." In the tank is a large wood log that the fish was batting around. The fish banged it back and forth, hitting the glass, from one end of the tank to the other, making all kinds of racket. When it had finished playing, the fish put the log back in place where it was originally. According to Bob, it was quite a comical sight.

Bob says, "The other 125-gallon tank contains Laura's special favorites," including a number of angel fish and a myriad of other colorful fish. Twenty-two more tanks are in the fish room, and one tank is in the living area.

Each Monday Bob and his wife, Laura, begin pumping out 25% of the water from each tank. When Bob has completed pumping five or six tanks, his wife then begins filling them back up with water until all 26 tanks have had water

replaced. He cleans the gravel with a siphon called a hydro vacuum cleaner. The reason for changing the water is to keep the fish healthy. By doing so, they can live eight to ten years without illness.

The rear fish room was converted from a den with a wet bar. Bob connected a sump pump to the sink plumbing, which he uses to pump out the water during their Monday night ritual. A closet has been fitted with shelves for all his supplies and air pumps that provide air to the tanks.

All Bob's fish are freshwater varieties. He decided to collect them rather than salt water fish because he thinks that freshwater fish are beautiful and colorful as well. He has 700 to 800 fish that he breeds for fun. At times he trades some of his fish to local pet shops in exchange for supplies.

Bob has been a member of the Greater Chicago Cichlid Association for six years and was recently elected its president. During those years he has become acquainted with many fish experts. It was at one of these meetings in 1994 that Bob met his wife, Laura.

Through his contacts at the fish club, Bob relates, he has been on three Amazon expeditions. When Bob goes on expeditions, he accompanies about eight people at a time. All of them are specialists in tropical fish, and many are associated with the famous Jacques Costeau group. They go primarily to study fish. His first expedition was in 1995 on the Tapajos River, a wide, deep river in the far eastern part of Brazil near the Atlantic.

Bob states that he had another prize catfish that died in 1997. He caught the fully grown fish while wading through 18 inches of water in the Tapajos River during his 1995 expedition. It is now featured in a text book entitled, *CICHLIDS, The Pictorial Guide, Vol. Two*, by Pablo Tepoot and Ian M. Tepoot. Pablo Tepoot is an author and Florida fish farmer who was introduced to Bob by a mutual friend. Tepoot made an offer Bob couldn't refuse — to have the fish shipped to Florida for studying and photographing for six weeks and then returned safely to Bob. The fish is now forever immortalized in print.

In 1996 he went to the Rio Purus, which is a 3rd order tributary to the Amazon in the far western part of Brazil. There he caught a 4-foot Caiman Crocodile in a swamp while wading around looking for fish.

His last expedition was in 1997 when he and Laura went on their honeymoon to the Rio Utuma in Central Brazil. This was a 10-day camping expedition that cruised the river in the midst of the jungle. They brought back three coolers containing 25 fish. During that expedition, Laura caught a small *Apistogramma*, a variety that never before had been described scientifically.

Bob has become an expert in his hobby and lectures to groups, fish clubs, and his step daughter's class at school. His wife, Laura, has also lectured about fish. Photography is her avocation, and is both a hobby and livelihood. Her love of photography integrates her love of fish. She has an extensive photo collection of fish and the Amazon, some of which are displayed in their home. She has won many prizes in national photo exhibits and competitions.

Fish have also become an integral part of their relaxation therapy. Bob and Laura enjoy turning off all the lights while sitting, watching the fish, and listening to the soothing sound of the bubbling water. Bob has gotten so used to the sound of the fish tanks gurgling that when he goes out of town, he takes a water pump with him. He puts it in a glass or container of water, and the sound helps him to sleep. Without that "white noise," Bob claims, he cannot fall asleep.

Evaluation: Cheryl's interviews and experience with her neighbor make for an interesting profile. Its topical organization (rather than linear) is especially refreshing.

Analysis of Home Circuitry

by Steve Bourgoin
Course: Physical Science 101
Instructor: Joseph Auer

Assignment:
*Study and analyze the level of electrical
supply service for your home.
Provide circuit diagrams and chart tables.*

This research assignment was an exercise to study and analyze the level of electrical supply service for my house. I proceeded to further analyze one individual circuit. Also considered and investigated was circuit grounding and how it relates to safety. Circuit diagrams and chart tables are provided for detailed explanation.

* * *

Prior to this assignment I was aware that electricity existed in every household; however, I was unaware of how it functioned and actually made the devices work and some of the protections it offered. For this assignment, I was to look at the total electrical fuse protection (circuit breaker) of the electrical service provided for our house and to isolate one of those circuits and analyze it. (See table 1 and diagram 1.)

I was aware of having a fuse box in our house, but was not sure of how it actually operates with the various rooms in our house. After reviewing what was to be done for this project, I prepared by looking over chapter eight and also by studying what a fuse box actually does, home electrical circuits in general, and grounding.

Now I know that almost every device in a household is 120v. So I chose the family room as my room of analysis due to the closeness of the main circuit panel or fuse box. (It is in this room.) This particular room has various devices and enough for me to choose for its specs. I determined what was on the family room circuit by shutting off that marked circuit breaker and then plugging into each outlet a small lamp. The lamp did not light on that circuit, and therefore, I identified that circuit as being in the family room. I learned that each device has a nameplate and gives the approximate voltage and power, but that I have to calculate the current in order to obtain all three parameters: amperage, wattage, and voltage. (See tables 1 and 2.)

I further learned that all the circuits in my fuse box are 120v except for our air-conditioner, which is 240v and is rated at 40 amps. I asked my father why this circuit was different. His answer was, "Air

Conditioners have high motor starting current requirements in the compressor, and they are easier to start using 240v. Also, since this part of the Air Conditioner is outside and a good distance from the main fuse box, it is more efficient to power it with 240v rather than 120v, since at 240v the wires to the AC would not have to be as large (wire size) as if it were powered at 120v." I did learn that when you double the voltage, the amperage is cut in half. And since the wire size (diameter) is dependent on the amperage flowing through it, this makes some sense to me.

The other circuits in our fuse panel have an amperage of either 15 or 20 amps. I then computed the total circuit capacity by adding all the listed circuit breakers together. Then I compared it to the main circuit breaker and it was a difference of 200 amps. The circuit capacity totaled to 300 amps and the main circuit or panel rating is 100 amps (a single circuit breaker). The reason for this is because you will most likely never use all the circuits at one time or the total maximum power at one time on any one circuit. An example of this is the family room circuit I studied. The total wattage actually operating is 815w. If you divide this wattage by 120v, the amperage is 6.8 amps. This is far below the circuit breaker rating of 15 amps, even if more lights were used and two to three other small devices were plugged in.

Although I did not study in detail other circuits in the house, it appears that the total power used on any of these other circuits would react the same. In other words, the wattage being used would not approach the circuit breaker rating of that circuit. If it did exceed the rating, it would trip and protect that circuit.

While doing this assignment, I figured out what the real purpose of the circuit breaker is. It functions as a protector for two things: protecting what is plugged into the outlet and the entire circuit (wires) all the way back to the fuse box. If the device that is plugged into that circuit shorts out or overloads that circuit, that circuit breaker will trip if the total amperage draw exceeds the circuit

breaker rating. An example of this would be if an iron has a high current draw and another high current device is plugged into a 15 amp circuit and it exceeds 15 amps, it will trip the breaker and protect the wiring from fire.

As the amperage goes up in circuitry, the wire tends to heat up because of resistance in wire. Every wire has an amperage rating based on its size (diameter) and the insulation rating of the wire covering. If the circuit breaker did not trip due to a malfunction, the high current (heat) will make the wire hot enough to possibly create a fire in the wires or burn through the wires. This would damage the wires and they would have to be replaced, inside the walls. By further evaluating the family room circuit, it was determined that all of the wires are inside of a metal "conduit." In the event of the insulation on the wires catching fire or melting, the conduit should prevent these flames from causing a fire in the walls.

If a circuit breaker would not trip due to a malfunction, it would be possible to burn or damage other wires in the main circuit panel or other circuits, since they are basically all connected. This could be dangerous and expensive.

Upon further study of the family room circuit, it was determined that the wall outlets have three prongs per receptical: two prongs for the power and one round prong for the ground. After reviewing an electrical wiring book, it was determined that this ground prong is connected to the conduit which goes back to the main panel box which is grounded. Also, it was observed that one of the power prongs is wider than the other. This wider prong is connected to the ground prong in the receptical. The purpose of this grounding is to help prevent electrical shock in the event of a short in an appliance or tool that a person would be touching. By making the prongs of different sizes, it forces me to only plug the male plug into the receptacle — correctly. If a short takes place, the circuit breaker will trip, breaking the circuit and there would be no current flow through the appliance or tool to cause an electrical shock.

Summation

The main circuit panel protects the entire house and the individual circuit breakers protect individual circuits, generally for different rooms. It should be noted that the main circuit breaker (100 amp rating) should protect any individual circuit in the event of a direct short and the individual circuit breakers would not trip.

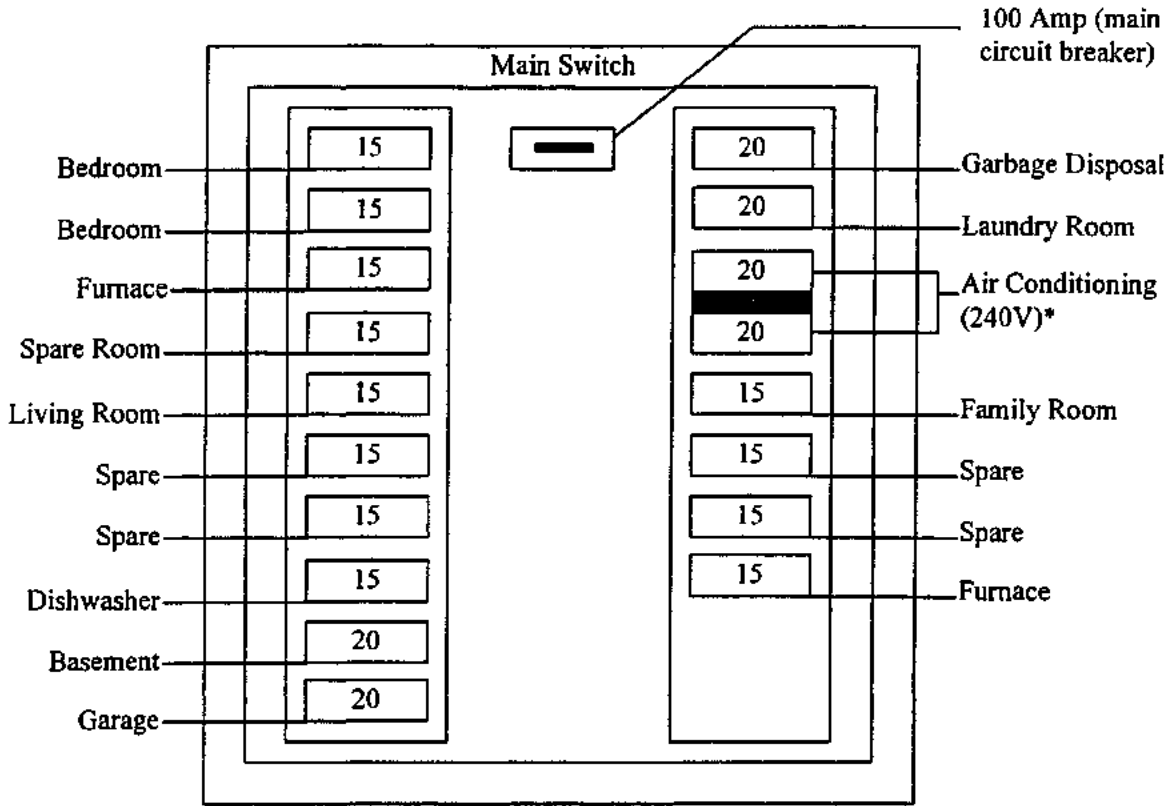
The individual circuit breakers, which are generally 15 or 20 amps, are usually large enough to handle the normal plug-ins used in a house. When all circuit breakers are added together, this value is greater than the 100 amp panel rating since it is not likely that a home would use more than 100 amps of power at the same time.

Grounding is very important for safety — in case someone is holding a device and it shorts out. The way the circuits are designed, and by using grounded or 3-prong plugs, a person should be prevented from getting an electrical shock, which could actually kill a person immediately.

Available in a house are 240 volts to power heavier circuits where a large amount of amperage is used. Common examples that necessitate this higher voltage are an electric dryer, an air-conditioner and an electric stove.

The diagrams, charts and calculations that follow describe in detail the electrical service provided to my home.

Evaluation: *No evaluation was provided.*



* All circuits are 120V except AC, which is 240V.

Diagram 1

Family Room			
Device	V	A	P
T.V.	120 _x	1.042	125 _x
Computer	120 _x	4 _x	480
Monitor	120 _x	1.4 _x	168
Guitar Amp	120 _x	.25 _x	30
CD Player	120 _x	.10	12 _x
Wall Outlets (4)	120 _x	15 _x	1800
Lights	120 _x	.83	100 _x

V=Volts
A=Amps
P=W=Watts

"n_x" indicates information on name plate of device

No "n_x" indicates which spec needed to be computed

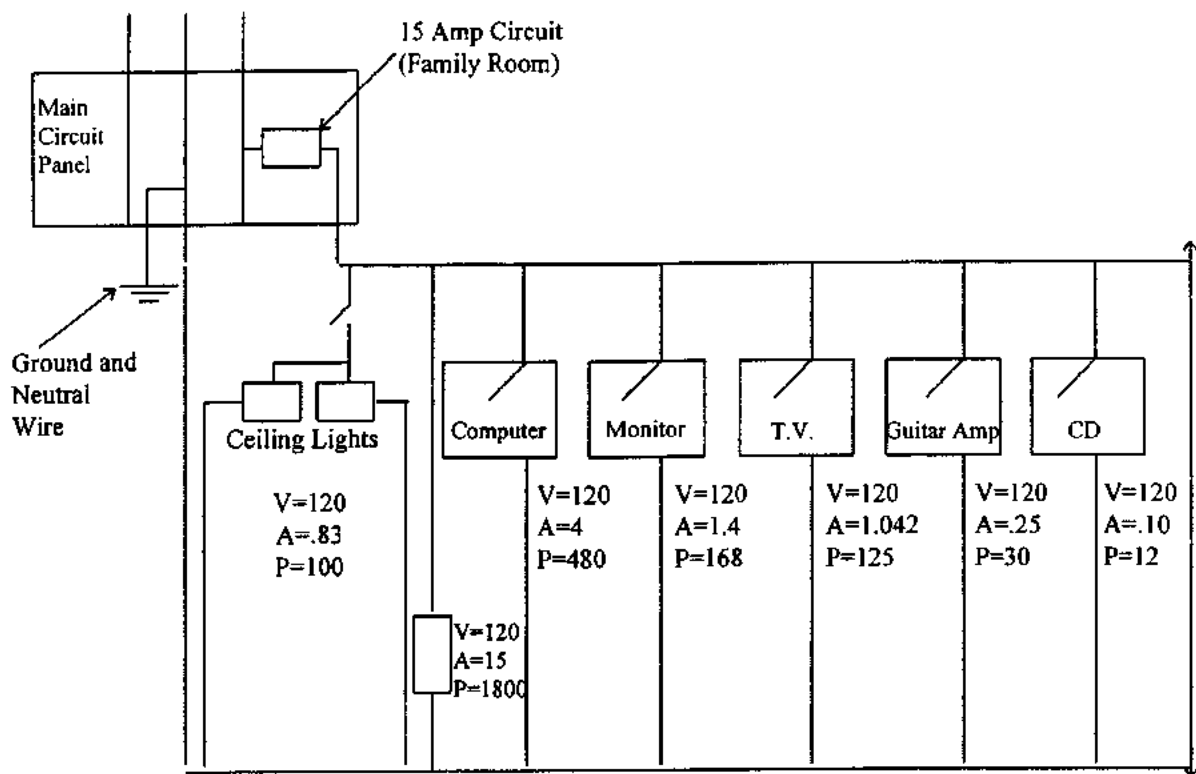
P=V*A
W=P
W/V=A
W/A=V

Table 1 Fuse Box in Family Room (120V/240V Single Phase)

Calculations	
Device	Calculation
T.V.	Given Watts (P)/Volts=Amperage If V=120 and P=125 Let A=1.042
Computer	Given Power=Volts* Amperage If V=120 and A=4 Let P=480
Monitor	Given P=V*A If V=120 and A=1.4 Let P=168
Guitar Amp	Given P=V*A If V=120 and A=.25 Let P=30
CD Player	Given Watts/Volts=Amperage If V=120 and P=12 Let A=.10
Wall Outlet	Given P=V*A If V=120 and A=15 Let P=1800
Ceiling Lights	Given Watts/Volts=Amperage If V=120 and P=100 Let A=.83

Total Power Consumption
Total Power=815 w (watts) (125 + 480 + 168 + 30 + 12 = Total Power)
Total Power Consumption (kilowatt hours) 815W*8 hours=6520 wh (watt hours) 6520/1000=6.5 kwh
Total Cost (per 8-hour period) 6.5 kwh*\$.10494 (for first 400 kwh) = \$0.68

Table 2 Calculations and Total Power Consumption



Electrical Device Symbols

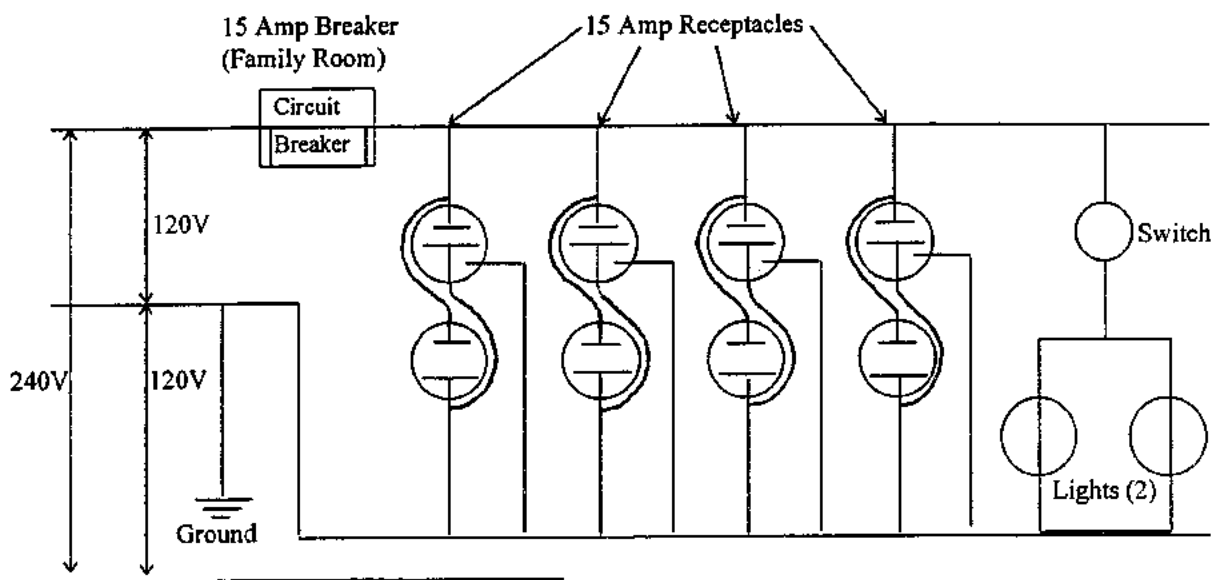


Figure 1 Family Room Circuits—Block Diagram

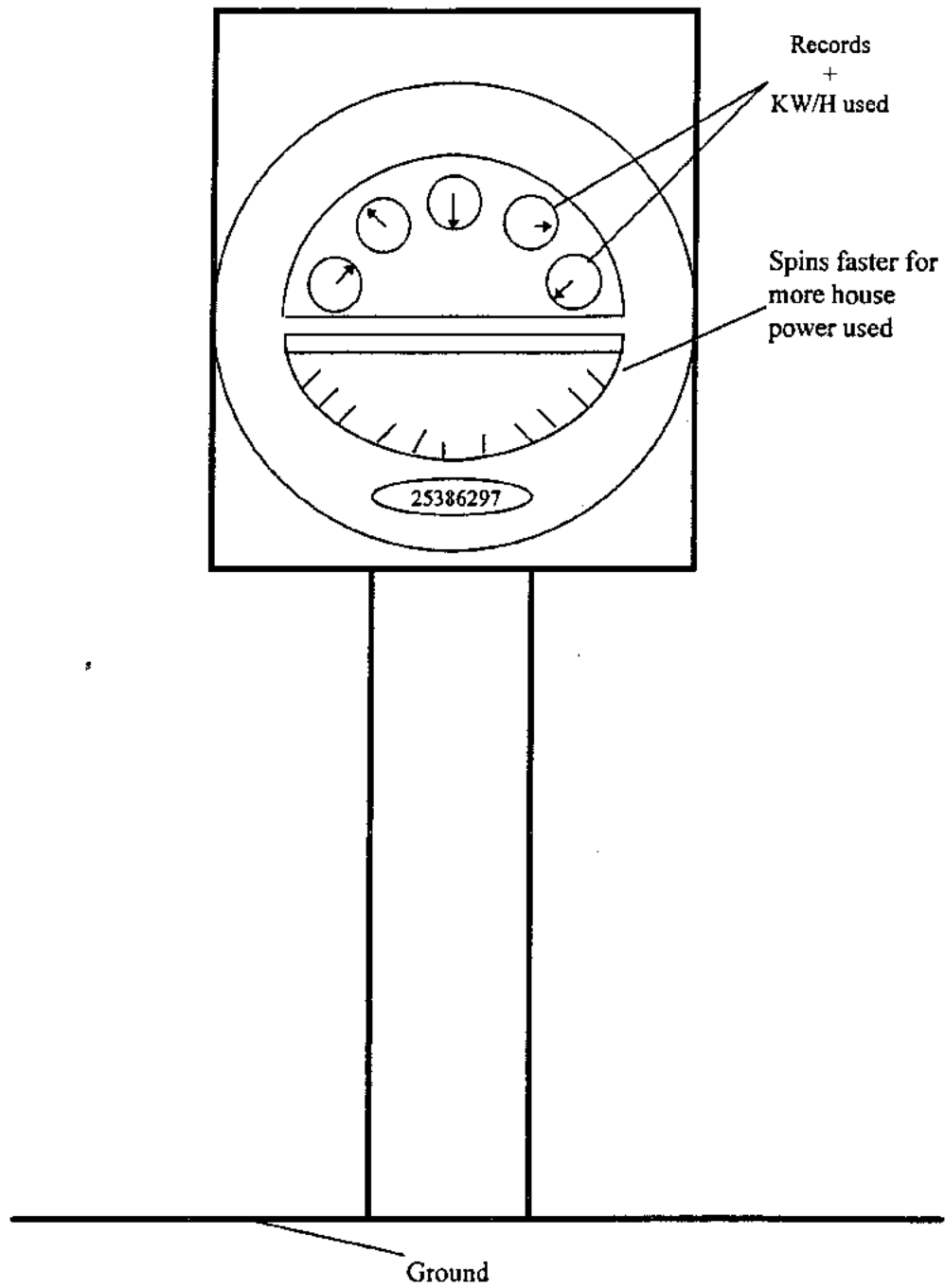


Figure 2 Outside Electric Meter

“ ’Til Death Do Us Part ”

by Kristen Campbell
Course: English 102
Instructor: Lauren Hahn

Assignment:

For their final research project, one suggested topic was, “Compare and contrast Ibsen’s view of traditional marriage in *Hedda Gabler* with the view expressed by Chopin in *The Awakening*.”

In most of the literature we have read this semester, the main female characters have gone insane, committed suicide, or both. In some instances, the character development has shown these options to be obvious ones, as with Edna Pontellier in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*. However for some characters, like Hedda Gabler from Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler*, suicide does not seem to be a reasonable choice for the ending of the story. Emile Durkheim was a sociologist who lived in the late nineteenth century and was a contemporary of both the authors and the time period in which the stories were set. According to the editor’s preface of *Suicide*, statistical information on suicide may be broader and more refined today than Durkheim’s work, yet his research remains the prototype for statistical studies in sociological subjects. In fact some of his tables and their analyses are still used in modern papers (Durkheim 9-11). I chose his work to evaluate the suicides of Hedda and Edna because

the material was contemporary to the authors and is still held to be accurate today. According to Durkheim’s research, both Hedda and Edna were prime candidates for suicide, despite their seeming differences in personality and situations, because of their socialization and society’s restrictions on their lives.

According to Durkheim’s research, there are personality profiles of people who commit suicide. Edna fits the personality profile of the altruistic suicide. The self-destructive impulse is encouraged by “insufficient individuation” (Durkheim 217). Because Edna has spent her life trying to fit into the role that society defined for her while denying herself, when she started to awaken to the needs within herself, she was unable to cope with the effects. She is not enough of an individual to deal with the consequences of breaking the rules of society, and so she meets the challenge of combining her wants with what society allows by killing herself. This way she doesn’t need to continue to deny herself that which she needs to be happy, but she also doesn’t need to bring down the wrath of society on her or her children’s heads. Chopin describes Edna’s situation with the following:

There were days when she was unhappy, she did not know why, — when it did not seem worth while to be glad or sorry, to be alive or dead; when life appeared to her like a grotesque pandemonium and humanity like worms struggling blindly toward inevitable annihilation. She could not work on such a day, nor weave fancies to stir her pulses and warm her blood. (56)

Durkheim’s research shows this to fit with her personality type and explains that, “its characteristic is a condition of melancholic languor which relaxes all the springs of action” (Durkheim 278). He goes on to describe how a total disinterest in all outside stimuli inspires an aversion to activity and thus to life. When a person is unable to emerge from within herself, she deepens the chasm that already separates her from society and thus makes suicide a much easier alternative to crossing the chasm.

Hedda, on the other hand, fits the personality profile of an egoistic suicide. Here the self-destructive impulse is encouraged by "excessive individuation" (Durkheim 217). This allows a state where the ego lives its own life and obeys its own rules. Hedda is such an individual that she takes pot shots at people out of her bedroom window and really doesn't think twice about mercilessly playing with people's lives. When a woman has become detached from society, she encounters less resistance to suicide in herself, and she does likewise when social integration is too strong (Durkheim 217). Hedda describes her own situation in the final act of the play with the following:

In other words, I'm in your power, Judge. From now on, you've got your hold over me... Nevertheless, I'm in your power. Dependent on your will, and your demands. Not free. Still not free! [*Rises passionately.*] No. I couldn't bear that. No. (1291)

Durkheim says there is another sort of person who commits suicide with her action being

essentially passionate... this inspiring passion which dominates their last moment is... neither enthusiasm, religious, moral or political faith, nor any of the military virtues; it is anger and all the emotions customarily associated with disappointment. (284)

Thus both Hedda and Edna were suicidal bombs just waiting for their fuses to be lit.

Because the socialization process of childhood has so much to do with potentiality of suicidal tendencies, one of the first things we should look at in comparing these characters is the information provided on their childhood and adolescence. Edna was used to being a solitary soul. As Chopin put it,

Even as a child she had lived her own small life all within herself. At a very early period she had apprehended instinctively the dual life — that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions. (14)

In the early part of the novel we learn through a conversation between Edna and Madame Ratignolle that Edna grew up in Kentucky, the daughter of a strict Presbyterian minister. Edna reveals in the conversation her distaste for church services by referring to them as follows: "...I was running away from prayers, from the Presbyterian service, read in a spirit of gloom by my father that chills me yet to think of" (Chopin 17). We also learn that Edna's mother died early in her childhood and she was raised without physical expressions of love or affection. Her relationship with her younger sister was one filled with quarrels and the relationship with her older sister was restrained due to both of them being reserved. She had occasional girlfriends, but they were just as reserved as Edna herself was. She was also prone to infatuations with unattainable men.

Hedda's past is a bit more obscure than Edna's. We know that she comes from the old aristocracy and that she has taken a step down financially in life. As Aunt Juju put it in the first act of the play, "General Gabler's daughter! Think of what she was accustomed to when the General was alive" (Ibsen 1235). We are also told that she is "a real lady. Wants everything just so" (Ibsen 1235). Hedda was pursued by just about every eligible man in society, but she was not interested in having a physical relationship. She reveals in the second act that she married Tessman because he offered commitment which was "more than my other admirers were prepared to do" (Ibsen 1256). She had a romance with Loevborg that didn't involve any physically intimate contact, and when it ended badly, she shot at him through her bedroom window. We also learn about her relationship with Thea when they attended school together. Their relationship is summed up by the fact that Hedda had threatened to burn off Thea's hair (Ibsen 1246). In Act Three, when Hedda burns the manuscript she says, "I'm burning your child, Thea! You with your beautiful wavy hair. The child Eilert Loevborg gave you. I'm burning it! I'm burning your child" (Ibsen 1282). Hedda is not a woman accustomed to friendly feelings or

demonstrations of emotion. In fact in this scene, she sounds like a sociopath.

Durkheim's research showed that married people had an increased incidence of suicide by a ratio of almost three to one (Durkheim 176), so the next area we should look at is the relationship these women had with their husbands. Chopin describes Edna's marriage to Leonce as "purely an accident" (18). She was pursued by Leonce during her infatuation with the great tragedian and his "absolute devotion flattered her" (18). It is interesting to note that her marriage choice was a rebellion against her family's opposition to marriage with a catholic, and these things combined with her disbelief in romance and concept of the reality of marriage led her to accept Leonce for her husband. Chopin describes Edna's acceptance of the married state as "she felt she would take her place with a certain dignity in the world of reality, closing the portals forever behind her upon the realm of romance and dreams" (19). The degree with which Edna thinks she has given up her fantasy is demonstrated with the statement, "she grew fond of her husband, realizing with some unaccountable satisfaction that no trace of passion or excessive and fictitious warmth colored her affection, thereby threatening its dissolution" (Chopin 19).

Hedda holds her husband in contempt. When talking to Judge Brack in the second act about why she married Tessimson, she says, "And when he came and begged me on his bended knees to be allowed to love and to cherish me, I didn't see why I shouldn't let him" (Ibsen 1256). She married him because he offered more than her other admirers were willing to. The most telling comment Hedda has to offer on George's good qualities is that, "there's nothing exactly ridiculous about him" (Ibsen 1256), which is not exactly a glowing description. The marriage between Hedda and George is more of a business deal than a romance, and when she realizes that George will not be able to keep his end of the bargain because of a shortage of funds, she tells him not to worry, that she still has her pistols to amuse herself with (1253). Moreover, the comment Judge

Brack draws from Hedda when speaking of her unhappiness is direct and clear: "Why on earth should I be happy? Can you give me a reason?" (Ibsen 1258). Surely, that is not the remark of a woman who celebrates matrimony.

Of course, we can also look at the feelings about marriage from the other parties, namely Leonce and George. When looking at Leonce, the most telling statement about his feelings towards Edna is "looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property" (Chopin 4). Not only is she a belonging to him rather than a person, but he also knows that their world revolves around him. When he goes to play a game of Billiards at Klein's, he takes it for granted that she will accommodate her schedule to his. He doesn't bother to tell her whether he will be home for dinner or not because it depends on whether he will find better company than hers. It is most telling of the situation that "he did not say this, but she understood it, and laughed, nodding goodbye to him" (Chopin 5). Not only is she an object, but it is Edna's sole responsibility to take care of the children. After all, "he could not be in two places at once; making a living for his family on the street, and staying at home to see that no harm befell them" (Chopin 7). Leonce has a tendency to act like a petulant child when Edna does not behave as he believes she should. For example, there is the incident when he returns from Klein's hotel late at night, and she is not as responsive as he wants her to be. In retaliation for her "half utterances," he makes her wake up to check on an imagined illness in one of the children.

George has no clue as to what is going on with Hedda or as to what she is capable of or desires out of life. He is more comfortable with his books and research and even spent a good part of his honeymoon in archives doing research. He seems to want to please Hedda which is demonstrated when he says, "I'm so happy for Hedda's sake that we've managed to get this house. Before we became engaged she often used to say this was the only house in town she felt she could really bear to live in" (Ibsen 1238). Unfortunately, he is out of his

league in trying to please a woman who is incapable of being pleased. His obtuseness of her desires is amply demonstrated in the exchange between him, Hedda, and Aunt Juju about the possibility of Hedda being pregnant. He is totally unaware of the discomfort the idea causes Hedda and does nothing to head off his aunt's exuberance on the subject.

Another area that demonstrates the difference in individualization of these women is in Hedda's and Edna's feelings towards children and motherhood. Durkheim's research shows that suicidal tendencies almost double for women who are married with children over women who are married without children (Durkheim 397). Edna was not a "mother-woman." Mother-women were easy to spot, "fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood" (Chopin 9). Edna was more concerned with herself than with obsessing over her children. Although she didn't think it necessary to spend her summer preparing winter clothes for her children, she did place her family above herself in that she would give up anything but herself for her children. She chose suicide over abandonment of her family because it was the only compromise that would allow her to keep the necessary things without doing irreparable damage to her children.

Where Edna fulfilled the role of mother, though admittedly not to the satisfaction of Leonce, Hedda has no desire to play the part. In fact, she is pregnant and refuses to face the fact. She gets distraught whenever the possibility is mentioned and seems to view impending motherhood as impending doom. After the discussion between Aunt Juju, George and Hedda in Act One about the possibility of her being pregnant, she looks out the window at the trees. When George asks her what she's looking at, she replies, "Only the leaves. They're so golden. And withered" (Ibsen 1242). The possibility of starting a family seems to seal the tomb on her youth and the hope for happiness.

Both women also deal with "other men" in their lives. With Edna, it is a matter of trying to fill a void in her life that she only became aware of when

Mademoiselle Reisz's music awakened "strange, new voices" (Chopin 62) inside of her. She obsesses over her alleged love for Robert and yet says herself that, "It was not that she dwelt upon details of their acquaintance, or recalled in any special or peculiar way his personality; it was his being, his existence, which dominated her thought" (Chopin 52). With Robert's abandonment when he went to Mexico, Edna turns to Alcee Arobin who was "absolutely nothing to her. Yet his presence, his manners, the warmth of his lips upon her hand had acted like a narcotic upon her" (Chopin 74). Edna feels no love for the men in her life, but rather for the feelings they evoke in her. She is feeling more and more alienated from the world around her, and she uses the men to try to ground herself back in reality.

Where Edna takes a lover and desires to run away with another man, Hedda is a cold woman who prefers to cultivate a cold relationship in order to torture the "other man" in her life. Eilert Loevborg was an old admirer of Hedda's, and she now resents the relationship he shares with Thea. She does everything in her power to destroy the relationship, and when that does not seem to work, her response is to burn his book and to urge him to kill himself. She offers him one of her pistols as a "souvenir" (Ibsen 1282). This is not an action of a woman feeling passionate love for a soul mate. Hedda also demonstrates her aversion to physical intimacy in her many conversations with the judge. In the second act of the play she has trouble even referring to spending the night with George. Instead of saying morning, noon, and night, she is forced to say "every minute of one's life" (Ibsen 1255). The prospect of being forced into a physical relationship with the judge is the last straw for Hedda, and she chooses suicide over intimacy with a man because she relates intimacy with submission and loss of control (Ibsen 1291).

Society itself allowed no alternative to suicide for these women. Most women at this point in history were the property of their husbands. Under the Napoleonic code, which Louisiana law was based on, anything that a woman possessed, including

inheritances, money earned, and even clothes worn, was actually the property of her husband (Culley 120). Thus had either woman decided to leave her husband, she would have been penniless and naked both literally and figuratively. According to the laws of society, a woman was the equivalent of a child or an insane person. She was incapable of giving testimony in a court of law or to enter into contracts (Culley 120). So once married, a woman was chained to her husband with no real recourse open to her. The type of behavior expected of her included such wonderful things as “never let your husband have cause to complain that you are more agreeable abroad than at home” (Etiquette/Advice 122). A woman was expected to be all that is goodness and light both in public and in her husband’s presence and the home was supposed to be “the nucleus around which her affections should revolve” (Etiquette/Advice 122). So we have two women who are intelligent adults trapped in a life that scorns intelligence and adulthood in women, and they are being told that their children and their husbands are far more important than themselves. Add to this the fact that there was no such thing as divorce for “irreconcilable differences” a century ago, and Hedda and Edna end up in relationships that are unbearable and inescapable. Neither woman had judicial grounds for seeking a divorce, and even if they did, they would have had no way to support themselves outside of the marriage. Trying to reconcile these outside pressures with their internal feelings was what drove Hedda and Edna to suicide.

So there are many differences between Hedda and Edna on the surface. Their personalities are worlds apart, but they face the same problems. They are both trapped in unhappy marriages with no outlet for their feelings or their frustrations. Neither could satisfy her desires for romance or for the life of their dreams. Above all else, society allows them no choice but to suffer on or to end it all. As Durkheim put it:

No living being can be happy or even exist unless his needs are sufficiently proportioned to his means. In other words, if his needs require more than can be granted, or

even merely something of a different sort, they will be under continual friction and can only function painfully. Movements incapable of production without pain tend not to be reproduced. (246)

Both women, for different reasons, have no choice but to commit suicide because to continue living would be to continue the pain. Although Hedda and Edna have different backgrounds, different views of children and motherhood, different attitudes toward friendship, and different attitudes toward lovers, they have their pain in common. This common ground is what makes suicide a reasonable choice—an appropriate conclusion in each great literary work.

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Evaluation: *Kristen cleverly focuses on the two protagonists’ suicides and reasons leading up to them as a way of evaluating their marriages. Her discussion of Durkheim, too, is effective.*

Sula

by Pam Casali

Course: Literature 115

Instructor: Joseph Sternberg

Assignment:

Explore the friendship between Sula and Nel.

*In your view, is it a valid representation of
friendship between women in general.*

In responding, use textual evidence.

Sula Peace and Nel Wright shared an unconventional friendship throughout Toni Morrison's novel, *Sula*. Their friendship was not a valid representation of friendship between "women in general," but when consideration is given to the time this story takes place and the family life of the women involved, their friendship does not seem so unusual. It was a friendship based on mutual needs and circumstances beyond their control. They were bound by common childhood experiences along with tragedy and extreme loneliness. Sula and Nel had very different personalities, and would take different paths that would lead back to each other at the end of the story.

In the beginning, Nel had noticed Sula at Garfield Primary five years before their actual meeting. They had never played with each other "because [Nel's] mother said that Sula's mother was sooty" (Morrison 29). When Nel returned from her trip with her mother to attend her great-grandmother's funeral, she had a "new found me-ness [that] gave her the strength to cultivate a friend in spite of her mother" (29). Nel's mother, Helene, was domineering and "any enthusiasms that little Nel showed were calmed by [Helene] until she drove her daughter's imagination underground" (18). So when Sula and Nel finally met in the playground at school "they felt the ease and comfort of old friends.... Their meeting was fortunate, for it let them use each other to grow on" (52). The girls were twelve years old at the time and shared the unfortunate distinction that they were "daughters of distant mothers and incomprehensible fathers (Sula's because he was dead; Nel's because he wasn't); they found in each other's eyes the intimacy they were looking for" (52). Right from the beginning "their friendship was as intense as it was sudden. They found relief in each other's personality. Although both were unshaped, formless things, Nel seemed stronger and more consistent than Sula..." (53).

Unlike Nel's mother, Sula's mother, Hannah, was detached and uncaring. Sula's grandmother, Eva, ran the household and it was rumored that she lost her leg on purpose in a train accident in order to

collect the insurance money. Sula also lived with the knowledge that her grandmother burned her own son alive in the middle of the night in an attempt to free him from his destructive drug habit. Adding to these traumas, one day Sula overheard her mother talking to her friends about the "problems of child rearing" (56) at which time she heard her mother say that she "just don't like her" (57). It was Nel's voice that "[pulled Sula] away from dark thoughts back into the bright, hot daylight" (57). As a consequence, I believe Sula never felt sure about her mother's love for her and this conversation affected her for the rest of her life. Later, Sula would idly stand by and watch her mother burn to death in a yard fire.

Not only did Nel and Sula have different personalities, the atmosphere of their home life was exactly opposite:

Nel, who regarded the oppressive neatness of her home with dread, felt comfortable in it with Sula, who loved it and would sit on the red-velvet sofa for ten to twenty minutes at a time—still as dawn. As for Nel, she preferred Sula's woolly house, where a pot of something was always cooking on the stove; where the mother, Hannah, never scolded or gave directions; where all sorts of people dropped in; where newspapers were stacked in the hallway, and dirty dishes left for hours at a time in the sink, and where a one-legged grandmother named Eva handed you goobers from deep inside her pockets or read you a dream. (29)

As young girls, their friendship was playful and adventuresome. "They [explored] everything that interested them, from one-eyed chickens...to the labels on Tar Baby's wine bottles" (55). They became interested in boys at the same time and would walk down to Edna Finch's Mellow House together looking for attention and mischief. They were having fun and "in the safe harbor of each other's company they could afford to abandon the ways of other people and concentrate on their own perceptions of things" (55). The girls shared normal

everyday occurrences growing up together at a critical time in their lives. But they also experienced racism and harassment from the white boys on their way home from school together. On one occasion Sula was so scared she "slashed off only the tip of her finger" (54) to prove to them that she could hurt them as well as herself. Sula "behaved emotionally and irresponsibly and left it to others to straighten out. And when fear struck her, she did unbelievable things" (101). This was just one example of Sula's irresponsible action at a time of crisis.

The girls shared a secret tragedy throughout their lives as well: On a hot summer day while playing down by the river, a young boy named Chicken Little came by. The girls were having a little fun with him and teasing him. They helped him climb a tree and then "Sula picked him up by his hands and swung him outward then around and around" (60). "He slipped from her hands and sailed away out over the water" (61) and never resurfaced. At Chicken Little's funeral "there was a space, a separateness, between [Nel and Sula]" (64). At the graveyard "they held hands and knew that only the coffin would lie in the earth; the bubbly laughter and the press of fingers in the palm would stay above ground forever" (66). They would never forget what happened that day.

As time progressed, Nel was the first to get married. I believe this left Sula feeling the same "profound loneliness" (51) she had felt as a young girl. She had lost her best friend, her other half. What was she to do without her best friend? "Their friendship was so close, they themselves had difficulty distinguishing one's thoughts from the other's" (83). She once again acted irresponsibly and left town and did not return until ten years later.

When Sula finally returned ten years later, Nel had the feeling that

[I]t was she alone who saw this magic, she did not wonder at it. She knew it was all due to Sula's return to the Bottom. It was like getting the use of an eye back, having a cataract removed. Her old friend had come

home. Sula. Who made her laugh, who made her see old things with new eyes, in whose presence she felt clever, gentle and a little raunchy. Sula whose past she had lived through and with whom the present was a constant sharing of perceptions....(95)

Their friendship picked up right where it left off upon Sula's return. They laughed until tears ran down their faces and Nel "felt new, soft and new" (98).

The sad outcome of Sula's return was when she slept with Nel's husband, Jude. Sula unfortunately did not view sex as a sacred act between two people in love; she used it to fill her loneliness without thinking of the consequences.

[Sula] had no thought at all of causing Nel pain when she bedded down with Jude. They had always shared the affection of other people: compared how a boy kissed, what line he used with one and then the other. Marriage, apparently, had changed all that, but having had no intimate knowledge of marriage, having lived in a house with women who thought all men available, she was ill prepared for the possessiveness of the one she felt close to. (119)

Moreover, Sula's impression of sex came from watching her mother "step so easily into the pantry and emerge looking precisely as she did when she entered, only happier" (44) after having sex with the married men of the Bottom. This reckless act of Sula's was what ended their friendship until three years later when Nel visited Sula on her deathbed and said to her, "I heard you were sick. Anything I can do for you?" (138). They finally confronted each other for the last time and settled their grievances. Later, as Sula lay dying, she "felt her face smiling. 'Well, I'll be damned,' she thought, 'it didn't even hurt. Wait'll I tell Nel'" (149).

Finally, at the end of the story after Sula's funeral, Nel came to the realization that:

"All that time, all that time, I thought I was missing Jude." And the loss pressed down on her chest and came up into her throat. "We was girls together," she said as though explaining something. "O Lord, Sula," she cried, "girl, girl, girlgirlgirl." (174)

Their friendship had its ups and downs, but in the end, both women realized how much the other person meant in their lives. *Sula* is a story of friendship that was by no means common or perfect, yet it was a true friendship experienced by two women. It was a friendship necessary for two girls to survive their adolescence. But, at the same time, it was a friendship that took an unfortunate turn and was never the same again.

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Evaluation: Ms. Casali responds directly to the assignment, provides plentiful textual support, and writes a clear, economical and orderly essay.

The Story I Can't Forget

Going Out in a Blaze of Glory

by Paul Casbarian

Course: Journalism 130

Instructor: Gail Cohen

Assignment:

In the tradition of journalistic recollections, students were asked to write "The Story I Can't Forget." Students were of such diverse ages, and the subject matter covered was mind-boggling!

It is an unfortunate bi-product of aging that as one grows older, he or she accumulates many stories that cannot be forgotten. One such story I have earnestly tried to forget was again raised from the dark of the priests burning themselves to death in Viet Nam, especially Thich Quang Duc, the first to meet a fiery death for his beliefs.

With a simple "yes," my mind went back to a day in June, 1963, in Hue. At the time and for years afterward the occasion had no real historical significance to me. It was merely another hellish moment in a hellish situation.

I was 20 years old and going on my third year in Army intelligence. I had been attached to the embassy in Bangkok for 14 months when the prime minister (dictator) of Thailand decided our little band of spies was getting a bit too large. The next

thing I knew I was out of my lush quarters at Seri Court and in a tent in Phu Bai, Viet Nam. This turn of events brought me face to face with my own mortality, as well as giving me a front row seat to one of the most newsworthy moments in history.

As was our normal predilection, when not interrogating some poor sot of a Viet Cong unfortunate enough to come into our clutches, Mike Simpson, Mike Case and I were in our favorite bar in Hue. Case was the first to notice the ruckus outside the bar, emanating from a veritable parade of saffron-robed Buddhist priests. Never ones to shirk our duty as nosy, albeit ugly Americans we went into the street, beers in hand.

At that time in the Viet Nam War's history, we were not uniformed. For all intents and purposes, we were civilian members of the Joint United States Military Advisory Group. To anyone who inquired, we were truck drivers. This being the case, we were more or less ignored by the local populace. As we joined the crowd, which included a large contingent of photographers, this day would be somewhat different however. A young priest stepped forward, sat down cross-legged in the street, poured a can of gas over his head and struck a match. His death did not take long, and the crowd of onlookers, ourselves included, stood in stunned silence as the flames died out, and left a charred body laying on the cobble stones. The two Mikes and I looked at each other, revulsed, and suddenly very sober. Our job had already made us older than our years. As we stood in the steaming heat, I think we all aged another 10 years in that moment.

At the time, I did not know why some nut would do this to himself, nor did I think of it as a significant act. Other priests were holding banners, but I did not read Vietnamese, and therefore had no idea what they said. I gathered theirs was a protest of some sort, but to what extent was a mystery to me. Nor did I contemplate the possible future ramifications of the act. It was no more, nor less, than my very cynical mind thought of the world in general, a world which at that time was best viewed through an alcohol-induced haze. Much later in life would I

come to view the moment as my first experience with the power of media. Had the priest's act been isolated, he would have been one more idiotic protester whose exploit would die with him. The media, however, made this act one which would end in the death of South Viet Nam's dictator, and ultimately the withdrawal of American troops from the country. To me, at the time, he was just another nutcase, whose form of death made me want to puke my beer.

Until my son brought the memory back I hadn't thought of it in 25 years. It is one of those unforgettable moments which cannot be shared with anyone, and which we try with all of our willpower to blot out, but never can.

Evaluation: Paul's haunting memories of Vietnam are written with power, grace and clarity. I find it amazing. Paul tells so vivid a story in barely three pages — the mark of a sensitive, focused writer.

Lessons from Harry Chapin

by Steven R. Casstevens
Course: English 101
Instructor: Jack Dodds

Assignment:

Write a narrative essay in the autobiographer's role. In a series of vignettes, describe a process of significant self discovery and change.

I'm playing catch in the backyard with my 5 year old son Grant. He's smiling like a Cheshire cat, proud as can be that he's playing catch with his dad. He doesn't want to stop. Neither do I. My wife, like the T.V. reporter she used to be, is on the deck catching every moment on video. I can't remember ever seeing my son so happy.

The day before, Grant had asked me to play catch, and my answer was as it has usually been. "Sorry buddy. I've had a long day and I'm beat. I just want to relax for awhile, okay?"

"That's okay" he said. "Maybe some other time." What an answer from a 5 year old.

*"My child arrived just the other day,
He came to the world in the usual way,
But there were planes to catch, and bills to pay.
He learned to walk while I was away.
And he was talking 'fore I knew it, and as he grew,
He said 'I'm gonna be like you dad.
You know I'm gonna be like you.'"**

It's 1963, and I'm the one who's 5 years old. My dad doesn't have the time to play catch with me. He's a hard worker. He's up before sunrise and off to work building homes. He's never back home until after sunset. On the weekends he's so tired; besides he has to do all the bookkeeping. I try my best to understand. He never seems to have time to do fun stuff with me.

*"And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon,
Little Boy Blue and the man in the moon.
'When you coming home Dad?' 'I don't know when,
But we'll get together then.
You know we'll have a good time then.'"*

Later when I'm 9 years old and I really want to play Little League, I try to hit balls and catch, but I'm no good. No one really wants a kid on his team who can't hit or catch. My dad doesn't have the time to teach me. I get on the team and then just sit on the bench. I suck. I don't want to play (but really I do). I don't think I ever played.

**"Cat's in the Cradle." written by Sandy and Harry Chapin, copyright 1974
© by Story Songs, Ltd.

Then I'm eleven years old and would love to play basketball in school. It comes naturally to my older brother. I just love to play but can't get the hang of it. Dad doesn't have time to shoot baskets with me. He sure has time to drink beer with his friends on weekends, or play poker on Saturday nights.

*"My son turned 10 just the other day.
He said 'Thanks for the ball dad, c'mon let's play.
Can you teach me to throw?' I said 'Not today.
I've got a lot to do.' He said 'That's okay.'
And as he walked away, he smiled and he said,
'I'm gonna be like him, yeah.
You know I'm gonna be like him.'"*

It's October 18th, 1992, and my son Grant Dalton Casstevens is born. I haven't cried in 20 years, but I'm so happy that I have a boy. He's sick and he's taken away before I get a chance to see him. He's in an incubator for days with monitors and wires and needles. I'm so worried about him. I tell myself I'll be the best dad. He gets out of the hospital and we can take him home. We try our best to survive the next 12 months with colic. He doesn't sleep for over a 2 hour period for months, always crying and screaming.

My parents still only live about an hour away. They're always calling and giving me grief for not coming down to visit. "You're only an hour away," my dad says. "Your mom sure would like to see you and the kids."

"We are very busy," I tell him. "You know, You're only an hour away too," I say.

*"I've long since retired and my son's moved away.
I called him up just the other day.
I said 'I'd like to see you, if you don't mind.'
He said 'I'd love to dad, if I could find the time.
You see the new job's a hassle and the kid's got the
flu, but it's sure nice talking to you, dad.
It's been sure nice talking to you.'"*

As Grant gets older, I work more. My job is stressful and I work a lot of overtime. I am in a unique position and I have the opportunity to real-

ly move up the ranks. I put in a lot of "extra" time that I don't get paid for, but that's my work ethic. I'm also doing charity work and sustaining a part-time job. I hate to turn down the money. I don't see my kids very often though. Then there's another promotion at work, and more overtime when I can get it. With the mortgage payment, new car payment, and all the other bills, I get all the overtime I can at work. When I get the bills paid, then I'll take a break.

*"And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon,
Little Boy Blue and the man in the moon.
'When you coming home dad?' 'I don't know when,
But we'll get together then.
You know we'll have a good time then.'"*

I'm home late. Dinner's already over. I barely get in the door and the kids are all over me like puppies in a pet shop, hoping to get picked up.

"Hey dad, look at this drawing I did."

"Yeah, that's nice Grant," I tell him, barely looking at it.

"Want to look at my spelling from school?" Stephanie squeals.

"Look!" I yell, "Can I please just get my coat off and relax for a minute?" I don't even notice how their shoulders drop, their smiles fade, and they walk away and give their dad some room (or do I?).

"They do that all the time" I tell my wife. "I would just like two minutes to get my coat off and relax."

*"And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon.
Little Boy Blue and the man in the moon.
'When you coming home dad?' 'I don't know when,
But we'll get together then, yeah.
You know we'll have a good time then.'"*

So here we are, back to the present. I came home from work today, and Grant ran up and gave me the biggest hug. He squeezed me like a vise, and said, "I really missed you while you were at work today. I miss you every day you're not here."

I had a huge lump in my throat. Then his next words hit me like a punch that I should have seen coming for years.

"Do you have time to play catch with me today?" Not "can we play catch?" but "do you have time?" I had to walk away and go to the bedroom so he wouldn't see the tears welling up in my eyes. I've been such a fool all these years. I wonder how long I would have let this go on if it weren't for that little guy being so smart and understanding. I love him. I came back downstairs with my glove.

"All right!" he yelled. He ran up the stairs as fast as his little legs could move and came back down with his glove and ball. We've been playing catch for almost a half hour now. I feel incredible, like Grant's been born all over again.

That night when I kissed him goodnight, he said, "Thanks for taking time to play catch with me dad." "I'll always have time for you pal," I told him.

*"And as he hung up the phone, it occurred to me,
He'd grown up just like me.
My boy was just like me."*

No way, I told myself that night. I'm going to be different, and so will Grant.

Evaluation: Using description, dialogue, and the lyrics of Harry Chapin's well-known song, Steve tells a vivid, dramatic story of what can be called a "life lesson." He writes with great feeling.

An Expensive and Exhausting Trip

by Xun Chen

Course: English as a Second Language
Instructor: Ilona Sala

Assignment:

The assignment was to write about a frustrating experience the student had encountered since arriving in the U.S.

My daughter's first Chicago trip was very expensive and exhausting. Three years ago, we lived in Sterling, which is a small town about 100 miles away from Chicago. One day, I decided to visit Chicago with my family. This was a special trip for my daughter because she had just come from China the week before. I spent a whole day planning this trip. The day before I left, I checked my car and filled it with gas. The car looked good at the time.

We got up early and ate our breakfast quickly. We wanted to have enough time in downtown Chicago to let my daughter enjoy her trip. Everything was fine when we began. My daughter was very excited; everything was new to her. She was eager on her first trip to Chicago. I introduced the corn fields and small towns to my daughter when we passed them. Sometimes she talked to my wife and me. She said that when she came to Chicago by air, she had not seen anything because it was night. Now she could see everything from the car's windows. We passed the toll plaza in Aurora and continued to drive. Fifteen minutes later, however, I heard a noise from my car. Then, my car lost power. I tried to steer my poor car out off the highway and stop it. My daughter felt very sad and said, "This is my fault because I wanted to go to Chicago." My wife tried to calm my daughter. She told my daughter it was our car's problem. I had a really tough situation. I didn't have any experience as a mechanic. I did not know what I should do about the mess. Suddenly, I remembered my insurance company had emergency road service. I found the telephone number, but I did not have a phone. I checked the map and found that we were close to the toll plaza in Oak Brook. A phone must be there. I walked several miles to the toll plaza and called the insurance company. I was told that my agent would contact the nearest car dealer to help me.

When I walked back to my car, I found a tow truck near the car. A mechanic had been sent by the car dealer to help us. The mechanic towed my car to the dealer's workshop. I thought my troubles were over, but they were just beginning. After checking the car, the dealer told me if I was going

to have the car fixed in his workshop, it would cost more than four thousand dollars and several days. I thought that price was too high, even more than the cost of the car. I could not pay so much, nor could I stay here to wait for my car to be fixed. So I decided to leave the car dealer. "Can I drive my car back?" I asked. They did some minor maintenance on my car and told me that I could go, but my car could break again at anytime. Since I wanted to go home, I left the car dealer.

At first, my car worked well on the highway. However, some twenty minutes later, I heard some noise from the engine. I exited the highway right away. I really did not know what I should do then. "How do I drive back to Sterling safely?" I thought. We were in an impoverished area. Some people were watching us unkindly. "We should leave this place as soon as possible," I said to myself. I could not leave my car to look for a phone for help because my wife and daughter could be in danger. We all could not leave our car because our car could disappear when we left. "What should I do?" I said. I tried to start my car. That was my only hope, but the car did not work. I waited and tried again and again. Finally it turned over. I thought I could drive home even though my car had problems. I drove slowly back to the highway and moved cautiously toward Sterling. On the highway, I heard a lot of car horns behind us because I was driving under the speed limit. I didn't care about these horn sounds and continued to drive on my way. However, I heard a "boom" sound from the engine in ten minutes, and there was black smoke coming from my car's hood. I couldn't control the car because it had totally lost power. I opened the hood and found that there was a big hole in the engine. The car was totally destroyed. I knew I could not drive it any more. "How do we get to the toll plaza to get help?" I thought. I remembered I watched a movie where people could hitchhike by standing with the right hand's thumb out. So, I stood by my broken car and held up my thumb to the passing cars.

Although I held my thumb up for a while, no passing cars stopped to help us. I thought I might be making the wrong signal. Perhaps the thumb should be down. Then, I held my thumb down to the passing cars for a while. Many cars passed us, but no one stopped to help us. I was confused. So I held my thumb up and down alternately. I was so disappointed that no passing cars helped us. Finally, I did not hold my thumb up anymore. To my surprise, a car suddenly stopped before us. A young man asked us if we needed help. I told him that we needed a ride to the toll plaza. He was very kind and invited us to get in his car. To get us to the toll plaza, he paid toll fees twice and also drove out of his way.

It was evening when we reached the toll plaza. I called one of my friends in Sterling. He told us not to worry; he would come pick up us. Two hours later, my friend came to the toll plaza of Aurora. I thought I needed to leave my car on the highway, but my friend suggested that I keep my car. He said it might not be as expensive to fix it in Sterling. We called the police and found out where our car was being towed. When we finally went back home, it was almost midnight. The first thing we did was look for food. We had not eaten anything since early morning. Two days later, I spent two hundred dollars to tow my car back to Sterling. A week later, I spent twelve hundred dollars more to totally fix my poor car. What an expensive trip! I will never forget it.

Evaluation: Although Xun doesn't mean this paper to be humorous, it is. He guides us through his experience and shows us how peculiar some of our gestures are. His chronological ordering and wonderful details allow us to relive his experience and chuckle at an experience that could happen to anyone, but is worse for someone who doesn't know American culture.

Female-Female Bonds in Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*

by Margaret Curio

Course: Honors Literature 223

(Minority Literature)

Instructor: Andrew Wilson

Assignment:

Write a literary analysis.

Gloria Naylor comments on the importance of female bonds and relationships in her novel *The Women of Brewster Place*. Brewster Place is a predominately female community, which conveniently allows the reader to examine many relationships between women, and at the same time look at the state of the community as a whole. I would like to address all of these issues as they appear in two of Naylor's short stories: "Etta Mae Johnson" and "The Two." (*The Women of Brewster Place* is actually made up of seven short stories.) Naylor reveals her philosophy on female bonds and society throughout both of these short stories. However, I believe that she chooses to present the ideas in very different, yet equally effective ways. In "Etta Mae Johnson," Naylor depicts a woman coming back to the bonds of her society. She is healed by her bonds, after she stops isolating herself from her community. This story points out that the stronger the bonds within the society, the healthier it will become as a whole. "The Two" also emphasizes the importance of bonds and society, but Naylor reveals these lessons in a darker way. Brewster

Place isolates two women, and fails to create bonds with them. As a result, the community ultimately fails, causing its inhabitants to undergo a severe 'wake-up call.'

"Etta Mae Johnson" focuses on the life-long relationship between Etta and Mattie. As the story begins, Etta is returning to Brewster Place after yet another failed relationship with a man. Etta is feeling depressed and alone until she walks into Mattie's apartment and "she [breathes] deeply of the freedom she found in Mattie's presence" (Naylor 58). When she is with Mattie, Etta feels as though she can truly be herself (a feeling she usually does not have around men). This points out the depth of the bond between these two women. Although Etta is secure with Mattie, she is still searching for something to fill some void within her. Etta is still weak, perhaps from the long time away from Mattie, and she chooses to go out with the Reverend James Woods following Sunday service. Mattie does not want Etta to go with Rev. Woods because both she and Etta know what is going to happen. Despite her gut feeling to stop Etta, Mattie recognizes that "sometimes being a friend means mastering the art of timing. There is time for silence. A time to let go and allow people to hurl themselves into their own destiny. And a time to prepare to pick up the pieces when it's all over. Mattie realized that this moment called for all three" (70). This statement clearly shows how much Mattie loves Etta. She is a true friend, and she will be there for Etta when she needs her.

When Etta is with the Reverend in a hotel, she is thinking to herself that this entire experience with him is sadly 'old and familiar.' All of the instances from her past were the same: all "meshed together into one lump that rested like an iron ball on her chest" (72). Naylor is saying that Etta (a prototype for many women in her situation) tries repeatedly to fill a void in her heart with empty relationships and meaningless physical love. What Etta really needs to do is go back to the society where she has strong bonds. In doing this, she will no longer be isolated from her true friends.

Etta does realize that she is only repeating her past mistakes by leading this sort of a life. As she is walking back from her night with Reverend Woods, she says to herself: "If I walk into this street, I'll never come back. I'll never get out" (73). Etta comes to terms with herself in a way, and gives herself an ultimatum. If she returns to her society, she can no longer have her old meaningless life. It is impossible for her to be a part of the Brewster Place community while continuing her old ways.

The decision to go back to her society and the bond within it is a triumphant one. "Etta laughed softly to herself as she climbed the steps toward the light and the love and the comfort that awaited her" (74). Etta has a type of love with Mattie that she could sadly never find with a man. The bond between Mattie and Etta is an unconditional love in which each party receives and gives respect, security, and friendship.

Gloria Naylor chooses to end "Etta Mae Johnson" on a positive note. She is creating a 'good' feeling in the reader about society and emphasizes the importance of female bonds. She is demonstrating how a society in which strong relationships are dominant will succeed.

Naylor also advocates female bonds and society in "The Two," but from a different perspective. The significance of bonds is seen in this story as a result of what happens to Brewster Place when these bonds are tainted or broken. By revealing what may occur when bonds and society are neglected, Naylor emphasizes how vital these aspects of life are to human existence. She proceeds to demonstrate the morbid consequences which may transpire due to the lack of a true community.

The main relationship in "The Two" is between Theresa and Lorraine. These women move into Brewster Place, and are generally accepted until it is known that they happen to be lesbians. The women of Brewster Place reject the possibility of such an 'element' in their society. Consequently, they end up isolating Theresa and Lorraine from the community.

Mattie and Etta discuss the situation of the two women loving each other in 'that way,' and they end up making a surprising realization. Mattie thinks to herself that she has loved Etta her whole life, and loved some women deeper than she has ever loved any man. "And there have been some women who loved me more and did more for me than any man ever did" (Naylor 141). Etta replies by saying that it is still different for Theresa and Lorraine. Mattie goes on to tell Etta "Maybe it's not so different. Maybe that's why some women get so riled up about it 'cause they know deep down it's not so different after all" (141). This is an amazing statement by Mattie because it shows that some tolerance is present. Moreover, this is an example of the importance of female bonds in this society. Some hope of eventual acceptance is seen in Mattie's response to Etta. She may be inclined to receive 'the two' as she would any other women due to the fact that they possess something so critical as female bonding in common. Naylor is pointing out the fact that Lorraine and Theresa probably have a friendship that is strikingly similar to the one that Mattie and Etta share. The only obvious difference between these two relationships is that Lorraine and Theresa are lesbians. With that point aside, these relationships truly show the universality of the female bond. Mattie and Etta may be inclined to accept these two young women and perhaps persuade others to do the same.

One female bond (or, rather, one female bond which is *not* a bond in the healthy sense of the word) in "The Two" which does not include major characters is the relationship between Ben's wife Elvira and her daughter. Elvira neglects the relationship between herself and her daughter by forcing her to work for Mr. Clyde. She cleans his house and does basically whatever Mr. Clyde 'has in mind.' Even after Ben's daughter complains to her mother, Elvira still insists she "earn her way" (152).

The abuse that Ben's daughter endures at the amusement of Mr. Clyde is the primary result of the non-existent mother-daughter bond. The break-

down of such an important connection is detrimental to all parties involved. Ben's daughter presently lives in isolation from her father, and Ben deals with the loss of his daughter every day of his life. Naylor emphasizes the vital female bond by pointing out the negative consequences of this failed relationship.

An example of isolation in Brewster Place is when Lorraine and Theresa receive awful ridicule from C.C. Baker and some women in the community. The bond between 'the two' may have become somewhat stronger, yet they still become outcasts in their own society. Theresa tries to convince Lorraine that they are different from the rest of Brewster Place, and that there is no point in trying to fit in with everyone. She does not care what the women of the community think of their relationship, and so she does not try to become a part of the society. Theresa is succeeding in isolating herself from the outside world, yet at the same time, she is putting her relationship with Lorraine in danger. Theresa lets the ignorance of the people push them out of the community.

Theresa may be trying to protect Lorraine from all of the cruel people who judge them. However, she is just making matters worse by closing themselves off from the rest of the community. Lorraine accuses Theresa of telling her how to live and act. "You want me to be independent of other people and look to you for the way I should feel about myself, cut myself off from the world and join you in some crazy idea about being different" (164). Lorraine chooses to escape the isolation of being with Theresa by going to Ben. Ben is a part of the society to which Lorraine so desperately wishes to belong. Naylor is revealing her lament of isolation and honoring the concept of society through this disagreement between Theresa and Lorraine.

This 'fight' between Lorraine and Theresa is a prime example of a strong bond in danger. The relationship between 'the two' is very secure in that they both rely on each other for support, love, and acceptance. Yet, when this connection is threatened

due to Theresa's jealousy of Lorraine's friendship with Ben, or the comments from others in Brewster Place, then there are morbid consequences to deal with.

Naylor comments on the indifference felt between Theresa and Lorraine during their 'fight' by ending the entire story with a tragic and frightening scene. C.C. Baker (who can easily represent the society's ignorance) rapes Lorraine on her way home from a party. The irony of this occurring is that Lorraine was going to the party just to spite Theresa; she wanted to prove to Theresa that she is independent. Perhaps in some unusual way, the rape of Lorraine is a punishment to Theresa for retreating from society, or a punishment placed on the society for pushing 'the two' away in the first place. In an indirect way, the death of Ben can be seen as an eye-opener for the people of Brewster Place. Due to pure ignorance, the community ultimately fails. The society ends up turning on itself by resorting to violence and giving into ignorance.

'The Two' are not invited into the bonds of society, and are thus forced to isolate themselves. This results in a tragic end to the 'presumed' peace of Brewster Place. The community is shocked into realizing its incorrect way of thinking. Gloria Naylor illustrates the importance of female bonding in "The Two" by revealing what happens to this particular society when female bonds are damaged or not formed in the first place. A society made up of unhealthy bonds cannot prosper.

Hopefully, the people of Brewster Place may learn from this tragic experience. Some of the members of the society do show remorse for what happened to Lorraine. They see that she is human just like the rest of them, and that realization is one small step toward acceptance. This broken society needs to find a common ground and begin to rebuild its shattered bonds. In the end, the community of Brewster Place may be stronger than ever before as the people learn from their fatal mistakes.

In both "Etta Mae Johnson" and "The Two," Gloria Naylor notes the critical nature of female

bonds, and of the society in which these bonds are found. The relationship between Etta and Mattie is what brings Etta back to a healthy reality in "Etta Mae Johnson." She rejoined her society, and it welcomed her. On the other hand, the society in "The Two" fails to see past petty differences which the two new women bring into Brewster Place. The people of the community neglect to create any bonds with these women, which caused 'the two' to proceed into isolation. Brewster Place is forced to learn the severity of its mistakes as the closing scene reveals the consequences of the people's actions.

I personally agree with Gloria Naylor's concept of society and female bonding. I believe that in the love two women share for one another, there exists a certain entity which is absent in some relationships between men and women. I cannot find a word to describe it, other than the very strong and unique connection between two souls. I have come to see the importance of relationships in my life due to a loss of my long-time bonds. Many of my close girl-friends moved away to school, and I felt abandoned for a short time. However I now truly find myself becoming closer to my mother and especially my younger sister. Perhaps without the loss of my bonds between my peers, I may not have developed as secure a relationship with my sister. Therefore, I surely agree and feel strongly about the critical aspect of discovering female bonds. Also, Naylor's comments pertaining to society also coincide with the idea of staying connected to friends and preserving the precious bonds between loved ones.

Evaluation: *What could be more important than our human connections? In this insightful essay, Margaret's answer is "Nothing at all." Margaret, I think, has learned the most important lesson that literature can offer.*

Let the Bells Ring

by Janina Czarniecka
Course: English 101
Instructor: Peter Sherer

Assignment:

Write a personal experience essay which focuses on an incident that helped you mature in some way.

That morning during the spring of 1975 was almost perfect for a day out. For five years, we Polish had been allowed to go to East Germany without passports or visas. I was very excited when, after months of begging and pleading, I was able to persuade my mother to take us there. We decided to spend a whole day in a German town called Górlitz. It is separated from the Polish town Zgorzelec by only a bridge. We lived very close to the border, and there were many buses going back and forth every day. We rose early that morning, and by 9:00 a.m. we were abroad.

The streets were empty, but we knew that very soon they would be busy. As we were walking and enjoying the peaceful morning, the town came alive around us. We had no specific plans, and as we wandered the streets I observed that this German town looked very much like the Polish town on the other side of the Odra river. After a long walk along the river and a filling breakfast in one of the many cafeterias, we stopped at a store selling knitting and needlepoint accessories. While raising three girls and working full time, my mother did not have much time for hobbies, but one thing she did enjoy doing in her spare time. She loved knitting. Unfortunately, there were few beautiful threads and other needlepoint supplies that she could buy in Poland. This store was a needlepoint paradise. The many varieties of cotton and patterns turned the store into a big and colorful rainbow.

My mother's eyes widened as she surveyed her many options. As she spoke to the store attendant, I realized that I had never known how fluent her German was. Finally, she was ready to pay, so we stood in line near the cashier. It was nearly noon, and the city bells were ringing from the distance. Those ringing bells—their rhythms and peaceful sounds—added to the magical illusion of a perfect world around us.

As my mother reached for her purse, the expression on her face quickly changed. Her skin became dangerously white, and she couldn't stop her hands from shaking. Her eyes, nearly closed, stared blankly. Her cheeks moved uncontrollably. She

seemed to want to say something, but words just wouldn't come. Her body appeared to resist some overwhelming feelings. As her lips tightened, I was reminded that my mother had been trained to hide her feelings and hold her words.

At first, unalarmed by my mother's physical changes, I kept on chatting, but she couldn't hear me. Then, following the slow movement of my mother's eyes, I turned to look at the young, tall, strong German soldier who had in the meantime walked into the store and begun talking loudly. He wasn't much older than I, maybe a year or two. Blond, blue eyed, healthy and happy, he was a conspicuous example of the Aryan race.

My thoughts flashed back to the day my mother told me of the time during World War II that she had spent in a German camp. She was then fifteen, and, barely a teenager, she couldn't accomplish the things she was expected to do. On one occasion she was assigned to work, without warm clothes and the right shoes, outside in the cold for the entire day. She was freezing. In the late afternoon, she decided to leave the field secretly and return to the barracks where the workers lived. Running into the room, and hoping that nobody would find her for the rest of the day, she hid behind a large heating stove. She wasn't so lucky. A young, tall German soldier with blond hair and blue eyes ran after her and forced her to go back to work. He slapped her face and kicked her several times, leaving large bruises on her back, legs, and arms. This was the only incident from those war years that my mother ever shared with me.

Looking at my mother in the light of that colorful German store, I realized that coming to Gorlitz hadn't been such a good idea after all. Then I looked at my mother again. She composed herself and gave the money to the cashier. Quietly, we left the store and the German soldier as he stood talking about something funny.

The bells were still ringing as we walked along the carefully designed and well-kept sidewalk. They rang loudly for many minutes. Then the sky darkened, and, as we left Gorlitz, the town became smaller, its streets filling with noise and congestion.

Just two years ago I visited my cousin in Berlin. By 1996 I had two passports and two different views of that country. I liked the old German capital, and I had a pleasant time getting to know some of my cousin's neighbors. But, in 1996, I did not ask my mother to go there with me.

Evaluation: Janina's essay reminds us that there are yet those alive who remember the sufferings of those violently persecuted during World War II. The narrator's serious tone underscores a message that will never be outdated.

Belay: The Art of Protection

by Phil Devol
Course: English 101
Instructor: Peter Sherer

Assignment:

Write an extended stipulative definition of a term which labels a process or behavior. Introduce an identifiable speaker. Include a variety of definition patterns.

All would agree, "We learn by our mistakes." Skills, whether physical or mental, are acquired and refined through the fires of doing, failing, and trying again in the hope of one day mastering technique. Even though this *modus operandi* extracts a price, such as a scraped knee, bloodied nose, or a bruised ego, this process is the default to which most of our minds are programmed. Tell me, can any of us recount the volumes of books read prior to taking that first step, remember the hours of study before heading out on that maiden bike ride, or recall the number of classes attended before strapping on a pair of skates? We didn't attend; we didn't study; we didn't read; we just did it!

A scraped knee may be a badge of courage and achievement for a six-year-old's first encounter with a two-wheeler. But, what happens when the stakes are higher as is the case in rock climbing, when it is no longer a knee or elbow, but a life that is on the line? Do we implement alternate methods of learning to master these techniques and skills before we go out and climb? No, the *modus operandi* remains the same. All we can do is protect or safeguard the learning experience.

In rock climbing, this essential piece of protection is the belay, without which no responsible climber would attempt even the simplest moves. This word of action, belay, has its roots in the welding of two English verbs, *to be* plus *lay*, meaning, "to be put in a position of rest." This may seem a bit of a paradox to the climber who loses his grip on the face of El Capitan. The contemporary definition of belay is, "to secure (a person) by attaching to one end of a rope," and, "to secure (a rope) by attaching to a person offering stable support."

As with many formal definitions, an additional note of explanation is necessary for the reader to get a firm grasp of the word's meaning. The primary function of the belay is to secure or brake the climber when conditions warrant, usually because of a fall or at the direct request of the climber. To belay, four components are necessary: a climber, somebody who needs to be secured; a belayer, somebody who is secured; a belayer's tool, a figure

eight or pyramid; and a rope of proper length. One end of the rope is tied to the climber, and the loose end of the rope is threaded through the belayer's tool, which is attached to the belayer. The loose end of the rope and any access is coiled at the belayer's side. Since the rope is woven through the tool, the contact area of the rope with the tool and consequently its coefficient of friction are increased, resulting in a very efficient, full range braking system. It's just basic physics.

This is how the process works. As a climber ascends, the belayer pulls in the excess rope using a hand-to-hand, sliding motion which allows the transfer of the excess rope without the need to remove the brake hand from the rope. If a descent is necessary, the belayer lets out the rope in a reverse motion, again, never relinquishing control of the rope. If the climber asks for a brake or if a fall occurs, the belayer can quickly and efficiently bend the rope and apply a brake to the line securing the climber until instruction is given to proceed. The belayer must focus all his attention on the climber. He must manage the excess rope between the climber and himself, leaving just the right amount of slack to allow for free movement and for a responsive brake.

The belay is protection, not a climber's aid. Proper etiquette demands that the rope never be used to assist the climber in any fashion. It is meant to be a passive system, which becomes active only when needed. But in all situations involving rock climbing, the belay is not an option; it is a matter of life and death. Let me illustrate with a practical example.

During the winter months, a bunch of us get together and go to the North Wall, a climbing gym in Crystal Lake. On one occasion, I recall setting my sights on an extended overhang. I had never seriously attempted these formations, knowing they require tremendous finger, hand, and arm strength, my Achilles' heels. However, there is a first time for most things, and who can tell? Perhaps I had underestimated my upper body strength and overestimated the demands of the

overhang. During the next forty minutes, the wall proved me wrong on both accounts. I had neither the strength nor the endurance to match its demands.

Approaching the wall, I checked the belay; all was ready. I queried, "On belay?" "Belay on," was the reply. I countered, "Climbing." "Climb on," was the command. I scurried up the wall on my way to the overhang. The belayer handled the rope with the grace and precision of a spider weaving its web. My direction of travel went from vertical to horizontal and my speed from fast to slow. Soon, my arms and fingers burned from the demands of suspending 140 pounds in mid air. I knew the end was near. Within two moves my left hand lost its hold. In a flash I was off the wall, but from that precious rope I hung safely and securely.

After some expert coaching, a closer inspection of the overhang, and a word of encouragement from a bystander, I was off for a second time, literally. It did not take long for that burning sensation to return, for my fingers to fail, and for the fall to occur. With the skill of a puppeteer, the belayer saved this marionette from a near fatal fall. There was a third attempt, then a fourth. This pattern continued time and time again. Each attempt brought me closer to the summit of the wall.

Whether or not I succeeded this ascent is relevant only to my vanity. The point is the belay saved my life more than once that night. Apart from the belay, nothing provides protection for the aspiring rock climber. Yes, each of us learns through failure. There is no escape from this truth. The belay, the act of securing by means of a rope, makes learning possible in an activity where failure and fatality often walk hand in hand.

Evaluation: *Phil's essay informs and engages us. It details the moves and behaviors integral to an increasingly popular sport today. Readers interested in sport, adventure, and good writing will respect and enjoy this essay.*

Sorority Hazing: How Far Is Too Far?

by Michelle DiMeo
Course: English 101
Instructor: Andrew Wilson

Assignment:
Write an argumentative essay.

A 19-year-old sorority pledge is held captive in the back-seat of a stranger's car, blinded by a paper bag over her head. After being recklessly driven to a secret destination, the naive girl, along with nine other pledges, are handed mysterious, slimy foods and told to eat them. In fear of what may happen if they oppose, the girls silently obey. For the next half hour, the girls are forced to swallow unknown, nauseating foods and to wash them down with shots of liquor. Finally, the car arrives at a house and the girls are hustled into a dark attic with a dirty toilet. It has now become clear what some of the mysterious food was: Ex-Lax. The sorority sisters taunt, "Don't be selfish," as they toss a single roll of toilet paper at the crippled pledges and lock the door behind them (Burton 117).

When the word "sorority" is mentioned, many think of instant friends, constant parties, and valuable future job connections. But at what price? Present-day sororities have gone too far with hazing. Insecure young women needing to feel accepted at a vulnerable time in their lives are the ones to suffer from physical, emotional, and sexual humiliation from their so-called "sisters." Perhaps newcomers *should* be subjected to a sort of "test" or "challenge" to see how serious they are about joining a sorority, but where should the line be drawn? The University of Georgia has recently taken action against all hazing, defining it as "any intentional, negligent, or reckless action, activity, or situation which causes another pain, embarrassment, ridicule, or harassment, regardless of the individual's willingness to participate" (Collins). I strongly believe acceptance into any sorority should be done in a manner that does not subject the pledge to *any* type of psychological abuse — whether it be physical, emotional or sexual.

At the start of every school year, thousands of hopeful women apply to sororities praying they will be among the lucky few selected. Being away from one's family and friends for the first time can be a very scary thing. Lillian Glass, Ph.D., author of *Attracting Terrific People*, states, "Hazing is the wrath of a bunch of girls on a serious power trip.

Freshman year is a really vulnerable time, and joining a sorority feels reassuring, so getting your legs kicked out from under you from your supposed 'sisters' is absolutely devastating" (Burton 119). To these lonely individuals, performing a humiliating act appears less frightening than not belonging to a group at all. However, some sororities understand this vulnerable feeling very well and use it as their weapon. Though pledges may expect some humiliation, many don't understand how severe it can really be.

In 1997, at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana, a female pledge was rushed to the emergency room after being branded by a cigarette lighter (Burton 118). Georgia State University also pressed charges against a local sorority last year when a hazing incident was blamed for a car accident severely injuring five students. Denison University faced similar hazing incidents when a freshman pledge was treated for alcohol poisoning in a hospital after sorority members presented pledges with bottles of alcohol disguised by symbols of the sorority and decorating them with their names (Geraghty A37). In each of these three cases, sorority hazing has required the hospitalization of an inexperienced underclassman. Being accepted into a group should not be determined by the amount of physical pain one can endure. These physical tortures provide no future benefits, deteriorate any prior trust the pledges had for their "sisters," and encourage fear and weakness in the innocent pledge's mind. Whether intended to do so or not, these hazing acts show newcomers that inflicting pain on someone is not only acceptable, but also fun—as long as the victim is an inferior. During a time when inequality and hate-crimes are prevalent, sororities should do their small part by discouraging this in their own community.

Though physical pain is serious, emotional pain can be just as severe. In the 90s, women struggling with low self-esteem, eating disorders, and achieving society's ideal (and near impossible) appearance

have become increasingly common. Women are struggling hard to accept their imperfections and live agreeably with them. However, some sororities have found this decrease in self-esteem an open door to attack their pledges. One girl admitted "The actives [sorority sisters] relished convincing the pledges that they were pathetic nobodies—dirt. They said I had a fat ass, called me a 'prick-teaser,' and told me my personality sucked—nasty stuff" (Burton 118). A 21-year-old sorority member at a California college added "You couldn't cry in front of the sisters. In fact, if they sensed any emotion at all, they'd yell, 'We don't care how you feel. How badly do you want to be in this house?'" (Burton 118). Sometimes, the insults have gone beyond verbal abuse, and pledges have been forced to put their "faults" on display. One girl remembers, "One night, the actives made fun of me and three other pledges by taking a big black marker and circling all of our fat. Then they made us go to a frat party wearing only shorts and tank tops so everyone could see their handiwork" (Burton 118). Young women who have faced similar challenges should be sensitive to their peers' insecurities, rather than targeting and belittling them. Being exposed to such cruel situations in the beginning of a pledge's sisterhood could only pave the way to more backstabbing, inferiority, and jealousy in the sorority's future. And how positive of a self-esteem could an individual have years after the incident when all she can remember from college is her "sisters" calling her fat, ugly, stupid, useless, and unworthy of their friendship? These are slurs impossible to forget and can only add to complications later in life.

Sexual humiliation is another popular hazing ritual used with young women. One freshman fraternity pledge at Boston University witnessed a horrifying act of sorority hazing: at the urging of her actives, an obviously intoxicated pledge squirted whipped cream on a fraternity brother's penis and performed oral sex while his entire house, consisting of approximately 50 guys, watched and

cheered. A 20-year-old Indiana University student recalls her personal experience with hazing:

The sisters took us to a bar where they had shots lined up. They strongly recommended we drink them to make it easier to handle what was in store for us. Then they took us to a frat party and made some pledges demonstrate blow-job techniques on pickles and bananas in front of all the jeering guys. Others had to read pornographic books out loud. We all had to act out having an orgasm dramatically while they cheered us on. Then, we had to perform lap dances for the guys and even lick chocolate off their chests. (Burton 118)

Some women have admitted having intercourse with fraternity brothers as part of sorority hazing. Are such degrading sexual acts, with the only purpose of humiliating the inexperienced, really necessary to be accepted into a sorority? This type of careless behavior contributes to the spreading of sexually transmitted diseases, degrades the sorority as a whole, and ruins a new student's reputation. With today's AIDS epidemic, having a one-night-stand to be accepted into a sorority is having a gamble for your life.

With the constant negative publicity sororities have been receiving and unerringly no positive outcomes emerging from these hazing horror stories, why would sororities choose to continue this unacceptable behavior? Because, like several other clubs, members feel their pledges should be put through a testing period as a way of proving themselves as a part of their exclusive club. They claim this is a time to help the pledges bond with their new sisters and learn how to work together. But should this testing period consist of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, or is there another way? When someone tries out for a basketball team, they are not beat-up by current members and then told they are too fat and too slow to be a part of the team. Instead, the members demonstrate their knowledge

of basketball and attend meetings to show their dedication to becoming a team member.

Luckily, some sensible sororities do follow these practical guidelines. Ivy Zlotnick, president of Delta Phi Epsilon sorority, strongly supports this idea. "I don't think you have to haze someone to make them loyal" (Collins), she preaches. Zlotnick says that absolutely no hazing takes place in her sorority, but instead, pledges attend weekly meetings, take quizzes, and attend sorority social events during their initiation period. Zlotnick believes this should be a time to learn about the other members and the group's history (Collins).

Some sororities have thought of other creative ideas in an attempt to free themselves of the negative hazing image. The Delta Sigma Theta sorority, an African-American sorority on the University of North Texas campus, has adopted a recently widespread initiation process: stepping. This up-beat march/dance is performed by members as a rite of passage which involves a beat created by hand claps, flashy choreography, and clever chants with lyrics like "I'm pretty on my left, I'm pretty on my right, I'm so damn pretty I can't sleep at night" (Jones). Though this may sound silly, these stepping performances build self-esteem in members (rather than decreasing it as hazing does), encourage team work in a positive environment (unlike the negative environment hazing provides), and have long-term benefits like fund raising which is used to support community service activities and charities (instead of leaving long-term scars on new members) (Jones).

With such positive and fulfilling options, it is hard to believe that some sororities would still rather choose hazing as a way of initiation. In the past 20 years, 40 states have adopted laws with penalties from fines to prison time against sorority hazing and the percentage of freshmen interested in Greek Affiliations is half of what it was in 1967 (De Camp). Perhaps instead of attracting negative attention, sororities would benefit from making

themselves known for more positive things in the public eye. If sorority sisters were more concerned with helping their community and supporting each other (as they claim to be) instead of devising new ways to humiliate their pledges, they would not receive the bad label they currently have and despise. By taking a stand against hazing, sororities and each of their members would benefit physically, emotionally, and sexually—both now and in the future.

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Evaluation: *In my opinion, this essay is perfect for the Harper Anthology. Lots of the Anthology's readers are students who will eventually transfer to four-year institutions, and Michelle's good writing offers those readers/students a warning about one of the strange but real dangers of campus life. Some of the details in this paper are graphic, but they nevertheless illustrate the intensely disturbing nature of the problem in question.*

Environmental Ethics Journal

by *Judith Dubeau*
Course: Philosophy 115
Instructor: Jerome A. Stone

Assignment:
*Keep a journal about visits to a
favorite outdoor place.*

August 28, 1997

For my journal location I chose my weekend home in Wisconsin. It is a three-acre tract of land abutted by a planned pine forest on the north. The surrounding area is comprised of planned forests owned by schools and paper-mills and natural forests with small homes and trailer homes tucked into the woods.

This place has owned me for approximately three and one-half years. It is my haven, my sanity, my balance. It is where I go to re-charge. My life in Illinois is filled with chaos. I have a high-stress job, attend school part-time and have a teenager and husband to care for. My life in Illinois is planned down to the minute because I could not meet all of the time demands required of me otherwise. Here in my Wisconsin life there are no schedules to keep. We own an alarm clock but I can only remember three or four times it has been plugged in since we've been here.

I almost always come here to work on major class assignments because no other place exists that does not place its own set of demands on me. Sometimes I come here to catch up on sleep, but most times to re-charge. I find it easy to spend hours just sitting and watching the birds eat or the trees move in the wind. I can wander at will through my woods and the public forests surrounding my home. By the time I finally must return to Illinois my balance and sanity have returned. The inner peace I find each time I am here helps me to make it through my chaotic life in Illinois. I don't believe that I could survive the pressures of my life in Illinois without my re-charge time in Wisconsin.

Each time I come here I cannot leave without walking the trail to the end of my property. Each time I walk the trail there is something different growing in the woods to see. This weekend my sister and nephews are my guests here. Two of my nephews are three and one is eight. All live in the Chicago area. We all took the hike this morning, the children having been taught on earlier trips to watch where they place their feet and not to step on anything green.

On this trip the blackberries are ripe. The children are surprised and excited that they can pick something growing wild and eat it on the spot. We looked at turkey and deer tracks and one of the little ones found a turkey feather. We must have had an unusually wet summer here. There is an absolute riot of mushrooms growing everywhere. There have always been mushrooms growing here but never in the variety or volume that are here today. Some resemble baseballs, others resemble eggs both in shape and egg-yolk color. There are puff-ball mushrooms which, if you step on them, send up a cloud of gray-green spores that resemble smoke.

I love bringing children here. I feel that we need to teach the next generation to appreciate nature, and that the only way to accomplish this is to subject them to nature early and up close. The children help me fill the bird feeders (although this is a truly lengthy ordeal when you fill them one itty-bitty

handful at a time) and put out food for the other critters. We suspend the rules for the children here also. Bed, wake-up and meal times are whenever. Even as children their lives are highly structured with schedules to be kept with organized activities filling their days. We no longer allow them the time to be creative or daydream. Here all time is unstructured because even children need a break in time where they can just think and be.

September 5, 1997

I am heartbroken. We have lost another oak to the oak-wilt. It was a marvelous tree, about seventy-five years old, that provided shade for my house and yard each summer. It shaded my deck in the hot summer afternoons, helping to provide the cool fresh breezes that smelled so green. My bird-feeders hang from this tree. I watch the leaves drop in the breeze and want to cry.

My woods consist primarily of Northern Pin Oaks (also known as Black Oak, Jack Oak, and *Quercus Ellipsoidalis*) and Jack Pines (also known as Scrub Pine, Gray Pine, and *Pinus Banksiana*). A few Red Pines (*Pinus Resinosa*) that are escapees from the planned forest to the north of here, a handful of young Yellow Birch (also known as Gray Birch and *Betula Lutea*) and young Red Maples (*Acer Rubrum*) that seem to have become lost have also landed here and begun to grow.

Most of the land in this area was and still is owned by the paper mill industry. Clear-cutting still occurs here. There are large tracts of land to the south of here that have been clear-cut and replanted within the past two years. Our land was clear-cut approximately eighty years ago. Approximately thirty years ago a forest fire moved through our area, shortly after which the paper mill companies sold large tracts of land to land speculators. My section was subdivided into slightly over three-acre parcels and sold within the past twenty years. My trees bear witness to this history. I have many in the fifty to seventy-five year old range, but few in

between those and the ones I estimate to be thirty years old and younger. In the past ten years the squirrels have been busy. They have planted so many acorns that there are hundreds of oaks under twenty feet high.

When we first saw this place it was February and under three feet of snow. We did not notice that many of the trees were dead or plagued by the Oak Wilt and Pine Beetle. It was densely forested and what we were looking for. Our first spring and the melting of the snow brought many surprises.

There is no garbage collection here so what can not be burned must be taken to the garbage-dump approximately fifteen miles away. Past inhabitants had obviously felt that this was too much of an inconvenience because my woods were filled with various forms of garbage including cans, bottles, broken glass and half of a waterbed. Plastic bags of garbage had been buried in the backyard. The yard itself contained a mini-dump of spent shotgun shells, broken dishes and toys, and was littered end to end with cigarette butts and bottle caps. We spent several months reclaiming this land, collecting and dumping the garbage of the earlier residents, but it was worth the time and work. The land seems to have become healthier with our care. I can now sit outside and see only what is meant to be here: nature, the reason that *I* came to be here.

September 13, 1997

We built a fire tonight in our outdoor fireplace. The stars are phenomenal here. Without the city lights and smog, it seems to be an entirely different sky than that which I can see in Chicagoland.

Today the bird feeders were full, but the birds were missing. There is such an abundance of natural bird food available now. The grass is tall with seed heads, many of the flowers have gone to seed, the blackberries are ripe and there are bugs everywhere. The only visitor to my feeders was this evening. I heard something eating while we were watching the fire, shined a flashlight on the feeder,

and found a flying squirrel inside. The creature looks like a combination of squirrel and bat and I was surprised to notice that it is nocturnal. I had never seen one before, although I had heard that they inhabit our area.

The fire attracted moths and we seemed to provide the bait to attract mosquitoes for the bats to feed on. It is amazing how close the bats can come without actually flying into your head. I cannot imagine the precision required to catch a bug as small as a mosquito without being able to see it visually.

I put cracked corn and sunflower seeds on the ground for the assorted wildlife here and so the squirrels would feed on the ground rather than empty my feeders. You could hear the raccoons coming through the woods tonight. They make so much noise that it sounds like something the size of a bear is coming. A mother and two kits arrived and started to eat the sunflower seeds. We shined a flashlight on them and the kits scampered up a tree. They came down in a few minutes when they realized that we were not moving closer. They were a mere ten feet away, but did not feel threatened by us or the light. It wasn't long before another mother raccoon and three more kits arrived. Raccoons obviously do not like to share, because the two adult raccoons began to fight over the food. Two of the kits went back up the tree, but the litter of three remained a short distance behind their mother while the fighting was going on. The raccoon that was first to arrive won the battle and the other mother and three kits went off into the woods, I assume to find an undefended food source.

September 27, 1997

The blackberries are all but eaten up; there are few left on the vine. The hazelnuts should be falling soon. This should bring the deer into the yard. I always think about collecting the hazelnuts and

roasting them, but I am never quick enough. By the time they fall, they are eaten. I never find any to collect when I look for them.

I have rarely actually seen the deer that come to visit. I know that they have been there by the tracks they leave in the yard and on the path. I do not know if they avoid us when we are here. Because the deer are hunted in this area regularly, the deer are usually cautious around humans. I have a friend, Karen, who has a cabin about eight miles from here. She has a herd of deer that she has trained to come in to feed when she turns on her spotlight in the yard. She has a feeding area where she puts out corn on the cob, apples and salt licks. Within fifteen minutes of when she turns on the light, the deer arrive. She allows no hunting on her land and the deer seem to know that they are safe there. I would love to bring the deer into my yard, but many of my neighbors hunt. I would feel that I was just baiting the deer for the local hunters to kill.

October 11, 1997

My neighbors here are a mixed group. All of the tracts of land are wooded, but each of my neighbors treat their land differently. Across the road is Todd, who hates Jack Pines passionately. Last year he cut almost one hundred pines down. Now his lot has almost no oaks older than twenty years old, and few trees other than the oaks. Next door to Todd is Carl, who sold all of his hardwood trees to a mill. His land is mostly pathetic looking pines and brush left behind by the loggers. Dean, our next-door neighbor, is a landscaper. His property is predominately lawn. He removed most of his trees so it would look like an urban lot. Kevin, Bud and Jerry all leave things as they are, rarely changing anything on their land, while Mitch and Myra plant additional trees each year. I have taken a proactive approach to the management of my woods.

Today I lopped pine branches that contained the knobby growth of the Pine Beetle. The beetles bore

into the branch and fed off of the sap, killing the branch. I cannot help the pines that are fifty feet tall, but I will do what I can to help the smaller pines to survive.

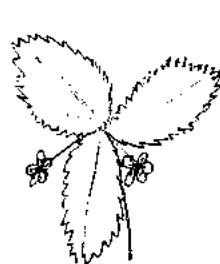
I originally bought into the theory that we must preserve everything. This land has taught me that this might not be the best course to take. When we first arrived here the blackberry brambles and hazelnut shrubs had invaded and overtaken the yard and a good part of our woods. We rented a brush-cutter, pushed back the brush, and reclaimed the yard. The grass returned, some of it Bluestem, with its shimmery purple stems. My yard now contains Common Strawberries (*Fragaria Virginiana*) to feed the birds and mice, Birdfoot Violet (*Viola Pedata*), Smooth Solomon's Seal (*Polygonatum Biflorum*) and Sweet Everlasting (*Gnaphalium Obtusifolium*).

Where the brush was pushed back into the woods the trees have shot up and seem so much healthier. We continue to push the wall of brush with fantastic results. As soon as the sunlight hits the earth the understory of plant life returns. While I believe that there is room for the hazelnut and blackberry brambles, it should not be to the exclusion of all other plant life.

Some of my attempted changes have been refused by this place. For two consecutive years I have planted a prairie seed mixture. For three years I have planted Beebalm, coneflowers, daisies and sunflowers. Either the seeds are gobbled up by the birds and other wildlife or they just refuse to germinate. I bought and planted four Sugar Maples last year, but only two survived. It seems that there is a local caterpillar here that loves to munch on Sugar Maples.

Most of these woods have been left to their own devices. Among the things I find on my trail walks are mosses, Wild Lily of the Valley (*Maianthemum Canadense*), Pasture Rose (*Rosa Carolina*), and Lead Plant (*Amorpha Canescens*). In some areas the oak saplings are beginning to outgrow the brush. They will eventually shade out the brush without my interference.

Do these woods really *need* my help? The young oaks and woodland flowers seem to do fine without my interference, but the areas in which I have pushed back the brush seem to thrive also. My original intention for removing the brush was to allow the trees more nutrients from less competition by other invading species. I had hoped that the oak saplings might evolve and become immune to the oak wilt fungus that has attacked the older trees. These saplings seem to be thriving, but will they eventually be killed by the fungus? Will the pines I keep trimming eventually succumb to the Pine Beetle? Maybe all things must evolve. Maybe only the Red Maples and Yellow Birches will survive because they are not under attack by nature. I want my woods to remain wild because it is the wildness that brings me peace, but am I helping or hurting this environment by trying to save what is distressed rather than replacing it with something different? At this point I shall help where I can and see what evolves.



Common Strawberry



Birdfoot Violet



Wild Lily of the Valley



Lead Plant



Smooth Solomon's Seal

October 27, 1997

The trees are arrayed in their finest colors this fall. They demand to be noticed, as if to say:

Yes, winter is on its way,
With its lack of sunlight, heat and color.
But remember us as you see us now
And we will provide you light
With the florescence of our yellows,
Heat from the warmth of our golden brilliance,
And the colors of red, rust, gold, yellow and all
the hues in between
To help you make it through the bleak days
of winter.
It will not be long before you see us again,
When we dress anew in spring.
Our colors now are our promise to return.

November 8, 1997

Several weeks ago I was trying to date the trees here by counting the rings of the dead ones that we had cut down in the past. The pines were less than thirty years old, but the oaks ranged from fifty to seventy-five years old. Because of my attempt at knowing their history, I had a truly weird experience yesterday.

On my lunch break from work I was running errands as usual. I did not have many things to do, so I was just wandering along in my car. All of a sudden, the trees moved to the forefront of the landscape. I do not know how this happened, or why, but I couldn't look anywhere that the trees were not the prominent feature.

I was born and raised in the Chicago area and have long been immune to the gray shades of the asphalt and concrete world. The landscape there has always seemed monotonous with its buildings, sidewalks and manicured lawns. Yesterday that all seemed changed. Everywhere I looked the trees loomed overhead. Each seemed to be an individual. No longer could I look and just see "trees." Each

tree was an integral part of the scenery.

I passed a new shopping development and it seemed that someone had taken a huge eraser, erased a square of land, and overlaid the face of it with a tidy and uniform existence of small ornamental trees, grass and strictly confined flowers. This seemed so impermanent compared to the majestic trees behind the development.

Some of the ancient trees looked to be one hundred and two hundred years old, their canopies massive, and their branches towering above. Many of them were older than any development surrounding them and must have been built around when the area was developed. They seemed to anchor all that surrounded them, to be sentinels watching over the surrounding land that was their domain. Were these trees part of the original forests in the area? What have they seen? Indians? Settlers? It was a humbling experience.

November 22, 1997

When we arrived last night the road was partially blocked by a tree that had been blown over by the wind. The entire tree, roots and all, was on its side. As loath as I am to cutting the dead trees on our land, I know that we must cut some of them down. There are hollows in our trees that provide a home for the squirrels and birds. They are also used by the squirrels and birds as highways of travel, but the threat of their falling on my house is real. I guess that it comes down to us or them; we are bigger, we win.

We have a ring of dead trees at the edge of the tree line. Of course we have other dead trees in our woods, but these trees stand out because they ring the open area of our yard. The trees seem to be in the fifty-year range, after counting the rings on similar-sized trees. They seem to be all of the same height and girth, and in the same stage of decay. Why did these trees die? If it was due to the Oak Wilt fungus attack, I would think that the nearby trees would have been affected also. What we call a

yard is our septic tank area. When the tank was installed twenty years ago, did the installation damage the root systems of these trees? Are they in the drain field of our septic field and did someone put toxic chemicals into the system? These trees have been dead for quite some time, their bark shed years ago. What killed them?

We cut down four of the trees, the ones that could have fallen on the house. Even though I have never seen leaves on them and I know that they have been dead for a very long time, I still wanted to help them. Now I look in the space where they had been and I see a hole. Because we cut the trees at the edge of the woods it seems like the woods are farther away now. I have too much yard now. We have several small four- to five-foot pines growing in this space and a few medium sized oaks, but it's not woods, it is not wild. My woods have receded.

November 28, 1997

It is windy and cold today. I am vegging out and watching the bird feeders this morning. The squirrels are always the first to arrive, first one then another, arriving one by one. You can see them traveling here from tree to tree in all directions. The squirrels work together to empty my bird feeders of seed. One squirrel is on the top of each feeder knocking the seed out onto the ground for the other squirrels to eat. This is a great area for squirrels because all of them are portly with healthy coats of fur.

I was told that the "early bird catches the worm," but here the birds seem to sleep in. You can hear the bird song in the trees for half of an hour before any birds arrive. Are the squirrels scouts for the birds or do the birds just wait to make sure that my feeders are safe before coming in to eat? Within one-half hour after the arrival of the squirrels, the blue jays (*Cyanocitta Cristata*) arrive. Because blue jays are aggressive and will chase away the other birds, I put food on the lid of a barrel so that they do not compete with the smaller birds for the food.

Shortly after the arrival of the blue jays the Dark Eyed Juncos (*Parus Atricapillus*) come in, each arriving separately, until the whole flock is here. They and the sparrows do not like to eat from the feeders because they seem to be ground feeders. The white-breasted Nuthatches (*Sitta Carolinensis*) alight on the feeders en masse and my yard is a constant movement of color.

The woodpeckers are always the last to arrive, as if they cannot pass a tree without stopping to peck out a bug or two. Their arrival is heralded by the high pitched peep they sound on their way here. Today we have Downy Woodpeckers (*Picoides Pubescens*) and Hairy Woodpeckers (*Picoides Villosus*). Woodpeckers will not eat just any seed, they will only come in for the suet. They have a few nibbles of the suet and then move to a nearby tree to peck out a few insects. They continue this feeding schedule all day long.

While sparrows and juncos will eat any seed mix, most of the birds here are fussy eaters and will not come in unless you provide their favorite treats. The goldfinch and purple finch will only come in for thistle seed, the Northern Oriole and woodpecker only for suet. The balance of the bird species will eat nothing but sunflower seeds and oilers. With a wide variety of food available, I get a wide variety of bird species here. I provide the birds with food and they provide me with a calming effect. I can watch them for hours and not tire of their flitting back and forth. They are a huge part of the peace of this place.

Evaluation: In addition to using correct grammar and spelling, the student adequately combined feelings, technical matters and poetry. Her writing was appropriate to these various purposes.

Death to Machismo

by Alejandra Esparza
Course: English 101
Instructor: Andrew Wilson

Assignment:

Write a persuasive essay. Make a little use of at least two outside sources, preferably print sources.

Even if you are a male reader (in fact, *especially* if you are a male reader), try to imagine for a moment being a woman married to a yokel, an arbitrary representative "macho man." Imagine that you are quite aware of your husband's affairs. And imagine that if and when you complain about those affairs, you are usually met with either laughs or sarcasm or a bashing. Imagine that you are the one who has to take care of the house, even when you are sick or even if you work as many hours as your husband does. "You are the woman," your husband scowls whenever you ask him to help you with the domestic chores. "Those things are not for men to do."

Imagine your children feeling scared and ashamed of their own father and the brutal actions he might take against you. What's worse, think of your children watching these scenes of abuse day by day, accepting them as a way of life, the cycle of life. Finally, imagine the feelings and the thoughts you have about your own person: the feelings that have obstructed your capacity to grow as a human

being, the self-destructive thoughts that follow your steps everywhere you go and make you feel inferior and insecure. Over time, you forget that this self-image is a product of your victimization; you forget that it comes from the man who was/is supposed to be your loyal partner, your lover, the man who was/is supposed to dedicate himself not to your misery but to your happiness, the man who should be your loving company and support, not your worst nightmare: your husband, the irreparable macho man. In the following paragraphs I will argue that machismo leads to violence against women and humiliation and intimidation within the minds and hearts of women. The ultimate consequence of machismo is nothing short of a sad sense of self-worthlessness among many—*too many*—unhappy female human beings.

Machismo is the behavior that insecure men use to demonstrate to others that they are able to control every situation. Machismo does not represent strength or intelligence; on the contrary, machismo only represents an afraid, weak, brash man who is not sure about his own abilities and weaknesses. Machismo is not a trivial or comical issue; it's something that people should take more seriously since it affects many people's lives (especially women's lives). To be a macho man you don't necessarily have to spend all your wages in alcohol; you don't necessarily have to cheat on your wife or hit her when you're angry. Macho men are those who don't understand that men and women were put together in the world to support and compliment each other, not to fight and discriminate against each other. Macho men are present in every social status, from the beggar with no education to the owner of a big company who refutes any suggestions that come from an "underling," especially when that "underling" is a female employee. At the bottom line, machismo is not a funny game. It's not something to be proud of or something that proves manliness. Machismo is nothing more than a nasty behavior that temporarily satisfies the cretin's ego.

Of course with any arguable topic, there are two sides (at least two). In other words, I have my oppo-

nents, those who defend machismo, those who say there's nothing wrong with behaving like a macho man because machismo indicates virility and/or sexual health. However, I disagree with that reasoning because it designates a macho man as the model example of sex appeal. That theory mistakenly associates machismo with positive masculinity and sexual attractiveness. I ask: Can we truly confuse a sexually healthy man with a man who treats women with despotism? Being a macho man and being an attractive and healthy man are two very different things, and they don't have to (they *should not*) come together in a man's life. For example, think of the man who represents an unregenerated macho man, a pure embodiment of an abusive macho man. Suppose that that individual is sterile or impotent; of course neither sterility nor impotence represents sexual health, and yet a sterile/impotent man is still capable of being cruel and arrogant because being a macho man and being sexually healthy don't depend upon each other for fundamental existence. Practicing macho behavior won't give a man strength or virility, and being masculine or having good sexual health has nothing to do with machismo. The distinction between the one and the other is the willingness to respect one-half of the planet's population. Indeed, good sexual health, in my view, is illustrated by the kinds of behaviors (gentleness, selflessness) a macho man would take great pains to avoid.

My opponents might also defend machismo with the claim that the world has almost always been set up so that women are inferior while men are superior, physically and (supposedly) otherwise. That has always been the way of things; it should not be questioned or disturbed. Again, I disagree. Such reasoning is primitive and does not promote equality; rather, it promotes a hierarchy. I agree with the fact that men—throughout much of history, in most of the corners of the earth—have possessed control and power, and that they have also been the rulers and leaders of the world. Men have been attended by women, and they have not attended to women. But I also support the theory that changes

must necessarily take place so that there can be an improvement, an evolution from bad to better. Change makes the human race grow stronger. In my opinion, not wanting to change something that has been unfair and basically harmful for many years, even thousands of years, is retrograde. In order to survive, we must change, searching always for equality and a common well-being. It's proven that the best civilizations have achieved their success based on equality, mutual cooperation, and the ability to adapt. (America practiced slavery once upon a time but wisely fought to abolish that sin and work toward a beautiful change for the better.) Besides, the kind of change I'm proposing can only be a fitting one, because giving others (women) the opportunity to express their ideas actually makes a system stronger since it embraces a supporting party and is therefore not alone in solving all of its problems.

Although many people (including some women) think that the anti-machismo movement is nothing else but a way for feminists to gain notice, it is a fact that those against machismo are targeting a reproachable behavior that should be eradicated from society. Machismo is harmful and it provokes serious effects on its victims. First of all, machismo leads to physical violence against women. This abuse ranks from the little push to the most severe beating. An example is the case of a woman whose "husband beat her with a part of a car axle..." (Sanchez B1). That shameful crime took place within the Hispanic community, but no one can deny that such crimes are present in other communities as well. Sadly, this abuse seriously, sometimes fatally affects its victims. And sadly, abused women commonly stay with their husbands, supporting their husbands' inhumanity because they think that if they leave their husbands they will have to deal with more compelling problems. Some other women fear that their partners might take revenge if they leave the abusive home. A grotesque example is the case of the brave woman named Aha Orantes who was "beaten, thrown over a balcony at her home, doused with gasoline and burned

alive" by her ex-husband ("Spain: Murder of Wife..."). Women who suffer this abuse (if they do not die, as Ms. Orantes did) feel humiliated and intimidated; they often don't dare to talk about their problems. Some even have the ignorant thought that "whatever happens in our house, happens in our house" (Sanchez B1). These women are insecure and afraid to release themselves from torment. They feel that they are worthless beings who did something wrong (marry their jerk husbands maybe), and therefore they have to pay with their self-sacrifice. Sometimes a woman uses her status as a mother as an excuse to stay home and endure all of her humiliation. She fears that if she splits from her husband, her children might suffer a traumatic experience. "I don't want people to look at my daughters like they are less, like they have no father," said one woman named Martha who left her husband after he broke her jaw and blackened her eyes (Sanchez B1). Finally, other women fear not being able to support their homes by themselves. But they don't consider the fact that if they have supported their humiliations and even savage beatings for several years, they probably have the fortitude to support their homes (as single mothers) and even improve their economic situations a hundred percent.

Fortunately, women are opening their eyes and minds; more and more are beginning to know that they are strong enough to take care of their children and themselves. Women have started to call for the rights that have been denied to them for an unnameable quantity of years. It's now common to find women "who don't think about getting married, who talk about getting married but don't want children, who talk about having children without a husband" ("Mexican Women Chip Away..." B3).

Of course, like any who are losing territory or property, macho men refuse to accept this change. "Men are resisting these changes," said Patricia Galeana, a Mexico City historian and feminist. "Of course they are. It's been great to have a slave in the house for all these years" ("Mexican Women Chip Away..." B3). But what many men don't know is

that this change won't necessarily have to have any damaging effect on their masculinity. On the contrary, I think that this change will cause many good men to feel gratefully released from the machismo pattern that they have historically adopted in order to fit into society's expected mold. In a strange way, without the pressures of machismo, men will be as free as women. Men will be able to break from their abusive behaviors, behaviors that have marked men with the brands of aggression and ignorance, behaviors that have formed unhappy families through generations. Men will be able to choose not to be macho without the fear of being labeled a "sissy" by their fathers, brothers, and friends. Such equality will allow men and women to understand each other better; it can only lead to a great bridge over the stormy waters separating the sexes.

Works Cited

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Evaluation: *I love this essay. Machismo is an odd and therefore highly refreshing topic for an argumentative essay. Alejandra has been speaking and writing English for just a few years, which makes her solid and fluid response to the assignment even more impressive.*

Things I Do to Avoid Homework

by Forest Flodin
Course: English 100
Instructor: Barbara Njus

Assignment:

"How to Put Off Doing Your Homework" was the third (of five) major essay projects for English 100. Prewriting assignments over two weeks emphasized strong verbs, vivid details, structure, and organization; the final draft has eight paragraphs in all: introduction, six body paragraphs on six different activities, and a conclusion. On the final draft, each student labeled all topic sentences (TS), the thesis statement (THS) and nine different sentence combining techniques labeled by number (Coordination: 1,2,3; Subordination: 4, 5; Beginning with: PP (prepositional phrase) or M (participial modifier); Using: CP (compound predicate) or RC (relative clause).

1 (TS) One of the most difficult things about school is the homework. (THS) I try to avoid homework in every way possible. A few of my favorite forms of avoidance include:

MOVING THE BODY

2 (TS) Visiting with friends is my favorite way of avoiding homework. Cari and I are sitting at Starbucks, corner of 83 and Lake Cook. It's gray and drizzling outside. Our faces are warmed by the steam from the cappuccinos which warm our hands. (2) Like most coffeehouses, the mood is relaxed; muted voices and the occasional hiss of the espresso machine blend with the drone of rush-hour traffic outside. Homework is the farthest thing from my mind. Visiting with friends always distracts me from homework. (5) Since most of my friends live more than a 20-minute drive from me, long driving times keep me away from the nag of homework. This brings me to my next avoidance technique.

3 (TS) Exploring is a wonderful outlet for the lazy student. A recent trip to Evanston comes to mind as a prime example of exploring. One afternoon while I was debating what to do about my homework, my mind wandered to a brilliant idea—I'll go explore! I spent several hours driving around Evanston. (3 PP) In the process I got lost to the point of confusion about which roads ran north to south, and which ran east to west; however, I found several amazing new stores. I browsed at this really cool record store, Dr. Wax. I ate a vegi-bagel sandwich at some health food store, and while looking at the Borders, I got some of that wonderful Yoplait yogurt.

MOVING THE MIND

4 (TS) One of the ways I avoided homework during break was by surfing the net, where you can throw your consciousness out over the phone lines, search for new information, and look for new people to talk with and share ideas. (RC) Saturday, when I should have been writing my paper, I found myself in a chat room with eight people who were arguing about Marilyn Manson. The major debate was whether or not he'd sold his soul to the church for publicity. Exchanging ideas with people in such an uninhibited environment is distracting—and exciting.

5 (TS) Reading a book is another great distraction. I remember the first time I read the *Catcher in the Rye*. (4) I got it as a Christmas gift one year; I opened it at the end of break when I was supposed to be doing the homework that I had been assigned. I totally forgot about homework, sat down and read it for two days. (1 CP) My life was still sort of normal during that time in that I was still eating and sleeping, but every moment other than those essential living things, I spent reading *Catcher in the Rye*. Holden's view made the most sense I had heard in a long time and homework slipped away.

MOVING THE SOUL

6 (TS)(M) Tempting me to play every time I sit down to study, my guitar stands against the bookshelf in the family room, six to seven feet from where I do my homework every night. One night stands out in my mind. I had been surfing the net and found guitar tabs for two of my favorite songs, "Disarm," by the Smashing Pumpkins and "She Floated Away," by Husker Du. I was fully intending to do my homework, but as soon as I sat down, the guitar caught my eye and I remembered the tabs. I just had to try out those songs. That night, I spent all the time I should have been studying,

strumming my guitar in the beautiful patterns of songs that I love. That night sticks in my mind because of music's ability to cut right into my heart and lift it ten feet above my body.

7 (TS) Another way to escape homework is to go to a concert. Attending a concert is one of the greatest experiences, and it involves a number of ways to avoid homework. It almost always includes exploring because concert halls have the knack of not being anywhere near where you thought they were going to be. I usually go with a friend or meet somewhere at the concert. Depending on who is playing at the concert, it can be one of those wonderful musical experiences that you remember for years. Going to a concert is the least common way of avoiding homework because there are not that many concerts happening and they are expensive.

8 (TS) With so many ways to avoid doing homework, it is a miracle that homework ever does get done. Miracles must happen because this homework is finished!

Evaluation: *Forest Florin's essay in all ways fulfills the assignment, smoothly incorporates the required grammar, and uses organization creatively.*

A Moment of Truth

by Katie Gillies
Course: English 101
Instructor: Peter Sherer

Assignment:
*Write a personal experience essay which
focuses on an incident which helped
you mature in some way.*

My eyes rolled helplessly in their sockets as I tried desperately to open them and focus on the world around me. My legs, tan from endless hours in the summer sun, were crumpled underneath my body. There were purple bruises already forming on my right thigh and shin. My fragile hand shook uncontrollably as I reached to touch my temple that pounded like a jack hammer. I felt leaking from a deep, jagged cut.

I held my head tenderly in my hand as I looked up to the sky. White, serene clouds drifted by silently. I turned my stiff neck to the left and noticed the black metal staircase. Just beyond the stairs, the sign for the Sleep Easy Motel flickered relentlessly. I shifted my gaze further to the left and saw him.

I heard him apologize a hundred thousand times. He pleaded with me to answer him and tell him if I was all right. I looked deep into his sincere brown eyes—eyes I had gazed lovingly into so many times before. I saw his fear. He was sorry and would never do it again (and again and again). Yes, he was sorry—sorry for lying to me, cheating on me, throwing me down these rusty stairs in the middle of a flawless day and making me bleed.

Panic-stricken, he grabbed my jelly-like arms and feverishly lifted me to my feet. My legs still shook, and for a moment I thought I would be unable to stand, that I would fall to the cement ground again. But I didn't, and I stood up. He helped me up the stairs to the cheap motel room we were "temporarily" calling home. Trying to shuffle through the doorway, I stumbled over my own feet. Afraid if I fell I would not get up again, I quickly grasped the old, weathered door. A bloody handprint—my bloody handprint—smeared across the once white paint. He hustled me inside, away from peering eyes.

The door slammed behind me, shutting out that carefree world and the truth. He sprinted to the bathroom, still apologizing repeatedly, and meticulously soaked a washcloth for my head. He handed it to me and gently kissed my quivering hand. He

snatched the ice bucket and said he would be right back. The sunlight momentarily blinded me as he ran out. He always tried to heal me after he hurt me.

I don't need this, I thought. I don't need *him*. I felt like a victim in a low budget made-for-TV movie. I felt...abused. Me? I was the girl who had graduated high school with honors. I was the girl who had a brilliant future. I was also the girl sitting in a dingy motel room bleeding steadily from a gash in my temple that I had received when my violent boyfriend threw me down the stairs to the hard concrete below. Suddenly, I had what alcoholics call a moment of truth. Everything about my life and my situation was painfully clear to me. A light shone on a corner of my mind that had been dark for so very long. I decided to leave that room and run far away from him,

I clutched my purse and rummaged for the keys to my 1979 Buick Regal, the lemon I called a car. I grabbed my powder-blue suitcase and frantically threw into it my meager possessions: a pair of shorts, a couple of T-shirts, a comb, toothpaste and toothbrush. I took one last look around the room, one last look at the life I had known for years.

Bravely, I opened the door and stepped out into the magnificent day. I felt so many things at once. I felt scared, empty...and free. I wasn't his prisoner anymore. I had walked out on him; *I had left him*. As I scrambled to my car, I repeated to myself my mother's words: "What doesn't kill you will make you stronger."

Evaluation: *It's an old topic, but it regularly invites new treatment. Katie's essay is controlled, compelling, and well styled.*

Pulled from Quicksand

by John Gross
Course: English 101
Instructor: Hanley E. Kanar

Assignment:

Narration-Description Essay.

Using description (writing with your senses), and narration (telling a story), write about a moment or moments in your life that changed you, changed someone you know, or both. This essay must have two significant central characters and you must make their feelings before and after the change clear.

Imagine being in a place that is very scary and there is no way out. There is nobody around who looks familiar. Friends, family, and other loved ones are far away. In this place, making decisions is out of the question! While there, it feels like you're walking through a dark forest and getting caught in some quicksand without having anyone around to help. This is the way I felt when I was incarcerated at Stateville.

When I was sixteen years old, I felt that the "cool" thing to do was to hang out with gangs. Now I realize that nothing productive could have come out from being a gangster. I started screwing up when I started hanging around these adolescent bullies that wouldn't take the word "no" even from their own mothers. Most of the time we would do whatever we wanted. Most of the time it was against the law. After my mother met these com-

panions, she knew that they weren't the type of friends that she would pick for me. Although my mom always let me make my own decisions, even if they were the wrong ones, she was a very strong believer in behaving in a proper fashion. She always tried to instill good morals in my brother and me. We would sit down and have long talks about different personal issues ranging from safe sex to how to say no to gangs and drugs. The most important lesson I have learned from her is through her own example of how she lives her life. Ever since I can remember, she always worked two jobs. Anything my brother and I needed, we got.

Being the caring mother she was, she tried to find out what was going on in my life and why I would want to involve myself with these hoodlums. I didn't listen to the advice my mother gave me; I was too busy trying to get rich by selling drugs and making lots and lots of money. Before I was old enough to get a nine to five job, I decided to stand out in the corners and supply the skinny, drug-addicted people with their favorite poison. Personally, I didn't care, at the time, if these addicts wanted to kill themselves and wreck their lives as long as I got what was coming to me...money!

Before getting caught I had acquired many valuables such as: gold necklaces and rings, furniture, and electronics. These are the kinds of material goods that enticed me to this type of lifestyle. I also enjoyed being the center of attention. I enjoyed being "the Man." Unfortunately, but maybe fortunately, I got caught two years later.

On a chilly autumn day, following my daily routine of going to school after dinner, after starting my car, all of a sudden two cars pulled up and boxed my car in. I was petrified! Out of each blue Chevy Caprice a husky person jumped out with guns drawn and pissed-as-hell looks on their faces. They yelled at me like two ravaged pitbulls attacking an intruder. At first, I thought, oh, oh, here it comes; I thought I was going to be robbed or killed. While they pointed their guns at my head, the two cops told me to get out, showed me their badges, and handcuffed me. A few seconds after

being detained, I heard a thunder-like sound. It was the front door of my house being kicked down. My poor old mother, innocent to the whole thing, got the same violent treatment, guns, handcuffs, and all. After the police and their canine assistants looked through every crack and crevice of the house, they found what they wanted to find—the product!

I was charged and convicted for possession and sales of narcotics and for unlawful possession of a fire arm. These charges were class X felonies which held six to thirty years. After my sentencing hearing, I learned that I was going to do six years of time. My mother, while crying, told me, "Don't worry, everything will be all right." This is the type of mother that I had learned to love. After all I had done, lying, sneaking out behind her back, and not listening to her advice, she was still going to stick by me.

As I walked through the tunnel (this is what they called the hallway leading to the cells), many feelings were running through me. Sweat was dripping from my hands like a faulty faucet, I felt like someone was doing back-flips in my stomach, and a million thoughts were running through my head, but the most pronounced emotion was fear. This was the first time I was in a situation where I had totally no control. I didn't know what to expect, what type of people I would find, or if I would ever make it out alive. This was the first time I was going to be away from my friends, family, and other loved ones. I was used to roaming the streets and doing whatever I wanted to do, and now, I was going to get told what to do, when I could leave my cell, and even when I could eat. This was like walking through an unknown forest.

My time at Western Correctional Facility wasn't all that bad. I started to get on a schedule. I met some inmates who had the same interests that I had and was getting along just fine. Western was only a medium security penitentiary which means that there is a lot of movement. I was able to go to the yard and play basketball or to the gym and lift weights, if I wanted. But, after getting too comfortable, I started to take advantage. I got into a fight

with another inmate over something silly. Because of this, I was shipped to Stateville, a maximum security penitentiary.

Segregation at Stateville is an inmate's worst nightmare. It was also mine. In segregation, I got placed in a one-man cell with no television or radio. All I had was a metal bed with a thin pad over it, a little hard metal desk without a seat, a grimy sink and toilet. This seven by ten foot cell was my home for the following six months. I was only allowed out six hours a week—five hours on Tuesdays to go to the yard and one hour on Wednesday to take a shower. At this time, I felt I was up to my neck in quicksand. By being let out only six hours a week, I was forced to think a lot. What I thought about most was my family and what I was going to do in six months.

I had six months to prepare for my release. During that time, I felt that I had to get myself mentally, physically and psychologically prepared for the outside world. I started off by getting as much reading material as I could. Before I got incarcerated, I had attended Harper and did not pass any of my classes with even a D. While in jail, my reading skills were at a very low level. I read at approximately the fourth grade. I stumbled through easy two-syllable words, my spelling was pretty much unreadable, and it would take me so long to complete what I was reading, that often I would forget what the first paragraph was about. I felt that there was no better time to improve my reading skills than while I was in prison. In that cell, I read more books than I had ever read during my whole life. My reading improved tremendously and I started to really like it. I would look forward to start reading everyday. Because I only got one book a week, I had to budget my reading time daily so I would not run out of reading material.

To prepare physically, I knew I would have to work out. I made out a workout plan that I could do without weights. Everyday, I would do 700 pushups and 500 sit-ups. This was also very important because it would keep me busy. While I was in segregation, I had to do different things just to

break up my day. I noticed that just like my reading skills, these pushups and sit-ups were getting done quicker and easier.

Psychologically, I had to prepare for a totally new lifestyle. Instead of being the "bad kid" I figured out that I wanted to be a role model for younger kids. Exactly one week after getting out, I enrolled myself back at Harper. The first semester was a little difficult. It was hard to get back in the swing of things. However, I did just that and managed to pull all A's and B's, even with my learning disability. I also decided to work on my most important relationship which is my relationship with my mom. She was with me one hundred percent of the way and it would only be fair for me to prove that I was worth all her anguish.

This event helped me become the man that I am today. Now, I have many goals for my future and now, I am on the road to complete them. I continue doing well in school and staying away from my old ways. My relationship with my mother is better than it has ever been. We have many open discussions and we have a trusting relationship. The rope out of the quicksand, for me, was knowing that I could do something with my life.

Evaluation: John's essay stands out not only because of his skillful ordering of a long and complex period of his life, but also because of the astonishing transformation he describes. I can imagine few other English Composition narratives that work as well; John's paper serves beautifully as a motivational tool for improving English language skills.

Two Languages, Many Lives:

Confronting Difficulty in English 101

by Alejandra Guerrero
Course: English 101
Instructor: Kris Piepenburg

Assignment:

Write an essay that speculates about the causes of a phenomenon or trend.

Eight years ago I came to the United States from Mexico. It was a long journey for me since I lived in Guanajuato, a state in the southern part of Mexico. My mother became a widow when I was about nine years old. She was here in Illinois working with my father, but he had an automobile accident on his way to get us from Mexico. My mother decided after a year that it would be best for her if she had us with her and our newborn sister. Therefore, my brother, my sister, and I made the journey to reunite ourselves with our mother. We arrived in late August, so we did not see much of the summer. We were having a difficult time trying to adjust to the new environment and to the new food. It seemed, though, that the language was the main problem with us. My mother needed us to be able to communicate with everyone; she wanted us to feel comfortable speaking in front of people. It took about a year before I was moved up to a mainstream class, a regular English class. It did take a great effort on my part, nights and days studying. I know that there are many factors which contribute to the lack of perfection in my English, and I would like to evaluate some in this paper.

After being born in another country and spending your entire childhood there, it can be extremely challenging to try to adjust to another country. It is difficult to learn a language and grow up thinking that each day you will be better at it, and all of a sudden realize that the language you have learned does not help in many situations. As a child, one learns to express oneself depending on the environment in which one lives. Thoughts and ideas flow in the head according to the values and morals taught to the individual. People learn to verbally express feelings in the native language. For example, if I were to write a poem in Spanish and try to translate it to English, my poem would probably lose its sense or main idea. It would be like singing a song with translated words, but the words do not seem to go with the music. This is a major problem even for professional translators, since there are many words that simply do not have a translation. If there is such a case, it may be that a thought or

idea flows like a river in your mind, but you cannot reveal it to someone who does not speak the language in which you are thinking. There are many occasions when my mother will ask me to translate mail for her, and there are some phrases that I cannot translate with the same meaning. I just work my way around it to try to come up with the closest meaning to it as I possibly can. I believe that that is exactly what happens the other way around. I think in Spanish most of the time and I work my way around to try and express my thoughts in English. This may be the reason why some of my paragraphs seem to go off the subject or are extended unintentionally. Something that I am realizing all of a sudden is that in college, professors want to see less than what I am used to writing. I have always been the kind of person who cannot explain herself in just one or two paragraphs, because ideas flow to my head like crazy. Once I get ideas, it is difficult to put them in the proper language so that other people will understand.

The second reason why I believe I have not done well in my English class this semester is simply the lack of time. I thought that college would be just as high school and it is in a way, except that when I was in high school I did not work full time as well. I did not stop to think about the many responsibilities I have and the ways in which I would manage to be a mother, an employee, and a student. I am a full-time student as well here at Harper. This is my first year in college, and I am extremely disappointed with myself. There is not enough time to do the kind of homework that I have while carrying out the rest of my duties. I cannot concentrate in my free time at home because I have a young daughter who demands my undivided attention, along with my nine-year-old sister. It seems sometimes that I have twenty children of my own, since my cousins rely on me to baby-sit for them once in a while. My family also relies on me a great deal, since I take them places where they need someone to translate to them. There are also many other obligations at home, which I must attend, and that takes away most of my free time. I think I was doing better in

school before because I did not work full time and have all these other responsibilities as well. Yet, I know that I must work full time to support my daughter and to pay for my tuition. It is impossible for my mother to help me with my expenses and also maintain the household. I feel like I am young in age, but I feel that I have lived more than I should have. It just seems that my life does not stop for a minute, and I worry even on the few hours of my sleep. I always dream that I forget to do something and that I get in so much trouble for doing so. Time is definitely one of my problems, and I consider it to be the greatest problem in my life at this point. Time is also an issue when it comes to doing the research. I can only do so much with my time being limited to only a few hours. This places me at a disadvantage because my papers cannot have as much information as I would like for them to have. It is difficult to find the time to do everything I have to do in one day.

Another reason why I have not been doing well in English is that I feel disappointment in myself. I have always enjoyed writing. It is the only way for me at times to express myself and be as honest as I can possibly be. There are many things that cannot be said in front of a person, and I believe that I can describe my feelings better when I write them than when I say them. Ever since I was moved up to regular English class, my grades were always satisfactory. This is the reason for my disappointment, since I had always received A's and B's. I was selected for the Young Authors Conference when I was in elementary school. Back then, I was selected for writing a variety of short stories for young children, and I still have that collection of stories I wrote. Then, in junior high school and high school, my grades continued to be satisfactory. It is difficult for me to see that I was doing well up until high school and all of a sudden, I just cannot seem to write a paper. This semester has been extremely frustrating for me and I feel very stressed out at this point; I just hope that one day I will find the answer to my problem in writing English papers. It may be that all the events in my life are making me

think more in my native language, and that is what is causing the problem. I do not want to quit writing, because I love it, but I just do not understand why I cannot be as efficient in English as I had always been. I am very confused as to why I had been doing fairly well, and all of a sudden it seems that I am writing in an entirely new language.

To conclude this paper, I would just like to say what I feel in regards to my situation. I know that right at this time in my life, there are many things going on, things which also keep me from succeeding in school. I have always loved writing and I would like to do better. I have recognized that one of my great problems is time. It is extremely difficult to have so many roles to carry out for only one person. It is impossible to do everything correctly when being full time at everything. I also have to keep in mind that many of my classmates do not have anywhere close to the responsibilities I have. This has taught me an important lesson, though. I must take things at an easier pace, and I know that I will not have as many classes next semester in order to do well in school. It has not been easy coming here as an older child, to learn new things and basically try to adjust to an entirely new culture and a new language. It is not easy to plug ideas in, once you think in your own native language. Phrases and paragraphs do not seem to have the same smooth pace as they do in your language, but I most certainly hope that one day I can write in English as well as I can think in Spanish.

Evaluation: Ms. Guerrero's essay reveals the mind of a concerned community college student as she grapples with the many adjustments her life has required of her. Her writing subsequent to this took quite a positive turn, emphasizing the growth potential involved in confronting one's personal difficulties in clear thinking and writing.

Butterfly, Butterfly, Fly Away...

by Virginia Harris
Course: English 101
Instructor: Peter Sherer

Assignment:
*Write a personal experience essay
which focuses on an incident which
helped you mature in some way.*

In the distance we heard a small dog barking at a car rolling lazily by. A cool breeze provided us relief from the sun's harsh rays. The sweet smell of freshly cut lawns hung in the Saturday afternoon air. The two of us were consumed in our game, hardly noticing the day slipping away. Ariel wrapped her small, plump hand around my index finger.

"What do you see?" I asked.

"Gween!" Ariel shrieked as she stooped to pat the grass carpet growing behind our house. Stray blades clung to her small hand with each caressing pat. She giggled at the sight of the grass rubbing off on her. Knowing she could easily clean her own hands, she held them out for me, indulging my need to baby her. At twenty-two months of age, Ariel was emerging from her infant cocoon, entering her childhood. We continued our game,

"What do you see?" I asked.

"Dat!" she pointed across the yard.

"What, honey?"

"Dat, Momma."

I looked where her finger led me. A small yellow butterfly gracefully floated through the day; it silently settled on a purple wildflower petal.

"What dat, Momma?"

"That's a butterfly, baby."

"Pretty..." her hushed tone revealed her immense awe. I understood her completely. I experienced the same awe when I first set eyes on Ariel.

The butterfly had no hint of the caterpillar it once was. Relying on sight alone, one would never know of the changes it had been through. And so it is with Ariel. She has shed the helplessness of a newborn. She no longer resembles the clumsy baby, unsteady on her feet. Ariel is leaping and dancing into her new stage of life—*childhood*, a time of whimsy when dreams are real, wishes are granted, a day is a lifetime, a summer an eternity. Middle-of-the-night feedings are a thing of her past. She no longer tolerates hours of humming in the rocking chair. Crayons and balls have replaced mobiles and rattles. I mourn the loss of the infant she was, and embrace the child she is.

I looked down into her deep eyes. Her attention was still captivated by the butterfly. Ariel's eyes hold a mystery. It is the mystery of who she is, and who she will become. So many nights I have stared into the darkness, wondering about this child before me. The longer I have allowed myself to stare, the clearer things have become. As my eyes adjust, the room fills with objects that were once disguised. For example, the side table that once blended into the blackness begins to take shape. What form will Ariel take as she grows? As my eyes adjust, will they see her dreams, hopes and aspirations come alive? What person will she be? When a clerk hands her more change than she is due, will she be honest enough to correct him? Will

Butterfly, Butterfly, Fly Away...

she make a landmark judgement while serving on the Supreme Court? Will she don a lab coat while finding an answer for AIDS patients? If she opts to have children of her own, will she take the time to gaze at butterflies with them? Whether she cloaks herself in a judge's robe or a mother's apron, I will be there watching. The longer I watch, the more I see; the more I see, the larger my awe.

I cherish this short time we have together, for the years will indeed speed by. Will she remember this butterfly? Will I? Will her childhood be as fleeting as this moment? Today I answer her questions; soon she will answer mine.

The butterfly danced a short jig for us, then set off into the heat of the day.

"Fly, Momma."

"Yes, that's right, Ariel, a butterfly."

"Fly!"

Yes, my child, you will fly!

Evaluation: *Virginia's essay is focused, tight, and wisely economical. It combines narration, description, and analogy. Its sentiment appeals as the narrator shares a universal moment with her daughter.*

Study at an American School

by Wei G. Jin

Course: ESL Reading 068

Instructor: Ilona J. Sala

Assignment:

Students were to write a memory piece involving someone very close to them.

More than three years have already passed, but I still remember it very clearly. It was the first day for our son, James, to go to an American school. Being an honor student in China, James felt full of confidence and said to us, "Daddy, Mommy, don't worry about me. I'll be fine!" He got up very early that morning and smiled to us when he left home to take the school bus.

I found James in low spirits as soon as I got home after work. After a short silence, James told us his story, the first day at the American school. His first class was science. With the book he knew the teacher was talking about the universe and celestial bodies, but he could not understand most of what the teacher taught. Though James had done well in his English class when he was in China, he could not even write down his homework. After class he found it was very difficult to communicate with his classmates. He began to lose his confidence and

doubt whether he could adapt to his studies at the American school.

"Daddy, why there are so many differences?" James looked at me and asked, "Can it get better?"

"Definitely," I replied without hesitation. "Jimmy," I said, "we've come to a totally different country, a new country. There are lot of differences you'll find. For example, our Chinese advocate modesty and politeness, but Americans prefer competition." As I didn't want our conversation to be too severe, I continued, "Even our habits are dissimilar. Chinese usually take showers before going to sleep. But Americans? Most Americans shower in the morning."

I explained the dissimilarities between the two countries from the histories to cultures, even the geographical conditions.

"This is a challenge in your life!" I encouraged James. "You can overcome these difficulties in a short time and gain success in your studies just as you did in China." Time flies, and now James is a freshman at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Yesterday, he came home to spend Labor Day with us. He told his Mama that the life in college was cool and fun. He has chosen two honors classes this semester. James told us he would never forget the phrase that his high school teacher gave him, "Never give up; miracles happen everyday."

Evaluation: I love the way Wei captures the spirit of an immigrant. He depicts how easily the self-esteem of a young boy is affected, and through strong support, how the spirit can rise again.

Organic Farming— Agriculture for the Future

by Miriam Johns
Course: Soil Science
Instructor: Chet Ryndak

Assignment:

The students were to provide a report dealing with a problem in soil science and were to identify some potential solutions.

Outline

- I. Introduction
- II. What is Organic Farming
 - A. Definition
- III. The Chemical Hook
 - A. The father of chemical agriculture
 - B. Post WWII
- IV. The Origins of the Organic Movement
 - A. Some historical facts
 - B. The founder of the organic movement
 - C. Other pioneers
 - D. The growing need for standards
- V. Why Organic Farming?
 - A. Our health
 - B. Our environment
 - C. Eliminate the chemicals
- VI. The Barriers
 - A. It isn't easy
 - B. The organic farmer is a different breed
- VII. The Future is Here
 - A. Gaining worldwide support
 - B. Sales are up
- VIII. Conclusion
 - A. Organic is here to stay

Introduction

"As soil is the basis for all human life, our only hope for a healthy world rests on reestablishing the harmony in the soil we have disrupted by our modern methods of agronomy."

— Dr. Alexis Carrel
Eminent French Scientist and Nobel Prize
winner in *Man, The Unknown*

Organic farming is not a new idea. It is the system our grandparents and great grandparents used until the end of World War II, and which nature has used for millions of years. Organic farming today, however, is not simply a return to farming as it was pre-1939. It has made tremendous strides because of modern science and an increased understanding of soil life.

Organic farming is increasingly being recognized as a potential solution to many problems facing agriculture and our environment in both developed and developing countries. All kinds of crops, including grains, can be organically grown and marketed for a profit.

More and more consumers are becoming increasingly concerned about the ways in which their food is produced. The educated consumer is prepared to pay more for products produced by methods that are "better" for his/her health and for our environment. The current trend toward a healthier lifestyle is here to stay and will help push organic farming to its proper place, at the forefront in agriculture of the future.

What is Organic Agriculture

Organic growing is a system which uses natural (organic) material to nourish the soil which produces vegetables, fruit and other crops. It dramatically reduces external inputs by refraining from the use of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides or fungicides. Instead, intensive management is used to improve soil health and reduce the need for synthet-

ic inputs. Healthy soil is key to successful organic farming. Organic farming is also known as "sustainable agriculture" or "regenerative agriculture."*

It should be noted that the product of crops by simply eliminating synthetic fertilizers and pesticides is known as "organic by neglect" and doesn't give the high yields and quality that purposeful organic production does. In organic crop production, emphasis is placed on building the soil with organic amendments and using crop rotations to enhance the cropping system's natural defenses against disease, insects and weeds.

The Chemical Hook

Poisoning the soil with artificial agricultural additives began in the middle of the last century when German chemist Justus von Liebig, hailed as a pioneer of the new age of science, deduced from the ashes of a plant he had burnt that what nourished plants was nitrogen, phosphorus and potash—ignoring the organic portion of the plant. The chemical fertilizer industry was created out of the ash of von Liebig's experiment and Liebig, whom we have studied in Soil Science class, became known as the "father of chemical agriculture."

In the 1930's, crop yields in the United States, England, India and Argentina were essentially the same. After World War II many scientists, turning from a wartime to a peacetime footing, looked for areas to conquer. Some, turning their attention to agriculture, analyzed the growing needs for crops and worked towards reproducing artificially the various nutrients which plants require for growth. They looked at the problem of pests and disease and unwanted weeds and devised powerful pesticides and herbicides which they could apply to the plants and to the soils to eradicate them. Researchers, scientists and a host of federal policies helped U.S. farmers dramatically increase yields of most major crops.

*Here and throughout the body of this essay, the writer does not provide source documentation and/or page references for quoted lines/passages. A comprehensive array of bibliographic sources is provided after this essay's conclusion in the "Works Cited" list (see p. 65).

Agriculture departments around the world welcomed this new era of chemical control. Production could be boosted; fruits and vegetables "looked" wonderful. A new golden age of crop production had arrived. Today, fewer farmers feed more people than ever before.

This success, however, has not come without costs. Some people around the world found that under the new chemical regime, their soil was dead. There were no living organisms in it at all. Good and bad had all been killed by the pesticides, herbicides and artificial fertilizers. They were worried about the long-term effect of the poisons on the health of themselves and their children. Scientists and agricultural departments ridiculed their fears. There was no "scientific evidence" to show any ill-effects on people in the short-term and, of course, the poisons had not been in use long enough to determine the long-term effect on people's health.

"I have sinned against the wisdom of the Creator and, justly, I have been punished. I wanted to improve his work because, in my blindness, I believed that a link in the astonishing chain of laws that govern and constantly renew life on the surface of Earth had been forgotten. It seemed to me that weak and insignificant man had to redress this oversight."

— Justus von Liebig, when looking back on his life and work.

From: *Agrikulturchemie*, Aug. 8, 1865

The Origins of the Organic Movement

Long before the "chemical age" of agriculture, Sir Albert Howard, an English agricultural advisor to the Indian state of Indore, first thought out the concept of growing plants without using synthetic chemicals. This came about because the area of India where he worked was so poor that local farmers couldn't afford to buy fertilizers. There was more to his thinking than just a solution to an immediate practical problem, however. He was disturbed by the trend of the scientific community toward advocating synthetic substitutes for many "natural com-

modities." He spent 30 years in India experimenting with natural farming where he also concluded that crops have a natural power of resistance to infection and that proper nutrition is all that is required to make this power operative. He returned to England in 1931, wrote books and lectured on the subject. In the book, *The Soil and Health*, he warns that the use of synthetic chemical fertilizers leads to imperfectly synthesized protein in leaves and thus results in many diseases found in plants, animals and human beings. Sir Albert became known as the founder of the "organic" movement.

Lady Eve Balfour, another pioneer of the organic movement, organized the Soil Association in Britain in 1946 and produced a convincing work entitled *The Living Soil* validating Sir Albert's basic premise that humus confers on plants initiate disease resistance amounting almost to immunity, something that cannot be obtained with artificial fertilizers. "It is surely imperative that further research is conducted into the real costs of the possible side effects of chemical farming," said the Prince of Wales, who delivered the Lady Eve Balfour Memorial Lecture at the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Soil Association in 1996.

J. I. Rodale, an American pioneer on the subject, first read about Sir Albert Howard's ideas in the late 1930's. Rodale was the first to use the word "organic" to describe the natural method of farming. He proclaimed that to be organic "was to know and to understand the lessons of nature in all ways, and to use that knowledge to evaluate all of the 'blessings' of science and technology." Rodale went on to publish the first issue of *Organic Gardening and Farming* in 1942. He also founded the Rodale Institute in 1947 which has worked for the past 50 years to "promote regenerative agriculture and seek to define the link between farming practices, soil health and human health."

Commercial organic farming and distribution began to mature over twenty years ago. Rodale Publishing, which actually owns the trademark to the word "organic," began the process of defining what the word meant, and to certify those who pro-

duced such products according to their definition. Subsequently, private certifying agents were voluntarily created in various parts of the world to administer such certification programs. Later, various state legislatures, in concert with the organic community, created legal definitions and, in some cases, State Certifying Agencies. Currently in the United States, 44 states have organic certification agencies.

As the market grew to near one billion dollars it became apparent that the diversity of standards developed by various state and private certifying agents were confusing consumers. Consequently, organic farmers, certifiers, and other interested groups (from public interest, environmental, consumer and advocacy sectors) brought about the passage of the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 by Congress in order to address the issue of consistent and uniform standards. The guidelines that will establish national standards for organic production, the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Organic Program, were expected to be issued in 1997. However, with only 60 days left in the year at the time of this writing, the delivery of those guidelines appears doubtful.

Why Organic Farming?

The reasons for farming organically are simple: our health, the environment and consumer demand.

Organic food has superior quality as a result of growth on fertile soil. People know their health is affected by what they eat. The molecules of water, earth and air that rearrange themselves to form the beans and kernels of our crops are the molecules that eventually become the tissues of our own bodies. The idea that "you are what you eat" is beginning to take root with the nutrition establishment and consumers. People want to buy organic food. As people become more educated and concerned about what they put into their bodies, demand will increase the need for organic food.

There are no chemicals used in growing or processing the food. The U.S. Environmental

Protection Agency (EPA) has identified agriculture as the largest nonpoint source of surface water pollution. Soil erosion remains a concern in many states. Pest resistance to pesticides continue to grow. Pesticides don't always stay on the fields where they are sprayed. They evaporate and drift in the jet stream. They dissolve in water and flow downhill into streams and creeks. They bind to soil particles and rise into the air as dust. They migrate into glacial aquifers and buried river valleys and enter ground water. They fall in the rain. They are detectable in fog. Some of the pesticides in our landscape promote cancer in laboratory animals. Some, including one of the most commonly used pesticides, atrazine, are suspected of causing breast and ovarian cancer in humans. Other probable carcinogens, such as DDT and chlordane, were banned for use years ago, but their presence endures. Migratory songbirds carry DDT molecules in their flesh, as do many freshwater fish. Global air currents carry DDT into the North American continent from countries where its use is still permitted. DDT periodically wells up from the deep basins of the Great Lakes.

To the 89 percent of Illinois that is farmland, an estimated 54 million pounds of synthetic pesticides are applied each year. In 1950, less than 10 percent of cornfields were sprayed with pesticides. By 1993, 99 percent were chemically treated.

Chemical companies spend millions of dollars to get new pesticides cleared for farm use, but they spend practically nothing to find out what the pesticides' residues are doing as they accumulate in the soil. Harmful substances have trespassed into our landscape and have also woven into the fibers of our bodies. It is essential that we should understand the lifetime effects of these incremental accumulations.

Growing food organically saves the land. There is no question that the fertility of the soil is crucial to the long term sustainability of life on this planet, or that the soil has been very generous to us. However, the high yield crops of the last 50 years have resulted in a gradual reduction in organic matter in the soil. Deterioration in soil structure has

occurred leaving the soil more prone to compaction and erosion.

The Barriers

Producing food by the organic method isn't easy. It's one of thought, care and a lot of hard work. Converting from commercial to organic farming can be costly and time consuming. The farmer must be intelligent, conscientious and he must be concerned about tomorrow as much as he is concerned about today. He must be concerned about his primary resource—his farm's soil—and his product, the food raised on his farm. In most cases, the process of converting a farm from chemical to organic takes about three years, allowing time for the chemical residues in the soil to dissipate.

Organic farming practices typically require more information, trained labor, time and management skills than conventional farming. And organic farmers cannot expect to get 100% return by using organic growing principles. He may only get 80% return. But he may get an 80% return if he's using non-organic methods, so the organic farmer with the 80% return knows he will get crops that are nourishing and free from harmful side effects.

Without a positive and ecological approach, it is not possible to farm organically. The attitude of the organic farmer must be different. He must train himself to think ecologically. He tries to see the living world as a whole. He regards so-called pests and weeds as parts of the natural pattern of the Biota, probably necessary to its stability and permanence, to be utilized rather than attacked. He studies what appear to be nature's rules, and attempts to adapt them to his own farm needs instead of scorning them. The organic farmer must be a special breed.

The Future Is Here

It is obvious that the world community has joined the organic movement. Many European countries have introduced programs to support

farmers financially during the critical conversion time of conventional to organic farming. Other countries like Israel, New Zealand and Australia have given considerable support to organic marketing strategies and research. The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements, a worldwide umbrella organization of the organic agriculture movement, has 530 member organizations and institutions in some 95 countries around the world. Grassroots oriented, the Federation represents the worldwide movement of organic agriculture and provides a platform for global exchange and cooperation.

Mass market organic produce sales in the United States rose 54% from 1993 to 1994. In 1995, sales were up 45% from the previous year.

In 1981, the U.S. Regenerative Agriculture Research Center began to study the transition process that occurs when converting from conventional to organic farming. Corn and soybean production was selected as the focus because huge tracts of land, particularly in the Midwest, are devoted to the production of these crops for animal feed. This Farm Systems Trial is now one of the longest running experiments designed specifically to study organic cropping systems.

The results of the first 16 years show that comparable yields can be obtained without the use of chemical pesticides or fertilizers. As a matter of fact, during drought years, when all the corn yields were reduced because of insufficient water, the yields in the organic corn were not as reduced as much as the conventionally farmed corn, suggesting that the organic systems may be more resistant to drought stress.

Conclusion

Farmers must shift away from heavy use of agrochemicals and see their activities bear consequences far beyond that of crop production. Farmers who adopt organic methods can have productive and profitable operations.

The elimination of chemicals lowers production costs and lessens agriculture's potential for adverse environmental and health effects without necessarily decreasing—and in some cases increasing—per acre crop yields. The success of these farmers indicates that organic farming practices hold promise for many other farmers and potentially significant benefits for the nation and the world. How fast and how far this transformation of agriculture will go depends on economic opportunities and incentives which are shaped by farm policies, market potential, research priorities and the importance society places on achieving environmental goals.

Government policies that discourage the adoption of organic farming practices must be reformed. The U.S. Department of Agriculture must allocate more of its \$1.8 billion research budget to the study of organic farming practices. More consumers must be made aware of the benefits of eating organically produced foods and help increase organic production by the principle of supply and demand.

The organic movement is established and here to stay. Far from being a return to the past, organic farming is an agriculture for the future, our future.

"There is nothing in the whole of nature which is more important than or deserves as much attention as the soil. Truly it is the soil which makes the world a friendly environment for mankind. It is the soil which nourishes and provides for the whole of nature; the whole of creation depends upon the soil which is the ultimate foundation of our existence."

— Friedrich Albert Fallou
Written in 1862

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- International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements, Tholey-Theley, Germany

Evaluation: *Miriam Johns has written a superb paper identifying problems in agriculture relating to chemical use and has provided excellent commentary on some potential answers to address this, namely organic farming.*

Mom

by Natalia Kida
Course: English 101
Instructor: Hanley E. Kanar

Assignment:

Using description (writing with your senses) and narration (telling a story), write about a moment or moments in your life that changed you, changed someone you know, or both. This essay must have two significant central characters and you must make their feelings before and after the change clear.

"Natalia, I need to talk to you," my brother said as he poked his head inside my room. It irritated me. I was playing spades and this was the deciding hand. I would have ignored him, but I looked at him and saw that there was something wrong. His eyes were wide and scared. I got up from the table and followed him into his room. "What is it? What's wrong Artur?" I was getting scared. He looked at me with a tear-soaked face "I just got a call from Grandma." His words came out in choked clumps; he was trying very hard not to break down. "Mom...mom is in...the hospital." "What? What do you mean, what's wrong with her?" I almost shouted the question. "She's going to die Natalia, she's going to die," and he started sobbing. I was in shock. She was still a young woman; she was only forty one. I walked out of his room dazed. He had to be wrong. I could hear Artur crying in the background, but none of this registered yet. I didn't want to accept what he just said. I walked back into my room. I heard people asking questions. Then I heard myself saying "My mom is dying." It did not sound like my voice. I didn't even feel my lips moving. "I can't finish the game right now. I think you should come back later." I just sat there. Someone said something else, but I couldn't comprehend the question. My mind was filling with memories of the short time I shared with Mom.

My mom and dad had been divorced for a number of years. My mom left to go to America when I was only five. There were a lot of political problems in Poland that prevented us from following her for ten long years. By the time we were reunited I had a half-brother and a mother with a terrible alcohol addiction. Despite everything, I yearned to finally experience the mother-daughter relationship I dreamt of for so long. I wanted to be like the friends I envied. I love my dad; he's the most wonderful man I have ever met, but there are some situations that require a mother's touch.

At first everything was great. Mom took me, Artur, and my half-brother Paul to Wisconsin Dells where we spent a month filled with happiness. When we got back my dad tried to get back togeth-

er with her for Artur and me. Mom ended up moving in. Oh, how happy I was. I was jumping around, preparing to live my dream. We were finally a family. For three weeks I was filled with euphoria. There was only one problem, Mom's overwhelming craving for alcohol. Dad forbade her to drink. After those three unforgettable weeks Dad, Artur, and I came home to an empty apartment. I was crushed. I felt as if someone had severed my heart from my body and cut it up in tiny, little pieces. I didn't understand her sickness and hated her for rejecting me. I hated her so much it hurt. Dad knew she went back to her old boyfriend, Paul's father. She was so anxious to get away from us that she left everything she owned behind. Dad wanted her to pick up her stuff the next day, after he got back from work. Once he hung up the phone, he turned to Artur and me and hugged us. "Don't go to school tomorrow. I know she'll come here during the day to avoid me. I'm sorry you guys had to go through this." He held us tighter as we wept. "I love you," he said and kissed our foreheads.

Once again he was right. She showed up in the morning with Paul, her boyfriend, and his friend. They stumbled onto our porch. The door was double locked so out of frustration she broke the window on our door. I was scared. In a drunken voice she started pleading with us to let her in. "I cut myself. I'm bleeding. Please let me in," she yelled in Polish. Artur gave in and unlocked the door. I went into my room while she got all her junk together. I heard her walking around, packing things in boxes, talking to the people she brought with her. She was paying more attention to her material belongings than to her own children! With Paul she had a clean slate; she had never left him. She looked at Artur and me, however, and saw her own guilt.

I wanted it to all be over; I wished I had never met her. At one point, Paul, only seven years old, came into my room. He had a hammer in his hand. He started waving it at me as if he wanted to hit me with it. "I hate you," he hissed at me. His face, once

the face of a carefree child, was twisted in a devil-like sneer. He stared at me through diabolic eyes. "I hate you." He spat the words out of clenched teeth again and left. Right then she walked into my room. "You will understand when you're older," she said and tried to kiss me. I said nothing; I didn't look at her. Then she was gone. She picked up everything she owned except for us. I could not understand why those things were more significant to her than her own children. How could that junk be more important than me?

I saw her now and then visiting my brother, but it hurt to talk to her. I ignored her for a year and a half. Then, on my fifteenth birthday, Artur persuaded me to see her. She came to our house with a present, a gold bracelet with my name engraved into it. I saw the hurt and longing in her eyes and realized how much I wanted her in my life. I threw my arms around her and we both cried, embraced in a hug I will remember for the rest of my life.

Our relationship never got to be what I wanted it to be. I now understand the sickness that took over Mom's life. That horrid enslavement to alcohol had her by the throat, squeezing out the last of her dignity and self-respect. At times, weeks would go by and I wouldn't hear from her. When I called, her boyfriend would tell me she was ashamed to talk to me. She drank so much her voice was gone. When she managed to speak, the sound from her throat was harsh and screeching. Then there were times she would say "Natalia, you should be proud of me. I haven't had a drink for the past three weeks," and I was proud. We would go shopping, to the movies, or just sit in her kitchen and talk. She once told me a story about my birth. All throughout the pregnancy my dad told her he hoped I had her hands. His are short and stubby. My mom had beautiful long fingers and slender hands. When I was born, before looking at my face, she unwrapped my hands. They were just like hers. We laughed at that story, but in a couple of days the cycle began again. I saw her on and off, depending on her condition. I always believed she'd get better.

Dad took me to the hospital. Artur ran out of the house right after he told me about Mom. His way of dealing with the unthinkable was to run down the street screaming and expressing the violence of his rage on cars and garbage cans. But I had to go and see her before it was too late. I had to tell her I loved her. On the ride there I realized it was her birthday; she was turning forty two. When we got to the hospital dad stayed in the car. He couldn't get himself to go in. One of my girl-friends was with me and accompanied me inside.

Mom was at Cook County Hospital. She lay on a bed surrounded by crack-heads and gang-bangers with bullet wounds. It was a shocking sight. Her once pinkish-white complexion was now the color of clay. She was swollen three times her size. There were tubes coming out of everywhere and machines beeping. The whites of her half-opened eyes were no longer white. They were brown and bloodshot. There was pus crusting around her eyes that stared into nothing. Her lips were slightly opened, oozing spit and drool bubbles. Her once gorgeous, reddish-brown curls lay in sweaty clumps on the pillow. I asked the doctor what happened. He looked at me and in his face I saw how much he hated his job right then. "Your mom had liver failure. Her liver was extremely damaged from alcohol. She took some Tylenol and it made her liver shut down." "Do you think she can hear me? I wanted to wish her happy birthday," I said, tears suddenly pouring out of my eyes. If he answered, I didn't hear it. I just stared at her, remembering the story she told me about our hands. I looked down at them and gently cradled hers in mine. They were so different now, swollen and dead. Those beautiful and slender hands looked like blown-up rubber gloves, only dark brown. I don't know how long I stood there, gazing down at our hands, comparing them. All I could think was that it wasn't her. Those were not her hands. They didn't resemble mine. My friend pulled me out of my trance. She put her arm around me and she too had tears in her eyes. I leaned over and kissed my mom's forehead: "Happy Birthday Mom. I love you, always." The

next morning our grandma called. Mom died during the night leaving behind ten-year-old Paul, me and Artur. She had just turned forty two.

Addiction is evil. Like a snake, it strikes with blinding speed and coils around, squeezing the life out of you. I can never forget the sight of Mom on that hospital bed, lifeless and brain-dead. She won't see me graduate, get married, or hold her first grandchild. I will never again be able to look at our hands and marvel at the similarity. She's gone forever and I never got to know her. We didn't have enough time. I have promised myself and my unborn children that I will never follow in her footsteps. I will see my kids grow up and spoil my grandchildren. Addiction will never constrict my life. I won't let it.

Evaluation: Natalia artfully combines description and narration in this moving autobiographical essay. Her characterizations are revealing and her descriptions full of metaphor resulting in an essay that is evocative and disturbing without being melodramatic.

Remembering

by Brenda Kitchka

Course: Honors English 101

Instructor: Martha Simonsen

Assignment:

Describe a return journey you have made to a place (model: E.B. White's "Once More to the Lake"). Bring the experience to life with vivid details, and examine the significance of the return.

I can close my eyes and return to that night last summer. It was the last night of our family vacation. Dad had rented an eight bedroom retreat house on Iron Lake in Minnesota, way up north near the Boundary Waters, not far at all from the Gunflint Trail where our family had vacationed many years ago. Mom was still alive when we made our first trip here, and I was about the same age as my daughter Jenny is now. In many ways these two trips were quite different; in many ways they were very much the same. The first trip we were all children. The second time we were adults bringing our children to a place with cherished childhood memories. But wait, I am getting ahead of myself.

As I said, it was the last night of our vacation. Our thoughts were to put the children to bed early so we could pack our belongings and prepare for the trip home. We had promised the children a bonfire on the beach this evening; they had been asking for one all week. But we held off until the last night, because this had been a very dry summer and a camp fire advisory had been issued by the forest

department. Tonight the fire added a magical feeling to the evening. We toasted marshmallows and made s'mores. We laughed when one of the children left a marshmallow stick on the log where Grandpa sat, leaving a sticky marshmallow mess on his pants. We talked about being ready to go home, yet not ready to have our vacation end. Since this was the last night together, we spoke more freely about our apprehensions of putting eighteen people in one house for a week. We joked and marveled at the fact that no cross words had been spoken, and how the children were even closer to their cousins than at the start of the week.

We started drifting apart, some to begin packing, others to put the younger children to bed. I was left at the campfire with my sister, Nancy, and Dave, my husband. As we watched the sparks from the fire drift into the sky, our attention shifted to the stars. I reminded them that the meteorite shower was supposed to climax on Tuesday, when about forty comets per hour would be visible to the human eye. But, according to my Skywatchers book, we should be able to see some comets tonight. My sister-in-law, the new Aunt Brenda, came down to the dock looking for something left behind. We saw a bright light in the sky and walked to the dock for a better view. It was MIR, the Russian space station! We watched its amazing speed, recognizing it as MIR from the descriptions given on the radio as to what to watch for. As we stood on the dock, we also spotted a shooting star, and marveled at its beauty. As we gazed into the sky trying to identify the constellations, another shooting star appeared! Nancy's husband, Mark, walked down to the dock to join us as we stargazed. The next shooting star was just like in the movies; it was bright and we were able to watch it travel across the sky.

After seeing that shooting star, I was torn between wanting to run up to the house to get my daughters and the rest of the family to join us and not wanting to leave the dock for fear of missing another spectacular sight. The desire to share this sky show with my family won. Soon we were all

standing on the dock straining to see the sky. Before long, I sat on the dock with Jenny's head on my lap as she lay down to watch the sky; my niece Sara placed her head on Jenny's stomach and before long, we were all lying like dominoes on the dock using each other as pillows. That evening we saw the most awe-inspiring light show in the sky. We marveled at the mixture of nature's beauty in the shooting stars mixed with the "space junk" man had put into our sky. Space satellites were also plentiful to see. They were not as bright as the MIR space station had been, and they did not travel the same distance across the horizon. We joked as we imagined we could identify the satellites — look, there goes CNN; I think that one belongs to ESPN; or maybe it's a government-owned satellite taking spy pictures of those crazy people lying on the dock down there.

In the darkness of the night we couldn't tell where the water ended and the sky began. This darkness gave our voices a distant and disjointed feeling. As we spoke to one another, we could recognize by voice who was speaking, but were unable to identify where that person was in the darkness. The only light came from the stars with an occasional spark from the now dying fire.

As we watched the sky, a glowing light to our left caught our attention. What is that? It flew closer; it was not high in the sky like the stars, but rather closer to eye level if we had been standing. It glowed with a greenish tint, not unlike the glow in the dark toys children play with. It was larger than an insect, yet smaller than a bird, more like the size of a hummingbird. It flew over the lake and into the brush to our left and hovered for a while as if to say, "I'll stay near while you watch and try to figure out what I am," but then it disappeared into the trees. We have no idea what it was we saw that night, but it's something we'll all remember.

As we watched the sky that evening last summer, my father asked if we remembered a night years earlier, when we had watched the sky from a boat in the middle of Lake Gunflint. It's funny how we all remembered the evening long ago, but each indi-

vidual had a different view. My dad remembered watching the sky from a historical perspective. What he saw that night, long ago, was the first joint effort as the United States and Russia hooked up in space. My sister, Susan, shares this memory with Dad, but she also remembers a small amount of disappointment over not seeing the Northern Lights. My memories of the evening are not of the sky at all. I had no idea of the historical significance of what we were seeing. I can, however, clearly remember the evening. I remember being in a small boat surrounded by total darkness — I remember clear skies and bright stars; I remember holding my mother's hand; but more than that I remember, and if I close my eyes, I can still feel that sense of peace and a closeness with my family.

I wonder what my children and my nieces and nephews will remember of this evening. Will they remember the space shuttles and the MIR space station? If they do will they understand the significance of these sightings? Will they remember the wonderful sky show put on by God? The beauty of the shooting stars — so many that we lost count? Will they remember seeing the Milky Way — as clear to us that evening as at the re-creations we've seen at the planetarium? Or will they remember only a family vacation with all their cousins, when they got out of bed to lie on the dock staring at the sky while quietly talking and laughing and listening to the water lapping at the side of the row boat? Did they feel as connected with each other and the universe as I did that night?

Evaluation: *E. B. White writes of the chain binding the generations of parents and children that visit his beloved lake in Maine. How beautifully Brenda captures a similar experience in this evocative essay.*

In Defense of “That Jazz Crap”

by Becky Klosowski
Course: English 101
Instructor: Jack Dodds

Assignment:

Write an expository essay in which you explain something that many people misunderstand or misperceive. Use information, explanation, and argument to correct their misunderstanding.

Outline

Thesis: Before jumping to the conclusion that it's just “crap,” you have to understand what jazz is, what is true as opposed to what is myth, and what makes jazz unique among the more popular styles of music.

- I. Jazz has a relatively small audience because most people receive little or no exposure to this music; they don't know what they're missing.
 - A. While not limited to jazz alone, improvisation is one of the defining factors and most exciting aspects of jazz.
 - B. Respected jazz musicians are incredibly talented; they study their whole lives to constantly improve; to learn the music and its history.

- II. Because most people are uninformed about jazz, they hold many misconceptions.
 - A. Jazz is “old people's music.”
 1. I must admit, some styles of jazz are “old people's music,” but that's not to say only “old people” should get the fun of listening to them.
 2. “Old people” aren't that much different from us.
 - B. Jazz is elevator music.
 1. “Smooth jazz” is elevator music, not jazz. The two should not be confused.
 2. “Smooth jazz is a child's attempt at “real” jazz.
 - C. All jazz is mellow and relaxing.
 1. This is a reason many people say they like jazz, but true jazz is not meant to be background music.
 2. Those who dislike jazz for this reason believe jazz has no “beat.”
- III. Jazz is obviously very different from most types of popular music, but these differences often explain why jazz is so interesting and unique.
 - A. While most jazz is purely instrumental, and most lyrics to jazz tunes lack the depth of those in present day popular music, this is more than compensated for by the rich emotional language of improvised solos.
 - B. In jazz, a particular song can be played for decades and never get old; each performance of any song is unique. No other form of music is quite like jazz in this way.

The arguments between my siblings and me over the radio in my mother's minivan are enormously vicious. When forced to ride somewhere together, we tear one another's throats out over who gets her pick of the music we all must listen to and—in all honesty—survive: my brother's classic rock and alternative, my sister's rap and the latest number one on MTV's Total Request, and my jazz. “How can you listen to that crap?” my sister moans when I win the front seat and control of the station. “Turn that crap off!” my brother shouts. “We don't

have to listen to anything; let's just talk...." ("That Crap" has become the working title of my music within my family, and so accustomed to this title am I that I find myself calling jazz "that crap" when talking to other people as well, even fellow jazz fans. Oops.) On one such occasion, I granted my brother's wish, turning the radio off and the conversation on to jazz to compensate. "Why do you guys hate this stuff so much?" I asked. "Why do you have any opinion at all?"

"Why do you care?" my brother returned. "Why do you always try to force that crap on us?"

"You *do* force," my mother added. Thanks mom.

It was the conversation that followed that inspired me to consider my opinion: Why *do* I care? I'd never really thought about it before. I suppose I've always been offended by people who make such quick judgments: I knew my brother and sister never really listened to jazz; they simply whined the moment it came on and lived through it by entertaining themselves in some other way, usually by attacking me for choosing it. I want others to understand my point of view, but also—since jazz has become my career choice and main love in life—I want to share with others its impact on me as well. Perhaps you don't believe any music could have that much impact on a person's life, but perhaps that's because you've never really listened to jazz either. Before jumping to the conclusion that it's just "crap," you have to understand what jazz is, what is true as opposed to what is myth, and what makes jazz unique among the more popular styles of music.

It has been my experience that jazz has a relatively small audience. Obviously, I've lived most of my life with a household of people who dislike my music. In the many part-time jobs I've held, I've worked with people who told me to "turn that crap off." In high school, I played in a jazz band in which people who *didn't* like jazz comprised the overwhelming majority. I began to feel that everyone I came in contact with must hate jazz. However, I realize most of you aren't so strongly opinionated as my siblings are, and that most of

you have had less exposure to jazz than even they: you don't know what you're missing.

As someone who has listened to jazz for many years, I can tell you that you're missing out on a deeply interesting and stimulating music. For example, improvisation is one of the defining factors and most exciting aspects of jazz. When musicians improvise, they play with the melody and chords of a song; they create music spontaneously, completely from their heads; they strive to portray their emotions with their notes. Great soloists can play sorrow, anger, joy; they can create and expand on ideas as though speaking in their own language. Wynton Marsalis, a famous jazz trumpeter and composer as well as a respected jazz educator, explains, "It's just like when we talk. We invent what we're going to say right in the moment, and we try to organize our thoughts as we go along."

As I have so far spent nearly four years trying to learn this art of improvisation, I can tell you that learning it is a life-long process. Improvising demands talent; respected jazz musicians study their whole lives to constantly improve: to learn the music and its history. Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, Benny Goodman—these jazz greats played as long as they were able. Joshua Redman, Leon Parker, Wynton Marsalis—though still young, these highly respected players have devoted their lives to learning from jazz greats. Jazz is a long story of both tradition and growth. Most popular music lasts a short while and is replaced by the next number one on MTV's Total Request.

Because most people are uninformed about jazz, they hold many misconceptions. One of these myths is that jazz is "old people's music." I'll admit that some styles of jazz could be considered "old people's music," swing for instance, since swing was the popular music in the days when these "old people" were our age. But that is not to say, however, that only the "old people" should get the fun of listening (and dancing!) to swing. Ever see the movie "Swing Kids"? (If not, I highly recommend you rent it.) According to the biography *Swing, Swing, Swing: The Life and Times of Benny*

Goodman, swing was a thrilling music. Whenever the big band up front would kick off a hot tune, all the kids would jump up and dance! Everyone knew how to jitterbug in the 30s and 40s: men would spin their ladies around, toss them into the air, catch them deftly; people would bounce and fly across the dance floor. Were these kids all that much different from us? Did they not want to have fun? The fiery music I would expect to have that kind of effect on people does not sound like what I would call “old people’s music.”

Another myth is that jazz is “elevator music.” Let me set the record straight. “Smooth jazz” is elevator music, not jazz; the two should not be confused. For those of you who are fans of Kenny G and the like, I pity you. You have put your faith in a music that is a child’s attempt at drawing a crayon masterpiece, with its circular trees, pentagon houses, stick character families, and strip of blue sky at the top. This “masterpiece” is certainly not a fair representation of the world, as this so called “jazz” is in no way representative of what true jazz is. They may have their similarities, but smooth jazz is only an amateur pretending to be a professional. Most smooth jazz tunes are merely unobtrusive arrangements of popular melodies, played by “musicians” with little to no talent. While they do improvise, this lack of talent stands out clearly when compared to “real” jazz improvisation. Their ideas are repetitive and unimaginative. It’s a shame smooth jazz is allowed to be called “jazz” at all, as this confusion of titles is usually the source of people’s misconceptions.

A popular myth drawn from that confusion is that all jazz is mellow and relaxing. This belief is often the reason many people say they *like* jazz. I always cringe in response to that opinion. What people don’t realize is that most of these “mellow and relaxing” songs are not trying to be mellow or relaxing. True jazz isn’t meant to be background music. People who find slow, emotional ballads with gorgeous melodies and harmonies relaxing are missing the point, often because they are not really *listening*. Unlike smooth jazz, “real” jazz is not

meant to relax, but to stimulate, both emotionally and intellectually. For example, the range of emotions in Stan Kenton’s arrangement of “My Funny Valentine” is staggering. The piece builds from a warm, whispering, trombone opening to a screaming, dissonant, trumpet climax, but with the volume turned down low enough, someone who doesn’t know what he’s listening to could call it “relaxing.”

On the other hand, many people I have talked to tell me they don’t like jazz for that same reason: it’s too mellow; it doesn’t have the excitement of popular music—namely, the beat. On the contrary! Listen to Buddy Rich or John Fedchock’s new big band or the old Count Basie Orchestra: jazz is defined by its rousing and exciting beat. According to Ron Carter, director of the top jazz band at Northern Illinois University, “If it don’t swing, it ain’t jazz!” The swing feel is unique to jazz: a driving rhythm that both leans forward and lays back the solid beat at the same time. Most popular music simply offers the solid beat monotonously and mind-numbingly.

I hope you are starting to see what jazz is and isn’t now. Jazz is obviously very different from most types of popular music, and some believe jazz is not as good for this reason, but these differences can actually help show how very interesting and unique jazz is. For example, while most jazz is purely instrumental, and most lyrics in jazz lack the depth of those in more musically mature popular songs, this lack of emotional words is more than compensated for by the rich emotional language of improvised jazz solos. When you understand jazz, you begin to understand this language as you understand your spoken vocabulary. Because soloists create music based on their own feelings, you can learn how to translate these ideas to fit their meaning to you: much like hearing someone speak. You find with some surprise that musical ideas can make you feel certain ways: some make you laugh; others remind you of a sad time in your life.

Another way jazz is unique from popular music is that a particular song can be played for decades and never get old; each performance of any jazz

song is unique. Many of these songs, called "standards," have been around for over half a century. The reason this longevity is possible is also one of the main reasons jazz still attracts young people nowadays, despite its general unpopularity: jazz is constantly growing while staying true to its history. Different arrangements of an old standard can give it a fresh feel, sound, or style. Different groups always strive to have their own individual style, so playing old tunes doesn't mean they have to sound old. Also, even if the same band plays the same arrangement of the same tune many, many times, the different improvised solos of the different musicians in that band will make it a different song every time. For example, Benny Goodman's band was best known for the song "Sing, Sing, Sing," a tune the group must have played several times a night at various concerts and gigs. (You may have heard this song in the old "Chips Ahoy" commercial with the dancing exclamation point.) The members of the band often claimed to be sick of hearing it; however, the crowds they played for always voiced their opinion, and the song continued to be played, night after night. Night after night, the performers produced fresh solos that made the tune swing harder than ever (Firestone). No other form of music is quite like jazz in that way.

If you open your ears, your heart, and your mind, you too can discover this amazing music called jazz. When musicians of any genre write music, they do so to express and share their emotions with those who listen to their music. This is something that is often overlooked by fans of popular music who listen to the music for its "beat" or simply its popularity. However, when you really listen to jazz, it is almost impossible to miss this true intent. Jazz is not only an emotional roller coaster to listen to, a thrilling and engaging music, but it's also deep and intellectual, a music with a history and language all its own. One of these days, when you're driving in silence, try flipping on 90.9 FM (College of DuPage's radio station which plays mostly jazz). Perhaps you'll catch some big band jazz on "The Saturday Swing Shift," maybe some

fusion on "Acid Jazz by Moonlight," or perhaps even one of the shows in which people—often famous musicians—discuss how jazz works, how to listen to it, and what makes it so exciting. See if you notice any of the things I've mentioned: the intoxicating swing feel, the intense emotions of improvised solos, the heart and head of the music. It's almost impossible for anyone to really listen to and understand jazz without being affected by it. At the very least, you learn to appreciate it. At the very most, you come to love and respect it. As well, you begin to hear *all* music in a deeper way: the way it was meant to be heard.

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Evaluation: *Becky has written vividly, informatively, imaginatively, and with style in defense of her great passion. Along the way, she tells us much about what makes jazz the important art form that it is.*

Let's Climb That Tree

by Amber Knoll

Course: Reading 099/English 101

Instructors: Christine Poziemski
and Barbara Hickey

Assignment:

Write an essay describing something from your childhood that remains important to you today. Enhance your description with simile, metaphor, and personification.

Dylan and I were born on the same day, at the same time. We were both placed in incubators and said to have never taken our eyes off each other while tubes and needles were being stuck all over our tiny, newborn bodies. We were born six weeks early and had complications. I got to be taken home three days earlier than Dylan and they say the minute I left, he cried for hours. Dylan was my next-door neighbor all throughout my childhood and we shared a special bond that no one could untie. Our parents were best friends so we were around each other all of the time. When we were old enough to sleep in regular beds, we would have sleepovers every Friday and Saturday night. I remember one night when I was five: we were brushing our teeth with our matching red and white toothbrushes and my tooth fell out and slid down the drain. Dylan was so upset that he couldn't get it for me, that a week later when one of his teeth fell out, he gave it to me to put under my pillow for the tooth fairy. There are so many memories and objects I have from our years growing up together, but the most important one is the treehouse we had.

We were on my swingset one hot summer day letting our orange popsicles melt down our sticky fingers when we decided we wanted a place of our own. The closest we could get to that was a little box of wood in a tree behind his fence. After a lot of begging and pleading, we got Dylan's older brother and some of his friends to build us a treehouse. It had three uncertain steps leading up to it and was about six inches taller than we were when we sat down. The walls were made of any wood that was found so there were some dark spots in the yellowed wood, looking like a cheetah's fur. The floor was rough and creaky like an old, abandoned staircase. The roof was made of two big sheets of wood that threatened to knock us in the heads if we stood up. To tell the truth, it smelled like an old, moth-eaten blanket, but to Dylan and me, it smelled new and exciting because it was our own. The air inside the treehouse seemed to yell out the words *independence* and *friendship*.

We spent weeks decorating it. I put up little hearted curtains which never got a complaint from my best friend, even though I did see him roll his big green eyes. I put down flower pots filled with red and purple flowers while he put a skull and crossbones on the door. I drew pictures of ballerinas for the walls while he drew ones with guns and aliens. I still have most of his pictures today. He was actually a pretty good artist for a seven-year-old—he put my stick people to shame. We hung every single drawing on the sandpaper surfaces of the walls which ended up looking like they were pasted with scribbled wallpaper. Eventually, the floor felt like one big sticker from all of the sun-dried drips of vanilla ice cream we ate up there.

Almost everyday we would lug a fishbowl containing two fish, Squinch and Munch, up to the treehouse with us. By the time we finally made it up the steps, half of the water would have splashed out over the sides and Dylan would run back to get more while I sat and worried if the fish were going to make it in their half-filled home. They always did. We would set the fish on the rug we made consisting of blue towels and yarn bows and make up fairy tales about them. We would lie on the rug for hours and talk without one moment of silence. Our treehouse was a whole other dimension to me because outside of it, we were normal, wild seven-year-old kids who teased one another, but inside we were like two adults who shared inner dreams and feelings. Only the walls of the treehouse knew Dylan as well as I did because that's the only place where he was completely himself. The treehouse had a taste of honesty and a feeling of security so we were easily able to spill our guts. Our treehouse remained as our home away from home up until that winter when Dylan passed away.

Dylan died that winter from pneumonia and I never went back in the treehouse. It was ours and we had always been in there together so it would have been too hard for me. My mom took everything out of it and gave me his pictures. There was one picture taped behind one of his big, green, one-eyed aliens that I never had seen before. It was one

of those grade-school hearts with the phrase *D + A Forever*. It's amazing how something as simple as that can just break your heart. Our treehouse still stands today knowing as much as I do, but unable to whisper our secrets. Broken down by bad weather, it's empty of people, but never empty of memories.

Evaluation: Amber uses vivid diction and imaginative figures of speech in her poignant description of her childhood treehouse.

Will the Real Bigger Thomas Please Stand Up?

by Adele Krueger
Course: Literature 115
Instructor: Andrew Wilson

Assignment:
Write a literary analysis.

"Number one, what is your name, please?"

"My name is Bigger Thomas."

"Number Two, what is your name, please?"

"My name is Bigger Thomas."

"Number Three, what is your name, please?"

"My name is Bigger Thomas."

"Thank you. There you have it, folks; we have three men who claim they are the main character in Richard Wright's novel, *Native Son*. According to the book, Bigger killed two women, a white girl and a black girl, and he is currently on death row awaiting execution. Let's see if we can find out which of them is the real Bigger Thomas."

Does this dialog sound familiar? If so, you're old enough to remember the game show called "To Tell the Truth" that was popular many years ago. If you're too young to remember, the show would bring on several contestants who claimed to be a particular person. The host would tell a little bit about the person's background, work, and/or a significant deed of some kind, and then several members of a panel would ask questions of the contestants to see if they could guess which one really was the person who had been described. Perhaps the following might be what we would hear if we broke slightly with the game show's tradition, dispensing with the panelists' questioning of the contestants, and just had each one of the Biggers tell a little about himself and how he came to be where he is today.

★ ★ ★

Bigger Number One:

"I grew up among the poorest of people in the 'brooding, dark, and violent' (Wright xxi) city of Chicago. I received little formal education; my education came mostly from the fantasies planted in my mind by the movies I saw in the movie house. I hate white people because they have everything, black people because we will never have anything,

religion because it talks about a better place where everyone will be equal, and my own family because they don't understand me. My mother has said to me, 'Bigger, sometimes I wonder why I birthed you' (6) and other things like, 'All you care about is your own pleasure!...Bigger, honest, you the most no-countest man I ever seen in all my life' (7). I know she would like to see me make something of myself, but how can I? The white folks make us live in one corner of the city and don't let us do anything. I would like to learn how to fly a plane, but they won't let me. It's probably just as well because 'if I took a plane up I'd take a couple of bombs along and drop 'em as sure as hell' (17). Even when Negroes join the Army to help defend our country, all we ever get are the lowest of the low jobs.

"Some people have called me cunning but not highly intelligent, and others have described me as 'an ugly, brutish bully' (xix), intimidating, and abusive of other blacks. Even my friends are afraid of my hot temper, like when I wanted to kill Gus in the pool hall. I was just as scared as he was, but violence is the only way I know how to react to fear. I always felt like something awful was going to happen to me, like 'I was going to do something I can't help' (23). Mr. Buckley, the state's attorney, was probably right when he called me a 'half-human black ape,' a 'beast,' a 'moron,' and 'human scum' (476, 478, 479) in court. That's all they think we Negroes are. His re-election posters say, 'You Can't Win' (13), and I know he's talking directly to us!

"Oh, yeah, and then there are the Daltons. I hate them and what they represent. I didn't know how to act in their house; I felt confused and awkward. I hated Mary Dalton, and I'm not sorry I killed her. I could not understand her. She and her communist friend Jan made me uncomfortable. I felt like they were making fun of me. And sure, when I was alone with Mary in her room, I wanted her all right. Then that stupid Mrs. Dalton walked in and ruined everything, and my whole life changed in a matter of minutes. I was filled with terror and panic when I realized Mary was dead, but at the same time I

suddenly felt free. For the first time in my life, I felt like I finally had control of my own destiny. I felt like all my 'life had been leading to something like this' (119), and I finally knew what would happen to me from there.

"Then, there's Bessie. I didn't really love Bessie; everybody needs to have a girl, and I just wanted her for my own gratification. Because I had killed once, it was easy to kill again. After all, I had to keep her from talking; I had to save myself. I was really angry when the coroner's people brought Bessie's body into court. They didn't really care that I had killed her; they just wanted to stir up more hate against me and show they still had control over me. Well, it's too bad it was so cold the day I was caught and my hands were frozen. I would have shown them who had control — I would have grabbed my gun, shot myself, and taken a couple of them with me. I would have blotted everything out like I had wanted to do so many times before and so many times since!"

Bigger Number Two:

"When I first saw my room at the Dalton's house, I was actually kind of excited about having a place of my own and about driving them around in a fancy car. The pay didn't seem all that bad; it would have helped my family out quite a bit and I even would have had a few dollars for myself. But I really didn't know how to act around rich white folks. I think I wanted to do a good job, but I was afraid and confused.

"Killing Mary was an accident; I didn't mean to do it. I knew that if Mrs. Dalton found out I was in Mary's room, everyone would have suspected the worst — that I had raped her. So I did what I had to do, I got rid of the evidence and made up a story to cast the blame away from me. I killed Bessie on purpose to keep her from giving me away, and I felt really bad when they brought her body into court. Even Bessie didn't deserve to be on display that way.

"The first time I ever felt that someone cared about me was when Jan brought Mr. Max to my jail

cell and insisted I talk to him. I didn't want to think of either of them as friends, but suddenly I realized that Jan thought of me as a human being and I felt very bad that I had hurt him by killing someone he loved. Mr. Max was so nice to me; I really wanted to trust him.

"I was ashamed to think about how much I made my family suffer. I had always thought I was alone, but when they came to visit me in jail I realized they had always been there. At that point, though, I just wanted them to forget about me.

"Then Mr. Buckley came to talk to me and tried to make me admit to other rapes and murders that I had nothing to do with. I wanted to make him understand the 'deep, choking hate that had been...life' (356). I didn't want to hate, but I couldn't help it. I confessed everything to him but realized later that the feelings I had trusted had betrayed me. He didn't care at all; all he was looking for was votes.

"Mr. Max asked me a lot of questions that started me thinking about my life, things like what did the white folks keep me from doing that made me hate them so much and what would I like to have been if I had had a chance. I guess I would have liked being happy but didn't know what happiness was. 'I just lived from day to day' (411). After I talked to Mr. Max, I tried to see myself in relation to other men, something I had never done before. I suddenly wanted to be able to touch other people and just know they were there. I might have been able to find a wholeness I had not felt in my whole life. For the first time, I really wanted to live.

"Mr. Max did the best he could to defend me. I think we all knew the outcome from the start. I really wish he hadn't asked me all those questions that got me thinking about my life because now I'm scared. I'm not trying to get out of this; I know I have to die, but I don't want to die without knowing what all this was for. 'I never wanted to hurt nobody....I hurt folks because I had to....I was trying to do something else. But it seems like I never could'" (496).

Bigger Number Three:

"I don't have as much of a story to tell as the other two Biggers. I just wanted to point out that I am not an exclusively black phenomenon: there are white Biggers, too. The same conditions have produced us both and reflect 'the failures of modern civilization' (xx): namely, 'the death of genuine spiritual values and traditions, the harshness of economic greed and exploitation, the avarice for glittering material goods that, in a culture of consumerism, ultimately possessed the possessor' (xx). White Biggers are 'as cut off from nurturing communal values and as emotionally ravaged by a gnawing sense of alienation' (xx) as black Biggers. We feel strongly the failure of society and its cultural and political ideals and promises, and we can't seem 'to accept the compromises that most individuals make for simple self-preservation' (xx). There are millions of us everywhere."

★ ★ ★

If this were the real game show, at this point the host would say, "Will the real Bigger Thomas please stand up?" Would it be a surprise to have all three Biggers stand together as one? Probably not, for this man called Bigger is actually a complex, complicated, and multi-faceted person. True, Bigger is not a very nice or likeable guy. His whole persona has been molded by the ghetto into becoming a tough, unfeeling survivor, and yet he seems to have a deep-down desire to truly know the meaning of life—his life.

It's safe to say almost certainly that Bigger is a product of his environment. Wright describes in his essay, "How 'Bigger' Was Born," many Biggers he had come across over the years, all of them mean, bullyish, rebellious, and hopeless. The controls and laws of the white people helped keep them that way into the mid-1900s, even though they had been emancipated many years before. Oppression is corroborated by William Faulkner's short story, "Dry September," in the following passage: "Did it really happen?...Happen? What the hell difference does it

make? Are you going to let the black sons get away with it until one really does it?" (Faulkner 313). This passage seems to prove that there was never any attempt to find out the truth whenever a black man was named in connection to an incident (if indeed there even was an incident). There was no such thing as innocent until proven guilty; the black man was always guilty whether he committed a crime or not. This is emphasized again as State's Attorney Buckley tries to get Bigger to admit to the rapes and murders he did not commit. Understandably, it would have been difficult, and more likely impossible, for one black man to overcome the racial prejudices of many white men.

On the other hand, there is no guarantee that Bigger would have been any different if he had grown up in an affluent, white family. The problems and attitudes such as those that shape Bigger are not exclusive to a particular race or class of people; but there is no doubt that if he had grown up in a different environment, he would at least have been provided choices and the opportunities he appeared so desperately to want. As it was, Bigger's personality was formed by a sense of hopelessness and destiny; his life became a self-fulfilling prophecy. With regard to the mold, either he didn't want to get out, couldn't get out, or didn't know how to get out.

We've come a long way over the years. Thank goodness our laws and attitudes have changed and made it easier for people of all races to educate and make something of themselves. All is still not equal, however. We have a long way to go to overcome the problems in society which caused Bigger to become who he was — problems mentioned earlier such as the fall of spiritual values, greed, exploitation, failure of cultural and political ideals and promises, and refusal to accept compromise. As long as these things are endemic to our society, Bigger will remain alive and well and living among us.

Works Cited

- Wright, Richard. *Native Son*. 1940. New York: Harper Collins, 1993.
- Faulkner, William. "Dry September." *Short Fiction: Classics and Contemporary*. Ed. Charles Bohner. 3rd ed. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice, 1994. 312-19.

Evaluation: *How do we become who we become? Are our natures dictated by DNA, or by our immediate social environments/circumstances? Adele's creative essay struggles beautifully to answer that ancient, enormous question. Meanwhile, her comprehension of Bigger's many-sided persona is clearly outstanding. What an essay!*

At the Improv

by Joe Kyle-DiPietropaolo

Course: English 101

Instructor: Peter Sherer

Assignment:

Write an extended stipulative definition of a term which labels a process or behavior. Introduce an identifiable speaker. Include a variety of definition patterns.

To the veteran jazz aficionado, the word "improvisation" can trigger vibrant memories of a particularly distinctive saxophone solo. A fan of stand-up comedy might think of Jonathan Winters or Robin Williams spinning wildly out of control while flying from character to character during a live show. Improvisation has a long history in the performing arts. The word "improvise" is typically defined as "to prepare or provide offhand or hastily; extemporize; to compose (verse, music, etc.) on the spur of the moment." My definition of improvisation is by no means limited to the context of artists, or of public performance. Indeed, this meaning of the word runs a distant second in my mind.

When I think of improvisation, or to improvise, I think of inventive people physically doing things to solve problems. For centuries, the nautical professions have spoken of the "jury-rig," a make-shift substitute replacing a faulty, missing or damaged piece of equipment or apparatus. "Jury" is used to indicate "makeshift," or "temporary," and "rig" or "rigging" to refer to the masts, sails and other equipment necessary for a sailing vessel's operation. Just as the artist must exercise the necessary skills and talents to be successful at improvisation, so must the nautical craftsman exercise the necessary skills and talents to be successful in the application of alternative solutions. The time-honored practice of installing the jury-rig has saved the life of many a sailor, allowing a triumphant return to port, or at least survival and subsequent rescue.

Even though we are no longer indebted to the wind for our voyages of exploration, the age of the jury-rig did not die with the age of wind. In America, pioneers expanding westward across the North American continent were constantly faced by new problems requiring improvised solutions. A broken wheel, far from the wheelwright, might have been a matter of life or death. The first polished steel plow, which made settlement of the mid-western prairie possible, was built from a broken saw blade. Much of the rich tradition of American invention can be viewed as one improvised solution after another, as inventors marched forward into

the twentieth century. Even that quintessential product of the twentieth century, television, hasn't been untouched. More than one popular television series has been based on the premise that the heroes, given enough junk, and perhaps a tool or two, can whip up an improvised solution to some particular sticky situation. MacGuyver, with his Swiss Army knife and whatever is lying around, can save himself, and the rest of the free world.

Most of the time, the term improvisation does not connote a game played for high stakes. It might more often refer to the higher level of satisfaction generated by the application of an elegant solution to a problem. Despite a critical component failure, despite a lack of suitable replacement parts, despite inadequate on-hand tools, the problem must be solved. An inelegant problem requires an elegant solution.

One of the finest real-life examples in modern times occurred during the ill-fated Apollo 13 mission to the moon. Having plenty of oxygen, but facing a toxic build-up of carbon dioxide, James Lovell, Fred Haise and John Swigert, with help from ground control, fashioned a jury-rig carbon dioxide scrubber. It saved their lives, and as part of a high technology mission, used nothing more exotic than plastic bags, cardboard and duct tape to adapt otherwise incompatible components. The stakes were at their highest, and so was the level of improvisation — in this case, a gamble that paid off.

When faced by crisis, the true craftsman must be an artist. For such an artist, fashioning an effective replacement for some indispensable item, with only the flotsam and jetsam available in one's garage, basement, or even in the trunk of one's car, represents the ultimate improvisational performance. Those of us in the audience regularly applaud.

Evaluation: In its sentences, words, and inventive treatment of the subject, Joe's essay is nicely styled.

The essay's voice tells of an interesting and imaginative speaker. The writing works as a fresh and fun model of a stipulative definition.

Essay Responses:

Fiction and Film Take-Home Exam

by Susan Leverenz

Course: Literature 112 (Literature and Film)

Instructor: Nancy L. Davis

Assignment:

Refer to individual questions at the start of each new section.

Question 1a

Select a key passage from Tagore's story, "The Postmaster." Analyze its meaning in relation to the story as a whole.

A HUMAN OBJECT: THE DESIRE FOR CLOSE COMPANIONSHIP IN "THE POSTMASTER"

Occasionally, sitting on a low wooden office-stool in a corner of his large hut, the postmaster would speak of his family—his younger brother, mother and elder sister—all those for whom his heart ached, alone and exiled as he was....Eventually, Ratan referred to the postmaster's family....as if they were old friends. She even formed affectionate imaginary pictures of them in her mind.

—Rabindranath Tagore
"The Postmaster"

In the story, "The Postmaster," Rabindranath Tagore writes of the need for connection to family. Both characters in the story have lost that connection and seek to regain it. The postmaster, fresh from college, has taken a position in a small rural village far from his family and the crowded city he grew up in. He has found that this village is not the idyllic, pastoral setting he had imagined and instead of writing poetry as he had hoped, he reminisces about his mother, sister, and brother in Calcutta. Ratan is a local orphaned girl who works for food and shelter as a housekeeper for each successive postmaster. Ratan has some vivid memories of her family and longs for the closeness found in a family setting.

The mutual need for closeness to family draws the postmaster and Ratan closer. He asks her about her family and soon she is sitting at his feet, much like a child might sit at the feet of her father, listening to the postmaster's stories about his home and family. She begins to develop an affection for them and is able to imagine what they look like. The postmaster becomes a father figure to Ratan, telling

stories and teaching her to read. From Ratan's perspective, she becomes more than a young companion to the postmaster—more than simply someone to help him pass the hours and alleviate his homesickness. When he becomes ill, she is the one charged with his care and she becomes a mother to him, nursing him back to health. But the postmaster is so absorbed in self-pity that he is unaware of her growing attachment for him—and the void she has filled in a small way in his life.

Whereas Tagore uses imagery to convey that Ratan looks upon the postmaster with the affection of a daughter, he is less subtle about the role Ratan takes on when he writes, "From that moment on she took on the role of a mother..." (44-5). Ironically, this show of concern and love which should have created a bond between them only accentuates the postmaster's longing for his family, and he returns to his home in Calcutta. Ratan is left behind, bewildered and angry, for she realizes that the postmaster never recognized her need for him and the affection that he shows for his family but can never extend to her.

Both Ratan and the postmaster were seeking "a human object for the heart's most intimate affection" (44). And while the postmaster knows his is in Calcutta, Ratan must continue with her meager existence, knowing she may never find that connection to family.

Question 1b

Select one scene from Ray's film adaptation of "The Postmaster." Explicate its meaning using the language of film.

RURAL VERSUS URBAN IN "THE POSTMASTER"

(The scene I have chosen to examine is when the postmaster first encounters the madman. He is seated on his front porch about to light a cigarette when the madman makes himself known. Ratan walks into the scene and tells the postmaster that the madman is harmless.)

Satyajit Ray's film adaptation of a story by Rabindranath Tagore (entitled "The Postmaster") deals with the conflict between rural and urban elements. The two main characters in the film—the postmaster and a village orphan, Ratan—come from disparate backgrounds, and it is this difference that becomes one of the major themes of the movie.

The madman scene is a vivid portrayal of that theme. In the opening shot, the postmaster is seated on the ground with his back to the wall; the madman is crouched in the yard. In front of the postmaster, and between him and the madman, is a post supporting the porch roof. Between the wall of the hut and the post, but off the porch, lies the broken chair discarded in an earlier scene. And beyond this enters Ratan.

The most striking aspect of this scene is the sense of entrapment and confinement it gives to the postmaster. He is against the wall of the hut, the porch post and the madman are in front of him, and his only routes of escape off the porch are blocked by the viewer and the broken chair—which he threw there. The postmaster sits in profile to the viewer and seems to be cowering in the corner almost off the screen to the lower right. His placement here suggests his vulnerability and powerlessness over the scene around him. He is so totally absorbed in his fear of the madman that he is barely aware of Ratan calmly standing there. The porch roof throws the postmaster into a deep shadow while both Ratan and the madman are in the sunlight. This tends to bond them and isolate the postmaster even more, as does Ratan's nonchalant attitude toward the madman in contrast to the postmaster's obvious terror. By placing Ratan in the center of the frame, she is given dominance—and an air of confidence—in this scene.

The madman is a personification of all the postmaster finds strange and frightening in this rural setting. The postmaster is a native of Calcutta and although there are most certainly madmen there, he has always been isolated from them by his upbringing and education. He is infinitely more comfortable in the city where one can ignore the

unpleasant. In contrast to that is Ratan, a child of this humble village who can chastise the madman and shoo him away from her master's door, who can take care of herself under the most adverse circumstances. Despite his education and Ratan's lack of one, she is wiser than the postmaster will ever be.

Question 1c

Decide which "Postmaster" version—the written or the film—you preferred and articulate why. Or, if you appreciated both versions for their artistic merit, articulate why.

TRANSLATION FROM
BENGALI TO FILM

I like to read. I read popular fiction ("books") quickly and with little personal involvement as a means of relaxation and entertainment. I read classical and modern fiction ("literature") with a great deal more thought and delight. I like the way authors use words to create images and characters. Therefore, my first response to the question of which I preferred—Rabindranath Tagore's short story, "The Postmaster," or Satyajit Ray's film version—was an immediate, "the short story." I even went so far as to write my first draft defending my choice.

However, in doing some outside reading on Tagore, I came across passages from "The Postmaster" in a translation differing from the one I had read and realized that much of what I liked about the story wasn't written by Tagore. Unless I learn Bengali, I can never fully appreciate the beauty and imagery of Tagore's writing. This realization came when reading the passage describing Ratan and the postmaster's last encounter. In the translation I read, the postmaster offers Ratan money, saying, "Today before I go, I want to give you something to last you for a few days." The other translation has him saying, "Ratan, I've never been able to give you anything." These are quite different interpretations of the original Bengali text and put a different slant on the postmaster's motivation

for offering Ratan money. Perhaps, in the case of translation to English, a film version is more indicative of an author's motivation (tempered by the filmmaker's eye).

In Ray's film, the interpretation is totally dependent on the viewer. Ray has used images and various film techniques to evoke responses from the viewer, but there is no outsider "translating" them. (If you know the story, the subtitles add—or detract—very little to the visual experience.) Most of the scenes, even those of the exterior, are tightly framed and in a closed form. This heightens the sense of isolation and apprehension the postmaster feels about the rural village to which he has been posted. The small, dark room, the low lighting, and the density of the interior shots create a feeling of entrapment, even claustrophobia. The exterior shots, while more open, still convey the same sense of not belonging. Throughout the film, the viewer is made aware of the postmaster's desire to leave. He is often placed at the edge of the frame, seeming to draw back as far as possible, indicating a desire to be removed from this place, especially in the madman scene. Ratan, on the other hand, is more comfortable in this setting. She is often placed center in the frame with more light. Because the camera angle is frequently eye-level to Ratan, the viewer can more easily sense her natural affinity to her surroundings.

It is the particular ability of Satyajit Ray to take the original written work of Rabindranath Tagore—unintelligible to those who do not read Bengali—and convert it into images which can be universally identified, and thus interpreted by each viewer. The film is, therefore, a better medium for understanding Tagore's story than any other form of translation.

Question 2a

Select a story from Raymond Carver's posthumous collection, *Short Cuts*. Make sense of the story by discussing character relationships, major conflicts and themes.

INDECISION IN RAYMOND CARVER'S "WILL YOU PLEASE BE QUIET, PLEASE?"

To all appearances, the Wymans are a happily married couple living a modest version of the American Dream—two children, a nice home, good jobs. But it is Ralph's lack of confidence in himself and in Marian's love for him that causes an ever-widening rift in their relationship.

We first become aware of Ralph's insecurity early in the story while they are on their honeymoon. Ralph sees Marian leaning on a balcony and immediately feels left out. "[T]he whole incident put Ralph in mind of something from a film, an intensely dramatic moment into which Marian could be fitted but he could not" (48). That same scene has Marian staring into the distance, looking away from Ralph, almost as if she could envision their future but he could not.

Later, after the confrontation with Marian, we find Ralph wandering aimlessly about the city. Again, we are made aware of his unconfident and indecisive nature. "Outside, Ralph turned around, trying to decide what to do" (57). During his sojourn, Ralph is bombarded with images, snatches of conversations, and glances from strangers that he imagines to be directed at him, and yet he cannot make any sense of them. His random thoughts come in a tormented stream and he cannot gather them together to make a coherent decision.

He would have liked to sit someplace for a while and think about it, but he knew he could not sit, could not think about it.... He tried to imagine how all this would seem twenty years from now. But he could not imagine anything. And then he imagined snatching up a note being passed among his students and it said Shall we have a go at it? Then he could not think. Then he felt profoundly indifferent. Then he thought of Marian as he had seen her a little while ago, face crumpled. Then Marian on the floor, blood on her teeth: "Why did you hit me?" Then Marian reaching under her dress to unfasten her garter belt! Then Marian lifting her dress as she arched back! Then Marian ablaze, Marian crying out, Gol Gol Gol (58)

It is only the next morning, after being beaten, that he makes the conscious decision to return home. But once again he is assaulted by self-doubt and indecision. "What, after all, should he do? Take his things and leave? Go to a hotel? Make certain arrangements? How should a man act, given these circumstances? He understood things had been done. He did not understand what things now were to be done" (66). Even the ritual of bathing seems a way to put off making any decision. He examines himself in the bath mirror, trying different expressions, in an attempt to settle on how he should present himself to Marian when he faces her again.

After his bath, as he lies in bed, he seems to have finally made a decision when he turns his back to Marian. However, once again, he does not have the power of his convictions and succumbs to her touch. "He held himself, he later considered, as long as he could. And then he turned to her" (68). He marvels at "impossible changes he felt moving over him" (68). Over the past torturous night, Ralph has come to the realization that despite the events of the past, he and Marian have the ability to go on with the rest of their lives. And in turning to her, he has finally made a decision.

Works Cited

- Carver, Raymond. "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?" *Short Cuts*. New York: Vintage, 1993. 46-68.

Question 2b

Write a mise-en-scene analysis focused on one scene from the Carver story you just discussed.

MISE EN SCENE IN
"WILL YOU PLEASE BE QUIET, PLEASE?"

The scene I have selected for mise en scene analysis is the interior of Jim's Oyster House as Ralph enters. The door to the exterior is to the right. Despite being night, there is a glow of red light from the neon sign outside. The interior of the bar is dim and smoky. There is candlelight at each table, but its light only makes the place seem dingy, not romantic. On the back wall is a long bar, mostly lit by advertising signs. There is a dance floor and small stage in the foreground. The stage is empty, but there are dancers lingering on the dance floor. Between the small dance floor and the entrance there are numerous round tables placed closely together to accommodate the patrons of the bar.

Dominant - The viewer's eye is drawn toward the open door and Ralph's silhouette. Even though it is night, the open door allows a different quality of light—red-tinged—to enter the darkened room, and thus our eye is drawn to it and to Ralph.

Lighting - Jim's is not a fine-dining establishment but rather a crowded, smoky bar where the patrons can blend in and not be noticed. The lighting is low key with low contrast.

Shot and Camera - This is a deep-focus shot across the crowded dance floor at medium range, with the bar and Ralph at long range. By including the crowded bar and dance floor in the shot, Ralph's solitary entrance places emphasis on his feelings of confusion and isolation.

Angle - The camera angle is high; more of the floor is visible than the ceiling.

Color Values - The colors are muted and hazy because of the low lighting in the bar with the exception of the flashing red neon light behind Ralph. The red is symbolic of the adultery committed by Marian, which brought him to the bar in the first place.

Lens/Filter/Stock - I would use standard lens, no apparent filter, and standard stock, relying on lighting and effects to create the mood.

Subsidiary Contrasts - After the open door, the viewer's gaze would be drawn to the stage and the bar. As the scene progresses, the band takes on an increasingly important role, eventually forcing Ralph into the backroom card game.

Composition - The scene is roughly divided into thirds—one third with Ralph and the open door, the remaining two thirds the bar and dance floor crowded with people. The asymmetry of the composition suggests instability, indecisiveness, and conflict.

Density - Except for the area around the door, the scene is filled with people, tables and chairs, the bar, and the stage, giving a chaotic look to the scene, mirroring Ralph's chaotic emotions.

Form - The closed form of the shot suggests that nothing of significance is happening beyond the shot. Every aspect of the mise-en-scene is designed to focus attention on Ralph and heightens the sense of emotional turmoil.

Framing - The framing is tight in this scene, at least for Ralph. He seems trapped by the door frame without anywhere to go except onward.

Depth - The image is composed on three depth planes: Ralph in the middle ground to the right, the stage and dance floor in the foreground center and left, and the bar in the background.

Character Placement - Ralph is at the door in the middle to the right with the bar patrons placed to the left of center, setting Ralph against the rest of the people in the bar and, in his estimation, the rest of the world.

Staging Positions – We see Ralph in profile, totally unaware of being observed, mired deep in his own misery and confusion.

Character Proxemics – Ralph is at a social distance upon entering the bar, but because of the press of people, he will be forced into an uncomfortable intimate distance.

Movement – Ralph will move from left to right, which is contrary to the eye's natural scanning and therefore makes the scene uncomfortable and tense.

Sound – If I were filming the entire story, "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?," I would open with a radio or TV in the background, something suggesting a typical evening in a suburban home. However, as we near the point of confrontation, that would be turned off and the dialogue between the characters would assume prominence. Once Ralph leaves the house, I might introduce music with dissonance and confusion, possibly modern classical. The bar scene, however, requires honky-tonk or maybe country, which might be carried through to the mugging. As Ralph realizes that he wants to go home, the music becomes more soothing. Once home, however, we return to the sound of a household with young children going through their morning routine. Finally, there would be silence as Ralph and Marian reconcile.

Color – As far as color or black and white is concerned, I would shoot this film in color. I don't think the storyline lends itself to the dramatic quality of black and white film. However, I would keep the colors neutral except for those scenes in which a splash of red would be used to symbolize infidelity or violence. One of those scenes would be the balcony in Mexico where Marian is wearing a white blouse (purity) with a red scarf at her throat, symbolizing her sensuality and foreshadowing the adulterous affair. Another would be the scene just prior to Ralph's entering the bar, showing the neon sign with the red legs sticking out of the calm. This might symbolize Ralph's feelings of helplessness in light of Marian's confession.

Question 3

Write an analysis of Robert Altman's film, *Short Cuts*, in which you discuss ways the director uses the language of film to evoke thematic meaning.

TRANSCIENCE AS THEME IN *SHORT CUTS*

The characters in Raymond Carver's stories are always on the verge of change, either in their relationships, their jobs, or within themselves. A recurring theme in these stories is the temporary nature of things. Robert Altman, in his film, *Short Cuts*, uses a number of techniques to emphasize this theme.

Every Carver story represented in both the film and in the posthumous collection contains some element of transience. The most common one is the unfulfilling job—or no job at all. Earl is a hired chauffeur who tells his wife Doreen that he has big plans for them to move on to a better life. He tells her, "It's all temporary." (Although he may be referring to his present job, considering their history, we wonder if this means their marriage as well.) Jerry owns a pool service business and while it is apparently a moderate success, he is frustrated and feels that it is not enough, either financially or personally. Bill, on the other hand, seems to enjoy being a make-up artist. But he is still in school and his future in the field is uncertain. Stormy's job as a helicopter pilot is going to last only as long as the medfly infestation. Gene basks in the authority and control he possesses as a policeman, but we doubt he will ever become more than a beat cop, if he is even able to keep that job due to his conduct both on and off duty.

Those characters who have careers and success, however, are given no assurances of happiness. In fact, it seems that the extraordinary events that enter their lives have an even greater impact. Howard, a successful newscaster, and his wife are struck by the temporary nature of life itself when their son dies after being hit by a car while walking to school. Even though this reunites Howard and

his father, that reconciliation is also only temporary. Marian, an artist, and Ralph, a physician, find that a moment of passion—a temporary rush of emotion—can affect their lives daily in some small way, reach a critical point one afternoon, and eventually settle back down to become a part of daily existence. Even the anger created by the confession seems temporary.

Tess Trainer's career as a jazz singer has been successful for her but it has caused her a great deal of emotional pain. It is only upon the death of her daughter that her hard exterior crumbles and we see the pain she is in when she, too, learns how fleeting life can be. Stormy Weathers takes it into his own hands to demonstrate to his ex-wife, Betty, that material things are indeed very temporary. The only thing left standing after Stormy's chainsaw rampage is the grandfather clock. And that too, in time, will be destroyed. When Betty returns from a weekend in Las Vegas, ostensibly visiting a step-half-sister (families can also be temporary), she tells her escort, "I don't want it to end." Again, this points out how weekends and so many other aspects of life seem so fleeting and temporary. The film ends on an incident that demonstrates the transience of nature and man. What starts as a typical family picnic on a beautiful day moves in a very menacing manner toward a violent end.

Besides using story and dialog to convey the theme of transience, Altman also uses a number of other visuals. Doreen and Earl live in a development of mobile homes. Here even the buildings aren't permanent. There are two houses for sale in the film: Claire and Stuart's, and Betty Weathers', another indication of transience, of moving on, of the temporal nature of life.

The automobile is another motif that Altman employs to further exploit the theme of transience. Almost every storyline somehow involves a car. Casey dies after being hit by Doreen's car (which is for sale); Earl is a chauffeur; the adulterous affair that comes between Marian and Ralph happened in a car; Zoe commits suicide by carbon monoxide poisoning in her car; Stuart's car is not working,

and Claire drives a clown-mobile. If Altman doesn't use one of his other two favorite motifs (windows/doors and water/fish) to open or close a scene, he uses the automobile.

The viewer may not immediately be aware of the techniques and motifs used to develop this theme in *Short Cuts*. But we come away from the movie with an uneasy sense that things cannot remain as they are for very long. In the last minutes of the film, even the calm of a sunny afternoon in California proves to be temporary when an earthquake shakes the ground.

Evaluation: Susan's intelligent and informed responses indicate a sensibility both to film and literary fiction. In particular, her careful and perceptive analyses of both mediums illustrate how form affects meaning.

Hills Like White Elephants

by Mike Mannard
Course: English 102
Instructor: Andrew Wilson

Assignment:
Write a 3-5 page literary analysis.

The short story "Hills Like White Elephants" by Ernest Hemingway is about two people trying to come together. Throughout the story, there is a sort of bantering that goes on between a girl named Jig, who doesn't want to do something, and an American man who wants her to. This issue that they can't seem to really agree upon appears to be a little more serious than either one is willing to admit to the other and it is keeping them apart. It is never exactly revealed by Hemingway what that issue is. However, it is probable that what the couple is talking about is abortion. It appears that Jig does not really want to go through with it. However, it seems she doesn't want to lose the American either, so she isn't fighting too hard. The man, on the other hand, seems to be very clear about it. He wants her to do it, but he doesn't want to push her too hard. He wants her to believe that it's no big deal and that a lot of people have done it and afterwards, everything was alright. The girl

wants to go along with him, but still has her reservations. The issue is keeping them apart. Although Hemingway is writing about one couple and a specific issue, I believe he is speaking about men and women on a larger scale. He seems to be saying that the differences between men and women on how they view life can create a gap that may or may not be able to be bridged. Hemingway throughout the story uses dialogue as well as imagery and symbols to illustrate these differences and this gap. I chose this story not only because I enjoy Hemingway's use of these literary tools, but also because I appreciate (perhaps too late) what these tools represent and mean to me and my life.

The very first paragraph begins the use of this imagery and symbolism:

The hills across the valley of the Ebro were long and white. On this side there was no shade and no trees and the station was between two lines of rails in the sun. Close against the side of the station there was the warm shadow of the building and a curtain made of strings of bamboo beads hung across the open door to keep out flies. The American and the girl with him sat at a table in the shade, outside the building. It was very hot and the express from Barcelona would come in forty minutes. It stopped at this junction for two minutes and went on to Madrid. (281)

This opening paragraph is full of imagery and symbolism. The man and girl are on the side of the valley where there is an oppressive sun and no trees grow. Trees represent life and fertility and presently the couple is on the side where there is no life and the land is not fertile. This side, I believe, symbolizes the man. Not only is a man unable to carry life, in the case of the American, he doesn't even want it. The second sentence talks about two rails. Train rails not only travel in opposite directions, but they run parallel—meaning they don't touch and stay apart. These rails are representative not only of the fact that the man and girl seem to be going in oppo-

site directions, but that they will not be able to come together. The curtain seems to symbolize separation as well, but perhaps also deceit on the part of the man. Also, the curtain is not woven. It is made out of beads that are separate. The final image in the paragraph is that they are at a junction. The couple seems to be at a junction in their lives of which direction to go and there is not much time to decide.

Another difference between the two, which seems to be representative of men and women, is their dialogue. The girl seems to be more creative and the man seems to be more matter of fact. When Jig says that "They [the hills] look like white elephants" (281), the man responds, "I've never seen one" (281) and drinks his beer. Not only is he not interested, he doesn't even pretend to be. Only when the girl protests does he say something about it. Then, trying to sound more practical and move away from what just happened, she asks about something written on the curtain:

"They've painted something on it," she said. "What does it say?"

"Anis del Toro. It's a drink."

"Could we try it?" (281-282)

Not only does she ask him something that she feels he'll respond to, but when he tells her that "it's a drink," she asks if they can try it. It's as if she's asking him something that she knows he'll respond favorably to. Drinking is something they seem to do a lot.

Alcohol seems to be another symbol in the story. Although coming from nature, alcohol is a non-nourishing drink that can even be damaging. I believe that the alcohol is symbolic of the man. Not only is this man not nurturing to her, he may even be harmful. Another facet of the alcohol is that the drink that tastes like licorice. Licorice has a somewhat bitter taste and I believe that the drink is symbolic of how the girl has found life to be. As she says after tasting the drink: "It tastes like licorice.... Everything tastes like licorice. Especially

all the things you've waited so long for..." (282). These "things" such as being in a meaningful relationship and having a child are not turning out to be as "sweet" as she thought they would be. In fact, they're turning out to be bitter.

There is another example of dialogue that seems to be representative of how men and women don't share their true feelings and how that can keep them apart. It's when Jig is asking about what it would be like after the abortion:

"And you think then we'll be all right and be happy."

"I know we will. You don't have to be afraid. I've known lots of people that have done it."

"So have I," said the girl. "And afterwards they were all so happy."

"Well," the man said, "if you don't want to you don't have to. But I know it's perfectly simple." (283)

This discourse almost seems typical of a woman who knows in her heart that she doesn't want to do something, but is allowing herself to give in to the man. She goes on to say, "And if I do it you'll be happy and things will be like they were and you'll love me?" (283). It seems that she's willing to do anything to keep him. Such dialogue is not at all uncommon between men and women. And although doing this may keep them physically together, emotionally they will be apart.

Another prime example of Hemingway's use of imagery describes the other side of the valley—the side they're not on:

The girl stood up and walked to the end of the station. Across, on the other side, were fields of grain and trees along the banks of the Ebro. Far away, beyond the river, were mountains. The shadow of a cloud moved across the field of grain and she saw the river through the trees. (283)

This image represents life and fertility and every-

thing the girl wants. This side not only has trees, but grain—nourishing grain. Not fermented grain in the form of alcohol, but grain that sustains life. Furthermore, this side doesn't seem to be a dry area with an oppressive sun. There's a cloud and a river that symbolize water and life. This side seems to be just the opposite of the other one—the side the man seems to represent.

This story is about an American man and a girl in Spain. However, I believe that it is at least marginally representative of men and women everywhere in how they view life differently and how these differing views keep them emotionally and physically apart. This story touched me in a personal way. For approximately four years I dated a woman with three children. She was everything that I wasn't. She lived life for the moment, whereas I thought a lot about the future and past. She had a job as a school teacher that didn't pay her a lot, but was very rewarding in other ways. I put more importance on money. She lived in an older style house that had a lived-in feeling to it. I lived in a brand new townhouse that was neat and orderly. Her neighborhood was full of mature trees that gave shade. My neighborhood was somewhat barren. What was most important to her was getting married and having a family. I didn't want to be "tied down." I ended up losing her to someone who had children too and wanted the same things she did—or at least was willing to go along with her. It took me a while to realize what I had lost and to realize that perhaps my views weren't very healthy overall. I still think about her almost everyday—along with her children, her school, her house, and her neighborhood.

Hemingway's story and my story are not uncommon at all. Although the reasons for "gaps" between men and women differ, they all seem to be related to different views and different emotions. If in fact the two characters in this story do stay physically together, this situation and probably future ones will continue to keep them emotionally disparate, lonelier than railroad tracks which lie near one another, but which never intersect.

Works Cited

- Hemingway, Ernest. "Hills Like White Elephants." *Literature and Its Writers: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*. Ed. Ann Charters and Samuel Charters. Boston: Bedford, 1997. 281-284.

Evaluation: *Hemingway is not known for having been particularly "gender sensitive" (especially where the female gender is concerned). Yet, Mike's good writing reminds us that, to the discerning eye, Hemingway might have been more aware of the complications between men and women than some critics have supposed.*

Of Memories, Legacies, and Beaver Ponds

by Sandra McKown

Course: English 101

Instructor: Joseph Sternberg

Assignment:

*Narrate an experience or series of
revelatory experiences and stimulate your
readers' senses in the telling.*

It would never be easy for me to escape my mother's watchful eyes in order to be there. My mother thought a girl of thirteen needed constant tasks to complete in order to stay out of mischief. I sometimes would wait weeks before I could slip away to my favorite secret haunt.

When I thought I could get away with it, I would quietly melt into the woods behind our cabins, keeping alongside the brook. There in New Hampshire's White Mountains, streams and brooks were fast moving, rocky, mostly shallow, and bone-chilling cold. But above all, they were beautiful! On my journey, I would watch as the transparent waters would catch "sunflashes" as they chattered and sparkled happily over boulders and rocks. Waterfalls would fling frothy white spray into the waiting air. Watery mosses, clinging to the rocks, would sway gracefully in the currents under shady

overhangs of the evergreen forest. Joyfully, with shoes and socks removed, I would skip and jump, barefooted, over the more substantial rocks and icy surges on my way to my favorite secret place. Beaver Pond.

I knew exactly where, across the brook and next to the beaver dam, a well-hidden path began. Ducking tree branches and blackberry brambles, I would clamber over a last waterfall and up a rocky bank. There was one certain smooth granite boulder that arose steeply out of the water, and that was my marker. Several trees overhung this spot, but I knew this was where the pathway started. I would duck under the low-hanging branches to see the narrow path, well hidden, threading along until the trees thinned and wild shrubs took over.

The trees did not thin out by themselves. Evidence of beaver-assisted culling was everywhere confirmed in the parade of stumps along the banks of the pond. Interesting, how the freshly whittled stumps had toothed tracings on their sharp points. Some of the stumps were surprisingly thick, and I would marvel at how these relatively small animals could fell and render to twigs something so large.

I had not seen a tree being felled, but I would imagine a beaver, chipping and scraping the tree's trunk with its strong yellow teeth while circling around the trunk as it worked. At the critical point, it would give some kind of signal for "Timber," as the defenseless tree would surrender and fall. I would imagine the tree falling in the direction of the water, so the animals would not have to drag it far. But, in some places, there was evidence of long-distance dragging: areas of underbrush would be flattened, and the pond banks would have well-worn sluices where something had been pulled down to the water.

Many times I would observe beavers pushing a sapling, complete with leafy branches, in front of them through the water. At the dam, their leafy cargo would be carefully inserted into the exact spot needed to stay the water's flow. It would make me smile to see these branches, their green leaves still clinging, poking out all over the dam. It would

be a comforting sight, meaning all was well with my beaver friends.

As hard as I would try to be quiet, I'd find myself crunching and crashing through the brush like a bull rhinoceros, altering all wildlife within miles. My efforts to be soundless, as I imagined ancient Native Americans to be while on the hunt, never worked out. Sometimes I would glimpse startled animals scurrying for cover as I bumped my way to my "hiding" place! Since every living thing around was already aware of my "hiding" place, I would only crouch down, eventually lie down, and then remain absolutely still for a period of time. Eventually, the woodland dwellers forgot I was there.

I would have to lie very still. I remember that if even one of my muscles would twitch, a beaver would sense my presence and the sharp report of a broad flat tail slapping the water would spread over the pond—the time immemorial method of beaver alert. Then, with a muffled "snunf," the startled animal would submerge, along with its friends and family. Pond life would pause, and a blanket of silence would cover the surrounding forest.

After an appropriate interval, the forest would reawaken with birdcalls, cheeps, buzzings and rustlings of life at Beaver Pond, continuing as it had for as long as time remembers. Gliding silently and smoothly over the water's surface, sometimes pushing twigs, branches and even small saplings in front of them, the beaver family would go back to work. How I would love lying there, hopefully well hidden and still, on the banks of the pond. I would watch these stately beasts as they worked, and marvel at their single-mindedness, at their determination to build and maintain their dam. In turn, the dam would have created their pond, and the pond would have concealed their underwater lodge.

I often wondered what they might be thinking as they went about their business. Did they actually plan to fell certain trees on certain days? Did they look at their dam and think to themselves, "Better shore up the northwest quadrant today...looks like rain on the way"? I would have to wonder, because

they obviously knew what they were doing, and did a splendid job of maintaining their domain.

Many people do not realize that the area forest dwellers are unsuspecting beneficiaries of the beaver's work. The damming of a stream and the resulting pond that conceals the underwater entrance to the beaver home also creates a habitat for their neighbors. The new pond and its vegetation provide home and shelter to a variety of animals: fish, muskrat, snakes, turtles, various birds and fowl. In addition, it becomes a watering hole for deer, moose, raccoon, fox and the rest of the local wildlife.

From my vantage point through leaves and branches of pond plants, I would experience Mother Nature's grand procession: sunlit dragonflies hovering over the face of the pond watching their reflections; voices of crickets vying with those of small frogs for virtuosity in the grand pond chorus; fragrances of green growing things intermingling with the evergreen-laden atmosphere; warm, musty pond scents. And, from my position next to the ground, heavy earth aromas would surround me.

Sometimes, I would be lulled to napping there by the buzzing of woodland insects. While I lay there in the warm summer afternoon sun, I would feel at one with the earth and its creatures. The timelessness of this place would infiltrate my very being.

Only when I realized I had become a living pantry to the myriad of biting insects, would I get up and sadly readjust my psyche for re-entry into my real world, and start back to the cabins. My mother would have noticed my absence, but I never told her where it was I would disappear.

Years later, I found myself returning to the cabins, now mine, having purchased them. One of the reasons I bought them was so I could go back to "my" beaver pond, deep in the New Hampshire forest, where I could escape the stresses of adult life and recharge myself.

Later yet, the Lamaze "focus point" I had used to keep my mind busy during childbirth pain was "my" beaver pond. I had visualized every detail in an effort to escape the reality of birthing. I had a

son, Craig, and when he was old enough, I took him there. I had of course, with great enthusiasm, described this magical place to him—this place where beavers lived in nature as they had always done. I had envisioned he would love it there as much as I did.

Being a Schaumburg, Illinois boy, and fully urbanized at that, Craig did not have a good grasp of what “living in nature” was all about. He didn’t particularly enjoy being dragged, pulled and carried over icy streams, through prickly evergreen forests and fields of thorny bushes; but my excitement transferred to him and he asked me at every unfamiliar sound, “Is that a beaver?”

As we approached my much-beloved pond, we found the dam in disrepair. It had an unkempt, disheveled look to it. Water gushed through openings in the infrastructure. There were no fresh green leaves on any of the branches poking wildly out of it. My stomach was a large sinking stone. It had never occurred to me that anything would ever change in this peaceful place; I thought that it would stay the way it had been forever.

As we walked around my secret path to my hiding place, we saw no freshly gnawed stumps. All stump points were weathered and gray. A pile of debris sat where the traditional beaver lodge had stood before. Not surprisingly, we did not hear a single “whack” of tails against the now quickly moving water, even though the noise we made thrashing our way through the tangled brush had hushed the surrounding forest. Sadly, I pointed out how it had once looked, and tried to impart to my young son what Beaver Pond had been like and how I had felt about it.

From other cabin owners we learned that a new business located about two miles upstream, a water-slide attraction, had directed its chlorine waste materials into the brook flowing behind its property. As a result, all life connected with the brook, both animal and plant, had been poisoned for miles downstream. A fine had been imposed, but the damage was there. It still is not certain how many years it will take, if ever, for this area to recover.

More years have gone by and Craig and I have returned there from time to time. I have hoped that somewhere in his mind’s eye, he could “see” the beavers as they purposefully and peacefully went about their business there. I have hoped he would feel the connectedness of life there, as I once did. He surprised me one of those times when he said, “I like to come here, Mom, because it’s so beautiful!” Those words made my heart glad.

The beavers are gone from that ancient place. The dam has fallen down over time, and the pond has reverted to soggy marshland. The brook has formed a new bed and is fast moving once again. Trees are growing in the open areas. Soon, there will be few traces left of the peaceful place I loved.

Sometimes, if I close my eyes tight and focus hard, I can see a late summer afternoon, where the yellow fading sunlight bounces off the slight, breeze-induced ripples over Beaver Pond’s calmness. Dragonflies hover over the darkening surface, waiting for water spiders to literally “walk on water” right under them. Crickets hum in harmony with the tree frog melody already in progress. Honey-gathering bees buzz lazily from flower to flower in the fading light. Slowly and silently the stately beavers swim by, their quiet wake fanning out behind them like a veil. They are moving, all in a row, toward their dam. When they get there, they all turn about in the water, toward me. Simultaneously, they give the water a final “whack” with their broad, flat tails in a kind of salute, before submerging forever under the now dark and peaceful waters of their beautiful pond. The setting sun disappears behind a mountain, leaving a rosy-purple glow that moves over the pond from one ripple to the next, until darkness enfolds. I am one and at peace with it all.

Evaluation: Ms. Mckown’s skillful and sensitive evocation of the beaver pond and related memories rests largely on fresh, vivid imagery, delightful figurative language and well-crafted, rhythmic sentences.

Wholeness and Identity in *Ceremony* and *Born on the Fourth of July*

by Brian Moore

Course: Honors Literature 223

(Minority Literature)

Instructor: Andrew Wilson

Assignment:

Write a literary analysis.

The main characters of the novel *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko and the film *Born on the Fourth of July* face very similar problems in dealing with war and defining a sense of self. Tayo of *Ceremony* and Ron Kovic of *Born on the Fourth of July* are both lured into an American war that leaves them broken and lost in the world they come back to. Both are disillusioned by the promise that fighting a war will bring to them a sense of identity and acceptance. Instead of the war being the growing process that they both expect, it tears all their expectations down and leads them toward a life of escape when they return. In fact, the war strips the two respectively of the identities that they had already started to build up and forces them to choose between a life of the pitfalls and stereotypes that surround veterans of war and a life that struggles to rise above these disadvantages. Both are eventually discriminated against by society as a whole and those that claim to be their friends, Tayo because he is bi-racial and Kovic because he is left in a wheelchair. Both Tayo and Ron Kovic find that

a sense of self or identity cannot come about by participating in a war that eventually leads to discrimination and the cold realities of the past.

Ron Kovic and Tayo have very dissimilar upbringings, but each chooses serving his country as a way to define himself. Kovic grows up as a very idealistic young man. His mother is very devoutly Christian and he defines himself by his community and his God. His father was a soldier in World War II and he feels that he should follow the same path. The country at this time is very much in support of the military action taking place in Vietnam and against the "insidious evil of Communism" (*Born...*). Kovic is further lured toward participation in the war by the ideals that are portrayed by President Kennedy, who says "We shall pay any price, bear any burden...to support the cause of liberty" (*Born...*). These words have an ironic tone later in the film when Kovic is crippled and broken by a lost cause, the Vietnam War. Kennedy's words "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country" (*Born...*) are not enough to comfort Kovic when the war has taken away from him everything that he once was or ever thought he could be. Kovic later questions these ideals because he feels that the government has made false implicit promises toward a goal that could never be reached.

Tayo, in contrast to Kovic who has had an identity forced upon him, hopes that the war can help build a sense of self. Tayo is discriminated against by the white race for being half Native American and discriminated against by those who live on the reservation for being half Caucasian. Even his friends have the potential to turn against him. "Emo had hated him since the time they had been in grade school together, and the only reason for this was that Tayo was part white" (Silko 57). Tayo constantly struggles to find himself, and this is very difficult since he does not know who his father is and was abandoned by his mother. He is only comforted by the close relationship he has with his cousin Rocky. When the two enlist for the armed forces and elect to fight during World War II,

Rocky asks if he can stay with Tayo if they sign up together, calling Tayo his brother. "It was the first time in all the years that Tayo had lived with him that Rocky ever called him 'brother'" (Silko 65). Craving to have a relationship with a member of his family and as a result, a sense of identity, Tayo decides to enlist with Rocky.

Tayo and Kovic are both deceived by representatives of the armed forces. They both believe that serving the country will help establish a sense of identity and the recruiters cater to this. Tayo's army recruiter says "Anyone can fight for America... even you boys. In a time of need, anyone can fight for her" (Silko 64). Although these lines are very condescending, they are exactly what Tayo wants to hear. He wants to believe that even he, a half-breed, can be accepted by the country in fighting for it. Kovic's recruiter, on the other hand, plays up to his sense of achievement. "Not everybody becomes United States Marines. We demand the best and we want the best because there is nothing finer...than a United States Marine" (*Born...*). Kovic, trying to build his character as an achiever, buys into these lines. The recruiter goes on to say that "You find out if you really are a man" by participating in war and "We have never lost a war" (*Born...*). Later, Kovic realizes that these things do not really matter. He even questions the morality that he has grown up to believe, quoting to his pious mother "Thou shalt not kill" (*Born...*). He understands the hypocrisy of his mother's and country's views when they claim that war is justified even by God when its goal is to flush out the foreign and misunderstood philosophy of Communism.

Before and after the war, Tayo and his friends fall prey to the vices that go along with belonging to a dominantly white society. "Belonging was drinking and laughing with the platoon, dancing with blond women, buying drinks for buddies born in Cleveland, Ohio" (Silko 43). This belonging does not last after the war. The Native Americans are lured to war with the promise of belonging and in the attaining of the symbol of success in the white man's world, the white woman. "These Indians

fucked white women, they had as much as they wanted too. They were MacArthur's boys; white whores took their money same as anyone" (Silko 42). White women have come to symbolize success in many forms of minority literature. They are the physical representation of achievement, but to the Native Americans, their presence does not last. The Native Americans want to get the feeling of belonging after the war. "They never saw that it was the white people who gave them that feeling and it was white people who took it away again when the war was over" (Silko 43). This feeling is also present to Ron Kovic. He realizes that it is taken away from him when his childhood girlfriend turns away from him because he is disabled. In fact, all white women are disinterested in Kovic after he becomes paralyzed. It seems that white women in literature are a prize only for successful whites.

During the respective wars, Tayo and Kovic are both forced to witness (and, in Kovic's case, participate in) the deaths of their own allies or people they feel connected to. In losing (or accidentally killing, as is the case in Kovic's war experience) their own brothers, they both lose parts of themselves. Tayo, for instance, is present at the execution of several Japanese soldiers, one of whom is, in Tayo's mind, his Uncle Josiah:

When the sergeant told them to kill all the Japanese soldiers lined up in front of the cave with their hands on their heads, Tayo could not pull the trigger. The fever made him shiver, and the sweat was stinging his eyes and he couldn't see clearly; in that instant he saw Josiah standing there; the face was dark from the sun, and the eyes were squinting as though he were about to smile at Tayo. So Tayo stood there, stiff with nausea, while they fired at the soldiers, and he watched his uncle fall, and he *knew* it was Josiah; and even after Rocky started shaking him by the shoulders and telling him to stop crying, it was *still* Josiah lying there....Tayo started screaming because it wasn't a *Jap*, it was Josiah, eyes shrinking

back into the skull and all their shining black light glazed over by death. (Silko 8)

In this moment of the book, Josiah does die back at the Laguna reservation. Tayo sees his uncle in the face of the Japanese soldier because it is at this point that he realizes that the American military is killing his own people. Native Americans are descendants of Asians and Tayo has become a traitor to his own people by participating in a white man's army. When Tayo visits a medicine man later in the book, he says "It isn't surprising you saw him with them. You saw who they were. Thirty thousand years ago they were not strangers" (Silko 124). Because the Japanese are Tayo's own people, he has symbolically killed off a piece of his culture and himself. Later, it takes Tayo much effort to mend the wound that this creates, but it does eventually make him a stronger person.

In his war, Ron Kovic kills one of his own people, and this causes him much pain. In a confusing battle, Kovic sees the shadow of a figure running toward him. He instinctively pulls the trigger and kills this man. Later, Kovic discovers that he has killed one of his own soldiers. He tries to come to terms with this right away, telling a superior officer "I think I might have killed him" (*Born...*). Instead of getting the punishment that Kovic perhaps is requesting, he is asked to forget about it. "I don't think so," says the officer (*Born...*). In denying Kovic's actions, the superior officer forces Kovic to deny his own sense of self and morals. In a similar way, Tayo is denied his respect for the dead in engaging in the Pacific conflict. The Laguna culture demands that the dead be respected, as illustrated when Tayo hunts a deer and performs various rituals to show appreciation for the dead creature (Silko 51). Again, because Tayo (a member of the non-violent/passive Laguna culture) engages in systematic violence in the form of the white man's war, he is forced to forsake his culture and values.

Upon returning from war, both Kovic and Tayo experience suffering and the escape from reality that many veterans turn to when dealing with hard issues. Unlike Tayo, Kovic remains very idealistic

in the beginning. He is taken to a hospital that operates under very poor conditions. Kovic struggles to use his legs again but is forced to give up when the doctors very directly tell him that he will never be able to walk again. Kovic faces the first signs of discrimination when the workers of the hospital refuse to treat him as an equal. He wakes up one day and calls out for help, screaming "I want to be treated like a human being!" (*Born...*). The mostly black staff is not concerned with his problems, one man saying "Why [do] we fight for rights over there if we ain't got rights at home?" (*Born...*). This man fails to see that Kovic too will have to fight discrimination for the rest of his life.

When Kovic finally does get home, he is hurt by those who protest the war. He withdraws into drinking. Most of his friends are either against the war or dead, and he does not have many people to turn to. His one friend who has also returned from war tells him that he does not feel like himself any more. He feels very similar to Kovic, who has lost his own identity through the war. Kovic asks his friend "What do you do when you feel like that?" and his friend replies, "What can you do? Mostly I do a lot of drugs" (*Born...*). Kovic submits to this way of thinking. He is asked to leave his home and goes to Mexico where he withdraws from reality even more through drinking and soliciting prostitutes. He says "I'd give everything I believe in just to have my body back—to be whole again" (*Born...*). Unfortunately, Kovic cannot find this wholeness until he is willing to come to reality again.

Unlike Kovic, Tayo is hopeless after the war and even loses his will to live. "He had been thinking about how easy it was to stay alive now that he didn't care about being alive any more" (Silko 39). Tayo also went to a hospital, one for those who had been psychologically damaged by the war. Coming home, he feels his mind and body fade away. He does not care about himself any more. "He didn't care any more if he died" (Silko 39). Only his friends try to pull him out of his depression, but they do it through drinking. Like the veterans of

the Vietnam war, these Native American veterans escape reality any way that they can. "Reports note that since the Second World War a pattern of drinking and violence, not previously seen before, is emerging among Indian veterans" (Silko 53). The rage that the Native Americans deal with is misdirected and eventually turns inward and forces the deterioration of a culture that turns toward self-destruction.

The self-destruction that takes place within the Laguna tribe starts when the Native Americans see the faults of their own people. Emo says to Tayo, "One thing you can do is drink like an Indian, can't you? Maybe you aren't no better than the rest of us, huh?" (Silko 60). In saying this, Emo perpetuates the stereotype. Tayo becomes upset at this and fights Emo in the bar. This is Tayo's lowest point and helps to maintain what some think as the white man's "witchery" against the Native Americans. "They want us to believe all evil resides with white people," says Betonie, Tayo's mentor. "Then we will look no further to see what is really happening. They want us to separate ourselves from white people, to be ignorant and helpless as we watch our own destruction" (Silko 132). Tayo learns through Betonie that the self-destructing violence cannot accomplish anything insomuch as equality with whites is concerned.

Like Tayo, Kovic also deals with the violence and self-destruction of veterans who blame themselves for the pain that has been created during the war. At one point Kovic fights with another disabled veteran about killing babies. The veteran claims that Kovic did not put his heart into the war because he never had to kill a baby or a woman (which he did). The two end up rolling on the ground fighting each other until they are too tired to move. Like Tayo's fight with Emo, this is Kovic's lowest point. After this, Kovic realizes that he must come back to reality and cannot change the past. He knows that violence cannot be the answer because it is this very violence that causes him to lose his own identity. He needs to define himself and come to terms with the things he has done in the war.

Tayo and Kovic contrast in their methods of healing or becoming whole again. While Kovic asks the question "Who's gonna love me?" and gets no answer, Tayo's healing owes much to the love that he receives from a woman that Betonie has prophesized. This is not the only step to recovery, however. "There were transitions that had to be made in order to become whole again" (Silko 170). A very large part of his healing process comes in mending the destruction that has come from the war. Tayo tries to make up for symbolically killing his uncle and his culture by setting out on a quest to retrieve his uncle's cattle. In following up on his uncle's dreams, he becomes closer to him and is able to learn about what it is to be a part of the Laguna tribe. Tayo finds his own peace when he lives in isolation with the cattle and refuses to be a part of the violence that has consumed the other Laguna veterans.

Kovic also heals by coming to terms with his past. He visits the family of the man he had killed and bravely tells them the truth about what had happened in Vietnam. Coming out of his withdrawal from society, he finds his sense of self in protesting the war and becoming a voice for the veterans who have been forgotten or ignored by society. When Kovic is able to express his feelings with a clear mind, he discovers who he is and the power of what he can accomplish as a voice for the voiceless. At the end of the film when he is about to address the nation, Kovic says "Just lately I've been feeling like I'm home—that maybe I'm home" (*Born...*). Kovic may not have found a home in the traditional sense, but he has found a home in coming to terms with the past and being honest about who he is and what he means for Vietnam veterans and the disabled.

Unlike Kovic, Tayo is given the chance to face the problems of a self-destructive culture head-on. Hiding on reservation land after escaping the veterans who had come to kill him, Tayo listens to the drama that unfolds as Harley is tortured for allowing him to get away. The others mutilate Harley in an effort to flood Tayo out, thinking that Tayo will

succumb to the same violence they use on themselves. "‘Scream!’ Emo said. ‘Scream loud so he can hear you’" (Silko 251). Tayo refuses to become a part of the violence. Even when they cut flesh and toes from Harley and throw them all in a paper bag, Tayo is able to resist the instinct to fight back. In refusing to be a part of the violence around him, Tayo has defeated the "witchery" of the white man and has become whole.

Both *Born on the Fourth of July* and *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko end with some unanswered questions. Kovic's speech is not portrayed in the film and life goes on for Tayo. These open endings demonstrate that the struggle for a sense of self or wholeness never ends. Each character has a long way to go to combat discrimination and the injustices of the past. They have each had very traumatic experiences in war and its aftermath. These experiences can only help to make them stronger. In an early scene of *Born on the Fourth of July*, Kovic, upon returning home, gives a pro-Vietnam speech in a Fourth of July community rally. During his speech he hears helicopters and the cries of babies—flashbacks of the war. He looks into the crowd and sees two Native Americans. It is at this point that Kovic has doubts about the morality of the war. He sees the Native Americans and perhaps even thinks about the promises made to them long ago before the white man stole their land. These false promises are the same as the ones used to recruit soldiers for war. The false promises given to the Native Americans hundreds of years ago and the ones given to potential soldiers are very similar. Tayo and Kovic are able to rise above the promises and become whole persons through their own struggles for equality and a sense of self.

Works Cited

- Born on the Fourth of July*. Directed by Oliver Stone. With Tom Cruise, William Dafoe, and Kyra Sedgwick. Universal Pictures, 1989.
- Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Ceremony*. New York: Penguin Books, 1977.

Evaluation: *The point of a minority literature course is to educate students with respect to the world's dispossessed inhabitants. In this essay—which thoroughly documents two characters' journeys from dispossession to selfhood—Brian more than demonstrates that he is sensitive to what it means to be marginalized, alienated, and what it means to triumph nevertheless.*

Growing Up Together — Day-by-Day

by Merry Moran
Course: English 100
Instructor: Kris Piepenburg

Assignment:
*Write a profile capturing the essence of a person,
place, event, or activity.*

"I'm awake now," Terence, my three-year-old, announces. "Awake and ready to put me through my motherly paces again," I think to myself.

Terence is sitting at the top of the stairs, rubbing the sleep from his bright brown eyes. His hair is all tangled from tossing and turning in his child's dreamland for the last ten hours. His Winnie-the-Pooh pj's have not fared much better. "The moon's out," he says, gesturing with his finger towards the window. "Where's the sun?" For Terence, the 24 hours in a day are simply broken into two time periods—day and night. Right now (in adult time), both hands of the clock are resting on number 6. Soon, my home will partially shed its personality and become "home-for-a-day" for an energetic contingent of children. For the next ten hours, Terence's home will become my home day-care center—Tot 'N Toddler Town. It never ceases to amaze me how he is able to play both role of a son and that of a part of the Tot 'N Toddler Town participants.

Bumping down the stairs on his bottom, Terence asks, "Are you home from school now?" At this early morning hour, the question seems a bit unusual. However, the last time Terence saw his mother was when I was walking out the door at 6:00 in the evening the night before on my way to my English composition class. As he reaches the final step (and bump), he inquires, "Where's my Dad?" He seems to be trying to organize time and people in their proper places so he can relate to them during the next several hours.

As he sits down at the breakfast table, the focus of his organization at the moment is his collection of "Hot Wheels" miniature cars. "I want my cars, Mom," he says. Terence's most prized possession is his collection of over one hundred little vehicles. At this early hour, he is already arranging and rearranging them in the "proper" places. This arrangement is the one that only he knows. Each car is positioned on the table by some mysterious logic of size, shape, and style. All the cars must be facing in the same direction with sports cars first. Then come the vans, trucks, buses, and finally, those that have no determined functional use.

At 7:30, the other children are about to arrive. "I'm going to put my cars away before Marcus and Amanda get them," he warns.

Where the source of this preoccupation for orderliness at such a young age comes from I cannot say. Perhaps, it has its roots in my own childhood. As one of twelve children, I learned at an early age to try to control the environment around me, if for no other reason than for survival.

My momentary reminiscence is interrupted by the chiming of the front door bell signaling the arrival of Marcus and Amanda. Terence, not given to welcoming pleasantries, is already setting the little table for breakfast. Napkins, plastic plates, and cups are being laid out by his tiny hands in the appropriate places. "Only I get a big boy glass. Right, mom?" he asks. "The other kids are too little." Pancakes, bananas, and milk are the morning menu and eagerly devoured in record time. No spilled milk mishaps have occurred and I am ready to begin the morning learning program. "I'm finished, Mom," Terence announces. "Clean up," he continues. He picks up his plate, places it on the sink, and throws his paper napkin in the garbage. "My hands are sticky," he declares and, as if to prove the point, meshes his fingers together. "I need to wash my hands." He marches off to the bathroom with the other children trailing behind. Apparently, at this moment, his orderliness is a bit contagious.

Arrival, breakfast, and clean-up has taken some time. The clock is now showing 9:00 am. It's time for an entertaining and educational TV program, "Blues Clues." We all settle down on the floor in the living room. Terence is watching the show very closely and imitates what the show host is doing as all the children try to solve the riddle. "It's over," Terence proclaims. "It's over." He stands up, goes over to the set, and turns it off. "What are we going to do now?" he asks.

"Let's all go out for a walk in the neighborhood," I suggest. While I am getting the other children ready, Terence retrieves his own shoes from the hall closet. Standing by the front door, he asks, "Can we go now, Mom?"

Once outside, I notice that it is a bit too cold today for an extended walk. We take a short walk instead. Along the way, Terence is picking up twigs that have fallen from the trees. These hold some sort of fascination for him. He carries these back to the house and drops them at the doorway, adding to the collection already there from previous excursions.

Back indoors, I sit all the children down at the small table once again. The morning is running along smoothly. It is now 10:00. Time for our finger-painting project. Terence goes to the small coat rack in the kitchen and comes back with a paint shirt for everyone. "Here, Marcus. Here, Amanda," he says, handing them each a shirt. "I can do it," he says, putting his own paint shirt on. The project, however, is short-lived. "My fingers are dirty," Terence wails. "I don't want to do this anymore." The other children seem to agree. The would-be artist in me is hurt. As a young girl, I spent many enjoyable hours sketching and painting. However, with this group of apparent non-artists, no amount of cajoling has any effect. "My hands are dirty," Terence continues to complain. "See! See!" he continues as he holds his hands up to my face to prove the point.

We all march off to the bathroom, once again. Terence places a small step stool by the sink, steps up, turns on the cold water, and squeezes some liquid soap into his hands. After dousing his hands under the running water for a few seconds, he confirms he is finished and jumps down.

"Is it time to do schoolwork?" he asks. Since the other children are otherwise occupied with toys, I set up a small sequence project for him. Having come from a large family, I learned a long time ago that fun and educational projects do not have to be expensive. Many times, items at hand in the home or items that are normally discarded after use can be turned into stimulating games for kids.

At the moment, the sequence project consists of plastic milk container caps in blue, red, and purple. The idea is to match them with the same colors in the objects I have drawn on small cardboard sheets. I have also placed on the table discarded paper towel

and toilet inserts that I have colored in blue, red, and yellow. These, too, must be matched with similar shapes that I have drawn on paper.

Terence picks up the colored caps and begins matching them on the cardboard. "I did it," he exclaims. Then, he continues on to the other project, matching shapes. "I'm done, Mom," he says. "What else can we do?"

The day is barely half over and I am getting ready to collapse. However, I know I must continue. Terence's innocence and enthusiasm is melting my fatigue. The projects and games, wiping of runny noses, toilet training and diaper changing continue throughout the day.

At 3:30, my other children come in the door. First in is my teen-age son. "Hello, Richard," welcomes Terence. "Did you go to school? I go to Mom's school! Don't eat all the cookies. Hang up your coat. You're making a mess. Mom says no messy," he rattles off. The sight of this three-year old trying to organize a teenager is too precious for words.

Soon, it will be time to close Tot 'N Toddler Town for the day. The other parents will be here to pick up their children. They have been with me and Terence for almost ten hours. I wonder how Terence views this daily intrusion into his own home. Perhaps, the focus on organizing is his way of maintaining some psychological distance from the other children. Is this his way of stating, while the other children may play and learn here at "Mom's school," it is still his house, his toys, and his family? Is this his way of reminding the children that, even though they are just visitors, they still must follow the rules?

*Evaluation: This profile demonstrates
the craft of a writer for whom the
implications of brief moments are not lost.*

The Blame Game:

Issues of Sin, Consequences, and Moral Responsibility in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find"

by Kathleen O'Connor
Course: English 101
Instructor: Richard Johnson

Assignment:
*Write an original analysis of a
short story read for class.*

Flannery O'Connor weaves an intricate tale of the ultimate family vacation from hell. The Grandmother, the mother and father, and the two children depart for Florida, all with entirely different desires and expectations for the trip. Unfortunately, the family never reaches its ultimate destination, due to an untimely run-in with a group of escaped convicts. The entire family is eventually slaughtered, leaving O'Connor's audience to ponder the question, "What and who caused this horrific event to occur?" Or in other words, "Who's to Blame?"

The mistakes and sins committed by a variety of characters in the story lead to the death of this family. While each character's individual actions contribute to the resulting massacre, overall blame is determined first and foremost by intent. The Misfit quite directly causes the deaths by ordering his sidekicks to commit most of the murders and then by shooting the Grandmother himself. The Grandmother indirectly contributes to her and her

family's death by way of deception and manipulation. Even more indirectly than the Grandmother's faults, Bailey's uncompromising and unkind personality also contributes to the fate he and his family must face. By examining both the actions and intentions of the Misfit, the Grandmother, and Bailey in O'Connor's story, we reach a clearer understanding of the concept of blame in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find."

At the point the Grandmother and the Misfit come face to face, the plot's conflict is evident. O'Connor introduces two conflicting schools of thought concerning sin. The first school of thought contests the notion that societal influences are at the root of humanity's transgressions. The second school of thought does not blame external forces for an individual's mistakes, but rather places blame with the sinner himself. Both the Grandmother and the Misfit are primary agents of the dire consequences of the story, but is either truly to blame?

The Misfit is a savage killer, but just as we witness a vulnerable side to the Grandmother, so too do we see that the Misfit wasn't always a "bad" person either. He tells the Grandmother, "I was a gospel singer for a while...been in the armed services" (O'Connor 47). He goes on to say, "I was never a bad boy that I remember of...got sent to the penitentiary. I was buried alive" (O'Connor 47). This contextual evidence allows O'Connor to show why many people conclude that society is to blame for the ills of a nation and not the individual. While societal influences are one of many factors contributing to the family's fate, each person is ultimately responsible for his own actions and most importantly his intentions. The first school of thought concerning blame would argue that the Misfit isn't responsible for his actions because the influences of jail life hardened his heart and drove him to commit his sins. Although I acknowledge the merit of this idea, I still contend that the Misfit is partially to blame. He openly admits his philosophy of hate to the Grandmother, saying, "No pleasure but meanness" (48). The Misfit orders the family killed and then shoots the Grandmother

himself. He cannot and does not love; he intends to destroy and hurt. Not only do his actions quite directly cause the deaths, but with complete knowledge of the consequences that will occur, he acts anyhow intentionally.

In a different and less graphic way than the Misfit, the Grandmother also makes a decidedly unpleasant impression on the readers. She is a pushy and manipulative old woman, set in her ways. And yet as the plot proceeds, O'Connor allows the reader to see that the Grandmother is also loving and nurturing. The Grandmother tells the children stories, braids the little girl's hair, plays with the baby, and tries to educate her grandchildren about both manners and the world at large. While faults are apparent in the Grandmother's character, her misgivings are almost universal. Like most humans, the Grandmother has selfish tendencies. She wants to go to Tennessee instead of Florida, because she would like to visit relatives there. However, she also views the trip as an educational opportunity for the children. Additionally, the Grandmother fears for her family's safety; she is mortified by the possibility of encountering the infamous Misfit on the way to Florida. The Grandmother's authentic concerns are simply tinted by universal human tendencies toward selfishness. Her intentions are not completely pure, but they are not evil either. In this sense the readers can identify with the Grandmother. She isn't a horrible person; she simply has minor personality flaws familiar to all people at one time or another.

On the other hand, the Grandmother's flaws *do* indirectly contribute to the death of her own family. First, the Grandmother sneaks her cat into the car against Bailey's wishes. Second, the Grandmother tells a lie to convince her son to drive to the old house. In addition, when the family meets up with the Misfit, the Grandmother identifies the Misfit as the killer, further endangering her family. Without a doubt, the Grandmother's thoughtless actions are key to her family's demise. Despite these facts, is the Grandmother truly to blame? While the grandmother is morally responsi-

ble for her deceptiveness, I do not believe that she should be held morally responsible for the deaths which occur at the end of the story. The Grandmother's intentions never indicate that she expects or desires for her family to die. Symbolically, I believe the cat, Pitty Sing, stands for the concept of "petty sin." According to old Catholic doctrine, which O'Connor may have been heavily exposed to, all sins are not equal. Lying is a sort of petty/minor sin, while murder is considered a "moral" sin; it's worse than all others. Does the Grandmother's tendency to tell white lies hold her accountable for the deaths of six people she loves? I think not.

While it's easiest for the reader to accept the Misfit as the "fall" man, it would be more difficult to place blame on the Grandmother. It is evident that her intentions are pure. It becomes increasingly difficult for the reader to place the blame on the Grandmother's son, Bailey, because he is the most indirect cause of the consequence. O'Connor depicts Bailey as an unkind, uncompromising, and difficult man. In this sense, he also contributes to the consequence. He mistreats his family and refuses to compromise. Bailey demands to have things his way or no way at all. The Grandmother is unable to share her feelings or ideas with Bailey. Perhaps the Grandmother is disheartened by the disrespectful and unkind treatment she receives. O'Connor depicts this unpleasant aspect of Bailey's personality when she writes, "Bailey turned his head sharply and said something to his mother that shocked even the children" (45). The Grandmother might have felt as though she absolutely *had* to lie in order to be heard. Obviously, Bailey is not a horrid person either, despite his personality flaws. However, maybe if Bailey had been willing to compromise with the Grandmother in the beginning of the story, the family never would have headed for Florida and encountered the Misfit at all. Perhaps Bailey could have spared their lives from the very beginning! The family would have been safely visiting relatives in Tennessee instead. Although Bailey is responsible for his own faults, he cannot be

blamed for the deaths of his family members. Realistically, it seems almost ridiculous to suggest that Bailey contributed to the fatal consequences that day. It's rather far fetched, isn't it? However, if the Grandmother is going to be blamed, then Bailey must be blamed also. In a reckoning of minor sins, they both indirectly cause the horrific event to take place, while the Misfit quite intentionally and directly causes the death of an innocent family.

In conclusion, the actions of several characters in the story "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" lead to the ultimate and irreversible consequence of death. While it seems that the Misfit should receive most of the blame, it is difficult to point the finger at anyone definitely. Indeed, a good man is hard to find. To err is human and no one is perfect. All people mistakes and must atone for their sins, petty or mortal, in their own way. Blame is useless, because consequences are permanent. In "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," the sins of several characters lead to the irreversible consequence of death. Not only is the consequence permanent, but the actions leading to this consequence are unchangeable as well. In this story, the selfish actions of several characters lead to the mass destruction which occurs, but not everyone intends to be evil or cause pain. In fact, the Misfit even appears to have a change of heart at the end of the story, saying to his snickering partner in crime, "Shut up, Bobby Lee....It's no real pleasure in life" (49). The Grandmother and Bailey are both responsible for their actions which lead to the massacre, but they should not be blamed for the massacre itself. On the other hand, the Misfit is not only morally responsible for his actions, but also the evil intent behind his actions. More than any other character in the story, the Misfit is to blame for the deaths in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find."

Works Cited

O'Connor, Flannery. "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." *To Read Literature*. Ed. Donald Hall. 3rd ed. Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1992. 39-49.

Evaluation: In a concise and cogent exposition of her thesis, Kathleen confronts the central question of O'Connor's story: who is most culpable for the tragic deaths in the story?

I Do More before 9 in the Morning...

by Shannon Plate

Course: Honors Literature 105

Instructor: Barbara Hickey

Assignment:

Write an original poem and provide analysis of it.

I Do More before 9 in the Morning...

I cannot catch my life. I	1
awake moving, my tasks clenched	2
in my hand	3
so that my time,	4
like money managed badly,	5
is gone	6
before it is truly mine	7
and my enemy hisses defeat in my ear because	8
it is never done ever.	9
But, some days it is enough	10
to wander sleeveless with the sun,	11
and explore myself—	12
as intriguing as someone else's garden,	13
treasures hidden under quick spreading yarrow	14
and thoughts I don't recognize	15
digging in, threatening to bloom.	16

Is it a good thing to have my day structured? Is it a good thing to gauge the success of that day on how many tasks I marked off my "to do" list? Being an active person, I have developed a lifestyle to complement that facet of my personality, but have I taken productiveness to such an extreme that I am always a step behind, running to catch up? My life has become a drill master, and I feel sometimes that I'm inhabiting that Army commercial that proclaims: "I do more before 9 in the morning than some people do all day." It has happened; "I cannot catch my life" (line 1), and the very words on the written page beg for change. The two distinctly split stanzas of the poem speak of the differences between feeling controlled by my schedule and knowing when it has become insanity to race all day for such nebulous gain.

The beginning of every day is busy. Of my own choosing, I spend the early mornings serving my family in the myriad of ways needed to each of them individually. Cooking, ironing, packing lunches and spreading general good will are bundled into a couple of hours so that I'm sure that all have had a pleasant start and an encouraging word before they disappear to their separate worlds. My childhood mornings were spent alone and in darkness, and I knew from the start that my family deserved better. Then comes the ritual Making of the List, which then becomes "my tasks clenched/ in my hand" (lines 2 & 3), tasks which rarely leave my sight or my conscience for the remainder of the day. I am ambitious and the list is usually longer than the day. My time has been all but spent, and like people with credit card bills that come in the mail to claim money they have yet to earn, it "is gone/ before it is truly mine" (lines 6 & 7). When a day is badly managed, I can bring myself to a state of frustration on the futility of finishing, of closure, of a neat list with everything crossed off. "[M]y enemy hisses defeat in my ear" (line 8), another day is done, and the enemy has been me.

When I find myself at such a level, when the busyness of my life has taken over the quality of it, I stop. It becomes imperative to take a breath, to

step back and take stock of what is really important and what I have merely given that title to. It becomes really important to spend some of the precious commodity of time "to wander sleeveless in the sun" (line 11), to feel the warmth put a shine to my shoulders "and explore myself" (line 12). What I find usually surprises me—a new idea, a change of posture on a formerly held position, a sense of gratefulness that my life allows for times such as these—and I am amazed at the lack of familiarity of my inner thoughts. "[Y]arrow" (line 14) is a perennial plant that, once given a purchase in a garden, can overtake the land for a few feet in every direction, cascading over and drowning smaller plants with its foliage. My busyness is my yarrow, and my found thoughts the "treasures hidden under" it (line 14).

Some of my best ideas have come from these moments. Even "thoughts I don't recognize" (line 15) become part of me, and may encourage a worthy change in my life if given a chance to breathe. As well, difficult decisions can be made, and disappointments brought to the forefront to be stared at and finally rested. It can be "threatening" (line 16) to feel these things that used to be thoughts: in the frantic activity of a list-bearing woman, growth may be set aside for the more concrete accomplishments. Mundane as they may be, there is something to be said for a full larder, an organized home and good works. In the stretch of life, however, all must be balanced and I have learned that methodical competency must be paired with the freedom to toss it all to the wind for a time, be it an hour or a day, and I've found it too hard to be complete without giving myself the choice of that decision.

I may always run toward my life, but I have decided not to run from it. When it becomes necessary to step back, I can and will. The older and, with hope, wiser I get, the less I will force the situation of chaos before recognizing the need for time to refresh. I can face the difficulties and challenges with deliberation and intent — knowing the time spent learning of myself in the midst of self-imposed clamor can be most important to my

growth, and working to the good of those things I espouse to cherish. It is my expectation that my "threatening...bloom[s]" (line 16) will forever be a part of my process, for once the blooms are spent and dried to dust, dormancy sets in and waits for the interminable spring to appear once again.

Evaluation: *Shannon's lucid prose analysis is an evocative companion to her exceptional poem.*

Common Ground

by Catherine Quigg
Course: Literature 105
Instructor: Barbara Hickey

Assignment:

Write original poetry and provide an analysis of it.

A DAY IN THE CITY

Sparrow-thin, she surprises me
with her hollow vacant eyes...
 a house with empty rooms.
Not thinking, I say, "How well you look."
Her eyes betray the falseness
 of my words.
We drink hot coffee from hand-painted
 pottery mugs bought in Mexico
 carefree years ago.
We talk of that and other things as
 chicken steeped in prunes, olives
 and white wine simmers on the stove.
I try to help...set the table, sort clothes,
 wash dishes, consort.
Then we eat—she with one hand hanging limp
 at her side—her knife a virgin.
Afterwards, to break this cool September day
 we go outside.
But first, like a child, she buttons her
 grey cardigan. Searching, twisting,
 groping, she reaches the last button.
 "Oh no," she cries. One off the mark,
 she starts over.
We walk a while. We part.
She calls after me,
 "What shall I do with my piano?"

WOMAN IN THE MIRROR

She pulls her hat low
across her furrowed brow.
Her shoulders bend forward
as she brushes her gray hair back.

Tired-eyed, pale-faced, weary,
She looks just like my mother.
I take another glance
and see that she is me.

A MATTER OF DEGREE

Your lie comes shrouded in darkness—
an unwelcome guest
suspected of stealing
the family diamonds and silver.

Not a lie, you tell me,
just a careful shading of the truth
Oh fine, I say,
mentally changing the heist
to rhinestones and stainless steel.

HOLDING THE LADDER

Today I hold the ladder for Paul,
cleaning dead November leaves from gutters,
repairing broken downspouts.

And I remember holding the ladder
years ago for my father
up three stories, cleaning gutters.

On the back porch Mother paced, weeping.
"Tell him to come down," she cried.
"He'll kill himself this time.

Dad shouted, "Tell her not to worry."
Then he ventured out on the sloping roof,
checking loose tiles, and the old brick chimney.

I waited below and prayed he would not fall.
There was nothing else I could do;
I held the ladder.

The idea for a poem usually comes to me as an experience or feeling recollected from the past or inspired by a happening in the present moment.

While most of my poems are short dramas or narratives, others are philosophical reflections on the vagaries and imperfections of ordinary life. I try to write about things I know, but sometimes I wander and speak of paradoxes and things I don't understand. I write to understand where I have been and where I am going.

"A Day in the City" is a true story. I had gone to the city to visit a friend recovering from a stroke that had paralyzed her left arm and hand. I wanted to describe the bravery and spirit of this single woman, her valiant efforts to overcome her disability, the shock of her appearance, and how we spent the day. At the end of our visit, she articulated her cool awareness of the prospect of never being able to play the piano again—so I ended the poem with this comment to give it emphasis.

I wrote "The Woman in the Mirror" on the way home from a trip to Boston in mid-July. Half-way home, the air-conditioning system in our new car failed and the fans—instead of blowing cool air—blew hot air into the car. My husband, our dog, and I sweltered in the blistering heat and heavy traffic. At our last reststop, before entering Illinois, I happened to look in the mirror and was stunned at what I saw. I had pen and paper in the car and quickly scribbled my feelings of that moment of recognition in the mirror.

There are poems that come seemingly out of nowhere—or dreams. "A Matter of Degree" is such a poem. Disturbed by a half-truth told me by an acquaintance, I awoke in the early morning with this poem fully written in my head. After I put these words on paper, I felt a sense of relief at having vented my resentment.

A recent experience triggered my memory of a past experience as a child—leading to "Holding the Ladder." As I held a ladder for my husband, I had a sense of *deja vu*, a sense of the fright I felt as a child in the same situation. Certain childhood experiences have such a firm hold on our subconscious

that we relive them over and over at different times in our lives. This poem reflects that kind of analogous experience.

I heard once that we read in order to know that we are not alone. I hope people who read my poems get that feeling.

Evaluation: Catherine's poetry is powerful and memorable. Those of us who read her poems participate in her journey of understanding and "know that we are not alone."

Together — Zusammen

— by Christine A. Schubkegel —

Course: German 205

Instructor: Renate von Keudell

Assignment:

Make an oral presentation to the class. Choose any of the poems from the hand-outs, or create your own. Explain why you chose the poem you selected or what inspired you to write your own. Then, recite the poem without notes.

Together

I will...
...You will...
...We will...
...together.
Keep him in...
...our hearts...
...our lives...
...our minds.
Always right
beside me...
...you...
...us.

Zusammen

Ich werde...
...du wirst...
...wir werden...
...zusammen.
Schließt ihn ein in...
...unser Herz...
...unser Leben...
...unseren Geist.
Immer neben
mir...
...dir...
...uns.

Laughing, crying,
with...
...me...
...you...
...us.
His heart
always seemed
bigger than...
...mine...
...yours...
...ours...
together.
I will,
you will,
we will
remember
him always.
He will live
in my life,
your life,
our lives,
right beside us
forever...
...together...
together forever.

Lachend, weinend,
mit...
...mir...
...dir...
...uns.
Sein Herz
shien immer
größer als...
...mein...
...dein...
...unser...
zusammen.
Ich werde mich,
du wirst dich,
wir werden uns,
immer an dich
erinnern.
Er wird immer da sein,
in meinem Leben,
in deinem Leben,
in unserem Leben,
für immer mit uns
für immer...
...zusammen...
zusammen für immer.

I wrote the poem "Together" or "Zusammen" for my grandfather. My grandfather died on the ninth of October, in 1997, and I composed this poem the day after. "Together" speaks of my love for my grandfather and is a memorial to him. I wrote this poem in German because my grandfather was German, and he was also my inspiration to learn the language. This poem was included in my grandfather's funeral bulletin.

*Evaluation: Christine shares with the readers her
sorrow about her grandfather's death and
documents her closeness to him well in her poem.*

A Thank You to My Tormentors

by JoDee E. Swanson
Course: Honors English 101
Instructor: Martha Simonsen

Assignment:

Use an essay we have read as a springboard for your writing. Select an author's statement, experience, or idea to expand on: bring in details and examples.

I can identify with James Baldwin in his essay "Stranger in the Village" when he asserts, "What one's imagination makes of other people is dictated, of course, by the laws of one's own personality.... by means of what the white man imagines the black man to be, the black man is enabled to know who the white man is" (129). I would add to Baldwin's statement by saying that the black man becomes what the white man imagines him to be. I believe that people who victimize others because of their physical appearance are making a statement about themselves. I also believe that a person who is continually labeled will eventually develop the characteristics that the label implies. Having been an object of ridicule, I grew up in a constant state of anguish. Now that I have had years to ponder my childhood, I find that the memories of this experience have culminated in a wealth of personal discovery and growth.

Before I could grow I had to endure years of ridicule. I weighed 246 pounds by the time I reached high school, and I had been tormented throughout my childhood. It had been confirmed that I was a nonentity. In the eyes of my peers, I had only existed for their sheer entertainment. In my own eyes, I had only to exist for the future. I promised myself that there would be a time when I would be able to socialize with others without having to suffer the anguish of being so different. I was caught between those who hated me for the way I looked, those who pitied me, and those who were just like me and sought refuge in the familiar. I hated myself because others hated me.

In the midst of my self-hatred, I took some comfort in the belief that people who victimize others because of their physical appearance are making a statement about themselves. I "knew" my tormentors by virtue of their transgressions. These people came from all walks of life. They were the kids in the halls who shouted, "pig" and "you're disgusting," and then would proceed to hit or trip me. They were the kids at church who overtly told jokes at my expense. They were the doctors who were cruel and insensitive to me. I remember think-

ing at the time that these people were just mean and heartless; they were not the kind of people I should be around. I soon realized that their cruelty was a symptom of a much larger problem. I started to notice that the aggression was never projected when the tormentor was alone with me. The harassment only arose when there was an audience. This told me that my tormentors were insecure and sought admiration from their peers for being funny. I observed that executing emotional torture on someone else drew attention away from the tormentor's own flaws. I began to see that this ritual of fervent derision was not about my fatness and me at all. It was about the tormentors and their pressing need to be liked by their peers. It was a need so compelling that it drove them to narcissistic avenues of choice like ridiculing others for a good laugh.

Although I had removed the masks from my tormentor's faces, revealing the vulnerabilities that all humans share, I found little comfort in this revelation. While I could intellectualize the fact that these people were really more interested in themselves than me, my heart could not release the sadness their persecution caused. On an emotional level, I had been imbued with their doctrine. In my eyes, I had become what my tormentors had imagined me to be: repulsive, moronic and not worth anything, traits that were reflected in my gait and my personality. The pain they inflicted intensified as a result of my recoil. Just as a dog that senses fear in a human is more likely to attack, my tormentors upon seeing that their taunts were hurting me were compelled to increase their efforts. I would then retreat even more.

As an example, I remember walking through the school's hall with my head and eyes down, so afraid of meeting up with one of them. I could see that there were three boys standing to the side of the stairs. I thought that if I avoided looking at them they wouldn't notice me. I decided to continue walking. My heart was pounding. I was glad I had my coat on—I thought it helped to hide me. I was wrong. The boys noticed me right away. Each one

saw an opportunity to impress his friends. As they started to surround me, I cowered and closed my eyes.

"Look at this big, fat slob!" one boy said. "Are you waddling to gym class?"

"Hey, that's the big, fat 'tuna' I was telling you about from my lunch table! What's the matter, are you too fat to get by us?" yelled one kid, who proceeded to position his face about one inch from mine. I tried to push him away, in an effort to walk past. As an act of pure condescension, he spit directly in my face. I remember the disgust and horror I felt as I was finally able to walk up the stairs. I thought I must truly be a bad, disgusting person in order for people to want to do this to me. By cowering and not responding to the boys, I gave them fuel for their fire.

In spite of the fact that this cycle of mockery and recoil continued throughout my high school experience, I believe that it pushed me to a level of self-discovery. I had an incredible sense of responsibility and refused to become lax in what I was being held accountable for: schoolwork, volunteer work and job-related work. This was regardless of what I was feeling inside. My biggest fear in high school was going to gym class. This class centered on what I could physically do and how I physically looked. I was extremely vulnerable to taunts in gym. At first, I couldn't think of any ethical way of getting out of going to this class. I finally went down to the Dean's office and told him what was happening. I also explained that I wasn't trying to get out of doing any work. I just needed to get away from the kids. I offered to write some term papers (by myself) instead. I was extremely fortunate enough to have a Dean that was compassionate. He agreed. As time passed, I graduated from high school and found a job as a secretary. I eventually developed a more confident sense of self. This latent confidence emerged as a result of my ability to obtain a good job (while I was still overweight) and ultimately earn promotions. I discovered that I had the tenacity to work at a goal and to achieve it; the emergent confidence gave me the strength to

lose weight. In the two years after I graduated from high school, I lost 130 pounds. As the weight came off, I found that the spirit of the people around me transformed into an attitude of acceptance. Unfortunately, the years of ridicule had left me to conclude that this miraculous acceptance was due to my weight loss. This conclusion led to bitterness. I developed antithetical feelings of exuberance (that I was finally accepted) and betrayal. It took a long time for me to figure out that the dynamics of human interaction had taken a turn because of my new attitude. My peers were more comfortable around me because I was finally comfortable around them. Maturation and an open mind helped me to see the truth. In an odd way, I became a self-contained sociological experiment. My peers represented the control group and I represented the variable.

I still believe that people who ridicule others make a statement about themselves. The statement becomes more complicated when analyzed. It is with sorrow that I reflect on the fact that I temporarily became what my peers imagined me to be. However, it has been very important for me to keep an open mind and a malleable perspective. The dynamics of human interaction are too complex to base one's self-perception on another person's view. This journey of self-discovery and growth is not yet over, but the rewards I have reaped have been extensive. I believe that it is because of the experience of being ridiculed that I have developed a deep sense of compassion for others. I am now able to pass that concept on to my children. The emotional insight I have gained has helped me through many painful situations. I truly believe that I would not be the person I am today if I had not been through this experience. For this (and only this), I thank my tormentors.

Work Cited

Baldwin, James. "Stranger in the Village."
Eight Modern Essayists. Ed. William Smart.
New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc. 1995. 124-34.

*Evaluation: A student records her humiliations
and triumphs. Her candor and lack of
self-pity make this painful account compelling.*

The Search for Identity:

An Interpretation of Li-Young Lee's "Persimmons"

by Max Szlagor

Course: Honors Literature 223

Instructor: Andrew Wilson

Assignment:

Write a literary analysis.

Discovering our personal identity and appreciating our culture are two of the most important goals a person could have. The speaker in Li-Young Lee's "Persimmons" goes on his own quest for identity and culture throughout the poem, and eventually finds what he is looking for through various images and people. He also learns to blossom like the central symbol of the poem, the persimmon.

The tone of the poem, setting and speaker make themselves evident near the beginning of the poem. The setting seems to be pretty vague; no time is really indicated, but it seems like the poem takes place in America. This is evidenced in the first few lines: "In sixth grade Mrs. Walker / slapped the back of my head" (1-2). These lines make it feel like the poem takes place some time in the present at any given elementary school in any given town in America. The speaker is a bit more difficult to identify since he may be a general, unnamed person or even the poet himself. After all, he is Chinese, like

Li-Young Lee, and he has a lover named Donna. Donna is also the name of Li-Young Lee's real-life wife. The speaker is defined by the following lines: "Donna undresses, her stomach is white....I teach her Chinese" (18-22). There is no further evidence to indicate the poet as speaker, however, so I will simply assume that the speaker is a persona. The persona seems to be a middle-aged Chinese man who has moved to America, has a lover, possibly a wife, and is very close to his father. He has some difficulty fitting into American culture and seeks his identity throughout the poem. The tone seems to be one of respect, as the speaker exudes admiration that he feels for various people and the persimmon. This respect can easily be seen by his detailed explanation of how to eat a persimmon:

Peel the skin tenderly, not to tear the meat.
Chew the skin, suck it,
and swallow. Now, eat
the meat of the fruit,
so sweet,
all of it, to the heart. (12-17)

He obviously feels that the fruit is very delicate and wants to make sure it is given proper respect in being prepared and eaten. Specifically he "Peel[s] the skin tenderly, not to tear the meat" (12), demonstrating his respect for the fruit. He also seems to personify the fruit through the use of the words "meat" and "heart." This personification suggests that he holds the persimmon in the same regard as people, and respects it in the same way. The gentle manner in which the speaker eats the persimmon can be largely representative of the way the speaker should assimilate both Chinese and American culture. He must learn to ease American culture in so that he doesn't suffer from culture shock or lose part of his equally important Chinese heritage.

Early on in the poem we get a sense of the difficulty this man has had adjusting to American culture. The following lines demonstrate this difficulty:

In sixth grade Mrs. Walker
slapped the back of my head
and made me stand in the corner
for not knowing the difference
between *persimmon* and *precision*. (1-5)

At this point in his life he is having trouble learning to use the proper words and his harsh teacher punishes him for it. Rather than being gentle and forgiving with the boy she has opted to ignore his circumstances and simply hit him. This is his first lesson in the poem, and is part of his quest for identity. Some of the best lessons in life are learned from being treated unjustly, and this is no exception. Here he learns that people should not be judged without knowing the circumstances behind why they act the way they do. He learns that people are important and should be treated gently, with respect, like the persimmon itself. Later on in life the speaker clearly demonstrates his profound understanding of the words which gave him trouble as a child:

How to choose

persimmons. This is precision:
Ripe ones are soft and brown-spotted.
Sniff the bottoms. The sweet one
will be fragrant. How to eat:
put the knife away, lay down newspaper.
Peel the skin tenderly, not to tear the meat.
Chew the skin, suck it,
and swallow. Now, eat
the meat of the fruit,
so sweet,
all of it, to the heart. (6-17)

This detailed ritual of eating the persimmon clearly demonstrates that he has learned the meanings of precision and persimmon and understands them better than most people. This is also the first point in the poem where the central symbol, the persimmon, is given a sufficient amount of description. The prominence of this symbol is evident in the

fact that it makes up the title of the poem and is used constantly in several lines to describe important lessons in life. While the persimmon can represent unique people in general, I believe it specifically represents the speaker in many ways. First, it is a fruit that must be prepared and eaten properly, and can only be truly appreciated when one has learned how to do this. In the same way the speaker is an interesting and important person who must be respected and given space to understand. The teacher does not take the time to listen to him and as a result sees him as a rotten apple, like a persimmon would be if it were not cared for and eaten properly. Also, the speaker must learn to grow and ripen like the persimmon by understanding his values and identity, a realization he ultimately achieves.

The first signs of the speaker's cultural crisis are evident as the poem moves on. He brings his lover out to the lawn and tries to teach her a little bit of Chinese before lovemaking: "Crickets: Chiu Chiu. Dew: I've forgotten. / Naked: I've forgotten" (23-24). A sense of lost culture is brought forth in forgetting simple words of one's native tongue. After all, as a child he had trouble knowing the difference between English words and now he can't seem to remember the Chinese ones. He has been caught up in American society and as a result is losing touch with his heritage.

Also present in the third stanza, however, is further evidence of his respect for life. When making love to Donna he "remember(s) to tell her / she is beautiful as the moon" (27-28). While these are simple lines I believe that the speaker telling her she is beautiful is important because he doesn't just view love-making as an act or routine as some people may, and he makes sure that his lover knows how much he loves her at all times. This is a good example of his concerned attitude towards people and things we may take for granted.

As the poem moves on, we get further insight into the speaker's cultural confusion and difficulty in adapting. The speaker points out specific difficulties in assimilation here:

Other words
that go me into trouble were
fight and fright, wren and yarn.
Fight was what I did when I was frightened,
fright was what I felt when I was fighting.
Wrens are small, plain birds,
yarn is what one knits with.
Wrens are soft as yarn.
My mother made birds out of yarn. (29-37)

Early on in his life the speaker gets English words like these jumbled as their meanings are intertwined throughout his childhood. They intertwine in much the same way that Chinese and American culture must intertwine. The lines quoted above also seem to point to the ambiguity in words and in the larger experience of life. His teacher is suggesting that words and the world are one sided and well defined while the speaker seems to view words as complex and having many associations. In the same way the speaker views the world as multi-faceted and this supports his belief that he can incorporate American culture as well as Chinese heritage into his life. It is easy to lose a piece of Chinese culture or fail to incorporate parts of American culture because both are constantly trying to dominate over the speaker. Because his teachers had no tolerance for his lack of comprehension he has learned to place a high value on American culture but the loss of his Chinese side has begun to disturb him.

As the poem goes on, we are shown how the lack of understanding in his fellow classmates and teacher has ruined certain experiences for them. For instance, the speaker points to a special class treat which was ruined:

Mrs. Walker brought a persimmon to class
and cut it up
so everyone could taste
a Chinese apple. Knowing
it wasn't ripe or sweet, I didn't eat
but watched the other faces. (40-45)

The teacher had no idea about the ritual necessary to enjoy the persimmon and as a result only taught the students about the bitter side of persimmons. She has done the same with the speaker by failing to appreciate his past. Her life experience will be one-sided if she continues to ignore the finer aspects of people and things. Through such reflections, the speaker grows stronger and learns to take a broader view on his own life. These reflections coupled with the advice of his parents guide him on the path to balancing his identity and culture.

Further along the poem, the speaker learns more about himself through his mother's advice. She tells him "...every persimmon has a sun / inside, something golden, glowing, / warm as my face" (46-48). The symbol of the persimmon is very important to understanding this line. Since the symbol seems to represent the speaker, this advice helps him understand that even though people may put him down or he may have doubts about himself, he is blessed with a strong sense of inner self. He has a sun inside of himself and he is a gift to the world, no matter what anyone says. This important piece of advice begins the end of his quest for culture and identity. It has made him stronger and leaves him thinking even harder about the persimmon.

Further along, the speaker confronts lost objects which ultimately lead to the final piece of his search. His father has gone blind and he wants to show him his respect, so he gives him a pair of newly ripened persimmons which are "swelled, heavy as sadness, / and sweet as love" (59-60). The persimmons have a good and bad side, sadness and sweetness. This directly relates to the speaker as well. He feels a great sense of sadness over the loss of his Chinese culture but also feels a great love for his father and a desire to retain his heritage. He continues his search in his parents' cellar, where he "rummage(s), looking / for something I lost" (62-63). Literally he may be looking for some old treasure but figuratively he is searching for his lost Chinese culture. He has come to the point where he needs some answers, and he turns to his father for them.

Near the conclusion of the poem, the speaker's father gives him the advice which brings him full circle and teaches him how to retain his Chinese heritage. While searching under some blankets the speaker discovers three paintings, one of which features "Two persimmons, so full they want to drop from the cloth" (76). He brings this important piece of art to his father, who sums up how he can retain his heritage:

*These I painted blind.
Some things never leave a person:
scent of the hair of one you love,
the texture of persimmons,
in your palm, the ripe weight. (84-88)*

The answers the speaker have been looking for have been in front of him the whole time. He was always able to retain his Chinese heritage and will always be able to, because it is a part of him. In the same way his father can paint persimmons over and over with his eyes closed, he should be able to call up his culture. While it may have appeared to have left him, the sense of belonging and ties to Chinese culture were always there, waiting for him to summon them from his subconscious mind. As long as he pays respect to his culture and tries to make it a part of his life, he will be a complete and balanced individual.

Li-Young Lee's poem "Persimmons" takes us on a Chinese man's journey to find a sense of lost culture and identity for himself. This journey reminds us all of the importance of being true to ourselves and our heritage. They define our personality and make us strong. Often peers or leaders try to make us forget our past and we can lose a sense of identity when this happens. We must not let others push any part of ourselves away that defines us as people. At the same time, we must be sure that we don't alienate others just because they don't completely fit in. Diversity is important to each of us and helps make the world a richer and more interesting place. The various cultures in the world add to the large collection of fantastic experiences and

stories that make all of our lives better. No one should ever become like the single-minded, isolating teacher in this poem because he/she will be missing out on some of the greatest experiences. It is the "hidden" teachers like the speaker's sagely, open-minded father who teach us the most. Finding these people in our life aids us in discovering a part of ourselves that may not have seemed clear at first. While there is generally nothing wrong with conventional sources of wisdom and guidance, sometimes it is better to look a little deeper for the answers we so desperately seek.

Work Cited

Lee, Li-Young. "Persimmons." *Rose: Poems by Li-Young Lee*. Brockport, N.Y.: BOA Editions, 1986. 17-19.

Evaluation: Lee's "Persimmons" is a wonderful but difficult poem that seems to branch off into several distinctive directions. Through insight and clear writing, Max brings the poem's many parts together, showing his readers that "Persimmons," finally, simply chronicles a man's ongoing effort to negotiate two cultures at once.

"Like Father, Like Son"

"Music of the Swamp"

by *Isabella Tenerelli*

Course: English 101

Instructor: Tony Trigilio

Assignment:

Identify an argument that unifies the three seemingly disconnected narratives in Lewis Nordan's "Music of the Swamp." Using copious textual evidence, persuade your audience that this argument is a crucial frame of reference for navigating Nordan's essay.

Lewis Nordan's essay, "Music of the Swamp," chronologically details the personal experiences of a young optimistic child living in an otherwise pessimistic world. Sugar Mecklin, the character of whom I speak, is primarily introduced to the reader as a child full of imagination and vulnerability. However, as the essay furthers, Sugar begins to understand the world for what it actually is and the effects it has upon him and his family. By emphasizing Sugar's gradual understanding of the world surrounding him, Nordan succeeds in showing the reader that the characteristics Sugar develops as an adult are direct results of the personal experiences described within the essay.

This correlation, in effect, not only is a characteristic of Nordan's detailing of Sugar's maturation through the years, but is also used to form a direct relationship between the three stories of "Music of the Swamp." Through each story it becomes evident that Nordan changes the point of view, "slipping from third-person stories about Sugar Mecklin to first person narratives" (Bartholomae, Petrosky 435). By directing narration away from Sugar Mecklin, Nordan attempts to persuade the reader that the perspective of each of the stories is indeed an interrelated part of a larger argument.

With that persuasion in mind, Nordan takes Sugar's particular experiences and indirectly supports them with situations seemingly unrelated to the main character. Those situations, specifically those experiences and details describing Gilbert Mecklin's own life, have a unique purpose, that purpose being that the reader is able to see that Sugar's own experiences are, in effect, influenced by the extent to which he observes his father's experiences. In turn, the reader is then able to validate Nordan's argument that Sugar Mecklin's current traits and characteristics as an adult are due to the infinite love he had for his hopeless father as a child.

Nordan succeeds in his persuasion by synthesizing the experiences of Sugar to those of his father for nearly every situation he provides to the reader. The experiences that successfully serve as support

for Nordan's argument are contained within all three stories of "Music of the Swamp," but predominantly within the second story, entitled "Porpoises and Romance." The experiences within this story serve as support for the argument because of the strong narration of the thoughts and feelings of Sugar Mecklin that Nordan provides for each situation. It is the synthesis of Sugar and his father's experiences within "Porpoises and Romance" that provides the means with which the last section of "Music of the Swamp," entitled "How Bob Steele Broke My Father's Heart," can accurately describe the effects of Gilbert Mecklin's influence upon his son. Because the experiences within the second story are described in detail and contain strong narration between father and son, the reader is able to validate Lewis Nordan's argument that Sugar's endless love for his father determines his own characteristics. However, it is that same dialogue between Sugar and Gilbert Mecklin that is lacking within the first story of "Music of the Swamp."

The first story of Lewis Nordan's essay, also entitled "Music of the Swamp," describes the contrasting situations of Sugar and his father Gilbert Mecklin, a man who believes the world is to blame for all the wrong in his life. In the beginning of the story, Sugar Mecklin is introduced to the reader as a young boy who wakes up to what "he...[believes will] be a special day" (436), but who later in the morning encounters otherwise. Instead of finding magic in this day, Sugar and his companion, Sweet Austin, uncover the body of a fellow resident in neighboring Roebuck Lake. Due to this undesirable and terrifying experience for a boy of his age, Sugar feels the need to be consoled by his father. Rather than finding a father who is able "to comfort two children who had seen too much death in their lives" (444), Sugar, upon returning home, finds a father who instead surrounds himself with "wrist-cutting music" (444), feeling as if he has been "hit over the head" (444) due to the excessive amount of drinks he has consumed.

And so, due to Sugar's own experience with death and subsequent description of Gilbert Mecklin's own state, Nordan *begins* to synthesize each character's situation in order to validate his argument, and consequently persuade the reader that if he or she keeps the main argument in mind while reading through the individual stories of "Music of the Swamp," he/she will better understand the interrelation between each story. Although Nordan does detail the experience of each character, there is still only a minimal correlation between Sugar and his father in this section of the essay. The fact that Sugar goes to his father for solace begins to substantiate the author's dominant argument. That support occurs because the author synthesizes Sugar and Gilbert's experiences by having Sugar go to his father for comfort and love, and that father in turn "fills his son's head with drunk talk" (446). But the inadequacy of support for Nordan's argument occurs because the author ends the first portion of the essay with Sugar reflecting on how his mother's support and comfort for the two young boys, not his father's, makes him feel.

This section of the essay ends with Nordan reflecting on the hope and love that Sugar feels at that moment when Mrs. Mecklin consoles and shows her love for himself and Sweet. Nordan states that "...the world was not the way Sugar Mecklin wanted it to be...but this particular day had turned out better than expected" (448). Because Nordan does describe the feelings and thoughts of both characters through this situation, he may disagree that it is solely the mother's comfort that leaves the profound effect of family and unity upon Sugar. Nordan may believe that the father's withdrawal from the situation together with the mother's solace lead up to Sugar's feeling of hope. But as the reader, I believe that if the input and consolation of the father to his son were further described, either in a positive or negative aspect, the reader would be able to perceive the effect that the father's experiences had upon his son. The description of the synthesis between Sugar and Gilbert's experi-

ences is lacking copious details that would additionally substantiate Lewis Nordan's argument, that by showing a relation between each of the character's experiences, it is evident that Sugar's infinite love for his father determines who he becomes as an adult.

But where the first section of "Music of the Swamp" lacks further analysis of Sugar and his father's experiences, the next two sections of the essay more than compensate for such a lack. Because of the strong description of the character's experiences, and the evident effect that Gilbert Mecklin's own experiences have upon his son, Nordan succeeds in showing the reader that Sugar's own drinking problem as an adult is due to the love Sugar has for his unknowingly influential father.

In the second story of "Music of the Swamp," entitled "Porpoises and Romance," it becomes evident that Sugar Mecklin loses all the magic that he once used to view the world with. As an adult reflecting upon his childhood, especially the experiences of the Mecklins' second honeymoon, Sugar states that "whenever I long for the return of my own innocence, I imagine becoming the person that my strange daddy was... and then I have to admit that I was never so innocent, not even as a child..." (450). This statement notifies the reader that Sugar has lost the imagination and magic he had as a child, but more importantly that in one way or another, the influence that Gilbert Mecklin has upon his son is a direct cause of Sugar's movement from an age of innocence to the realities of the surrounding world.

"Porpoises and Romance" focuses more on the experiences of Gilbert Mecklin than Sugar's own situations. But it is through the father's experiences that the thoughts and feelings of Sugar Mecklin are conveyed, and more importantly, the influence that Gilbert's experiences have upon the observant and watchful Sugar Mecklin becomes evident. Sugar, well aware that his father is pursuing a seemingly unattainable feat by trying to create love between himself and his wife, simply "[watches]... [sneaks] around, ...and just... [spies] on him" (449). By

describing in detail the extent to which Sugar observes his father's situations, Nordan validates his argument that Sugar's own experiences are in effect influenced by the extent to which he takes note of his father's own situations.

Lewis Nordan provides substantial detail of the influence that Gilbert Mecklin has upon his son by describing the way in which he watches his father, or even the constant duplication of his father's actions. Situations that can accurately validate the author's detailing include the fact that Sugar chooses to observe his father during the second honeymoon, rather than participate, or even the situation in which Sugar begins to read *Connections*, the same magazine that his father used and, in a sense, was studying in order to rekindle the love in his marriage. The important fact of this situation that Nordan wants the readers to discover, is that he does not include this example to further promote the characterization of an inquisitive young boy, but rather includes it to stress that because Sugar is mimicking his father, he actually is responding to the influence he was receiving from his constant observations of his father's experiences. During the second honeymoon, Sugar Mecklin is "always either with his daddy or behind him, nearby, watching..." (453). Through all of Gilbert's experiences on the honeymoon, the frustration, the misunderstandings, the failures and the successes, Sugar is watching, observing, and ultimately and unknowingly becoming influenced by his father.

In order to further validate Nordan's argument, the author crucially ends "Porpoises and Romance" with Gilbert Mecklin shouting in frustration, "I can't do no better! Maybe if we lived near a better beach" (455), a statement overheard by the ever-observant Sugar. It is then that the adult Sugar lends his voice into the story by responding to his father's statement and telling the reader that "it is just the kind of thing I'm always hearing myself say these days: if the world were different, I would be different, I would be more in love" (455). Just as Gilbert Mecklin believed, in Sugar's youth, that the world was to blame for all the things that went wrong in

his life, Sugar now believes the same. By using his father's statement as an absolute excuse or denial of the inevitable truth surrounding all the wrongs in his adult life, Sugar, as the reader now knows, has indeed become influenced by his father. Sugar is now what his father was in the past. It is that truth that allows the reader to believe that "Porpoises and Romance" is the first story in "Music of the Swamp" that shows substantial evidence that Sugar has been influenced by Gilbert Mecklin's own experiences.

Lewis Nordan provides substantial detail throughout this story and concludes "Porpoises and Romance" with the present-day voice of Sugar Mecklin explaining to the reader that he now repeats the same phrase he once overheard his father state. Through the use of Sugar's voice and stating that Sugar is repeating his father's past, it has become completely evident to the reader that Sugar, due to his constant observation of his father's experiences, has indeed become influenced by Gilbert Mecklin, and is now full of the same characteristics as an adult. Because of that crucial statement, Nordan provides substantial evidence to validate his argument that if the reader focuses upon the extent to which the young Sugar Mecklin observes his father's experiences and thus the influence that his father has upon him, then he or she would agree that Sugar's traits and characteristics as an adult are determined by the infinite love that he had for his father as a child.

Nordan succeeds in persuading the audience that the perspective of each of the stories is indeed an interrelated part of a larger argument by changing from a third-person point of view in "Music of the Swamp" to first person narratives, as seen in "Porpoises and Romance" and "How Bob Steele Broke My Father's Heart." To successfully persuade the audience of this interrelation, the author takes Sugar's particular experiences and indirectly supports them with situations seemingly unrelated to the main character, those situations belonging to the character's father, Gilbert Mecklin.

By combining both of the character's situations, Nordan successfully shows that the characteristics

that Sugar Mecklin develops as an adult are direct results of the personal experiences described within "Music of the Swamp." Nordan is able to support his argument by providing sufficient narration on the thoughts and details of each situation experienced by Sugar and his father, Gilbert Mecklin. Providing that sufficient narration with each character's experiences is the key that successfully synthesizes the experiences of Sugar and Gilbert Mecklin. Because the first story, also entitled "Music of the Swamp," lacks the further description of the input or consolation of the father to his son, either in a positive or negative aspect, the reader is not able to perceive the effect that the father's experiences have upon his son. In turn, the first story cannot accurately support Nordan's argument as strongly as the second story, "Porpoises and Romance," does.

The proper narration and details of the experiences within "Porpoises and Romance" are essential in providing the means with which the reader can develop that correlation between each of the stories. By reading through the experiences of Sugar and his father, and keeping the main argument in mind, I discovered the link between the three stories of "Music of the Swamp," that link being that through the description of Gilbert Mecklin's own life and experiences, the dominant influence upon Sugar is developed and proven to the reader. By discovering that correlation, I was able to validate Lewis Nordan's argument that Sugar Mecklin's current traits and characteristics as an adult are due to the infinite love he had for his hopeless father as a child.

Works Cited

- Nordan, Lewis. "Music of the Swamp." *Ways of Reading*. Ed. David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky. 4th ed. Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996. 435-66.

Evaluation: *An insightful essay—carefully written and argued. Writer's attention to detail is substantive, as is her synthesis of Nordan's voice and her own voice.*

Where Do They Go from Here?

An Essay on a Short Visit of Environmental Significance

by Julie Threlfall

Course: Philosophy 115

Instructor: Jerome A. Stone

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Assignment:

*Write a two to three page essay on a visit to a place
of local environmental significance.*

It was a beautiful spot—not manicured or tamed, but wild. In the low and wet earth, cattails flourished proudly, vying with the Jerusalem Artichokes in good-natured competition for towering supremacy over the smaller thistles and grasses, their brown heads majestically releasing their milky, downy seeds into every fall breeze that came calling, whether with a gentle caress or a fierce, lashing roar. Geese zoomed in for a landing, feet first, as if playing dive bomber. They would skitter across the land and make their way toward the large pond, either for a swim or a long, lusty drink of water to wash down the windfall corn pilfered from the farmer's field across the way and down the road. Field mice hurried to and fro, filling their paws and their bellies with countless sweet morsels from the land; the small creatures furtively rushed to stay out of harm's way, for the hawks would circle from time to time, and pounce mercilessly on the unwary or on the careless adventurer.

A feeling of peace and contentment settled over the area, wrapped in the blanket of winter snow that cozily encompassed the earth. Ice particles glistened in the winter sunshine, throwing back a myriad rainbow spectrum from the frosted cattail stems and marsh grasses surrounding the frozen pond. The earth appeared to be resting, but the promise of life, new and fresh with the springtime to come, simmered and pulsed under the surface of the shimmering whiteness. The very air seemed to delight in the surprise that was evolving underneath. The pristine white sign proclaiming "Wetlands Restoration Area" stood proudly and blended with the winter backdrop.

With the melting of the snow, the land became glutted with water: that wonderful elixir that calmly, quietly and modestly provided life for countless organisms, plants and baby animal life born or hatched just in time to enjoy the new wonder of the warm spring sunshine, drying new feathers or fur, stinging the eyes, but feeling wonderful and new. For the majestic geese had returned to nest; the field mice proudly and cautiously initiated their fuzzy little offspring to forage for the tender new

shoots produced by the rich earth and the nourishing winter snows. The baby geese learned to venture into the chilly pond, and quickly found the fun in frolicking, splashing and bumping one another under the surface, then gliding quickly out of reach of their befuddled siblings.

The heat of the summer sun gave life and courage to the countless wildflowers; purple thistles and dozens of marsh flowers flamboyantly decorated the hillsides and the banks of the pond with their riotous color, and stretched their necks as tall as they could into the sun's pulsing rays. The cattails once more took on their rich green hue, with their brown velvet heads puffing and swelling with the ripening seeds that the fall winds would be expecting on their next visit; the wind's summer cousin was wafting the sweet flower scents through the air to tantalize and call nearby honey bees. The young field mice played hide and seek amongst the flower heads, while the fledgling geese greedily filled themselves with the sweet clover and marsh plants.

Then the noise came. The smells changed. Large, oil belching machines dug and filled and graded. Men came and buried steel and poured cement. The pond became smaller and there were fewer cattails and places for the mice to roam. The world became confusing, disorienting, and not quite safe. The large geese hurried their young to another spot nearby. The young mice, made brave by the miraculous absence of any hawks circling overhead, chewed curiously on the wood, recently arrived. It was tall, flat and thin; and its crisp, flaky bark tasted strange and not very pleasant. They left it alone and skittered confusedly back to their parents, with a not quite pleasant feeling in their stomachs.

This winter, when the snow falls, it will blanket a smaller pond. The cattails will have won the battle with the Jerusalem Artichokes; they did not grow close enough to the pond to escape the graders. They will be no more. There will be fewer cattails and grasses to toss the glitter of the ice back to the sun, and less shimmering, fallen snow. Most of it will be plowed away in order to keep clear the new parking lot that will have been provided for the

new, 30-screen movie theater that will be completed and sitting on the land. Cars and trucks will cough fumes of exhaust from gasoline and diesel fuel into the waiting winds, to settle gently on the marsh and coat the tender plants with another type of sheen: the choking sheen of petroleum. What will the baby field mice eat now? The myriad rainbow spectrum once thrown back by the winter sunshine will be produced year-round by the oils that will lay on the top of the pond where the baby geese had learned to swim. Where will they go from here?

Perhaps they can all move across the street and down the way, just past the farmer's corn field. There are 95 acres there of wetland with cattails, ponds and woods. At least, that's how many acres the sign claims — the sign that says "For Sale. Zoned Industrial and Office."

Evaluation: *In addition to employing correct spelling and grammar, this student communicated her ideas clearly.*

Listen to Your Heart

by Joy Tranel
Course: English 101
Instructor: Jack Dodds

Assignment:

Write a narrative essay in the autobiographer's role. Use description, dialogue, and figurative language to dramatize a significant personal discovery or to reveal something important about yourself.

I am suddenly awake in the early morning of January 5, 1997, remembering that I am neither in my own bed nor am I alone as I turn to see a set of familiar ocean-colored eyes framed with long, beautiful lashes studying me. His bright white teeth glow in the darkness as he gives me a smile his orthodontist would be proud of and says, "I feel like I am in heaven right now."

"Why?" I ask, returning his smile.

"Because I have a beautiful angel in my arms," he says while gently squeezing me tighter before he continues. "As I laid here for the past few hours watching you sleep, I realized just how lucky I am to have you and how I wish this night would never come to an end."

I move closer to him inhaling his wonderful Eternity cologne as I whisper in his ear, "I don't want it to end either."

"Joy," he whispers back, "I realized something else, too."

"What was that?" I question.

His hand slips under my hair and his fingers gently tickle my neck. He knows I love that. "I'm in love with you, angel," he says sweetly.

I turn away from his gorgeous waiting eyes and waiting smile. No you don't, David. You can't. Take it back. Please take it back. A photo album of people I have loved and who have hurt me downloads into my memory. I can't delete this file no matter how hard I try.

An image appears. It is a man of athletic build standing a little over six feet in height. Only in his mid-twenties, still his blond hair is thinning and balding on the top. His large blue eyes smile as he holds a laughing blond tot with bedroom eyes of army green—his little princess—in his arms. I am his "little princess," and he is my father.

I can hear David breathing softly, almost to say, "Please don't leave me hanging!"

A new image. This time the "little princess" is not so little, and she is not laughing. Instead I sit on a closed toilet seat in a bathroom stall painted in pale yellow with tears running down my cheeks. I am dressed in a white polo shirt, untucked, and a knee length skirt decorated in blue and white plaid—my school uniform. In my hands I hold a "Why I am Great" assignment that holds my name, though I have not written it. I hadn't even turned one in yet.

"Joy, I need you to stay inside during recess today. I have something special to give you," my teacher told me just moments before. What he gave me was the letter written by my father as well as a bouquet of flowers. I was given a gift of love today. My daddy loves me, and I am great.

David released me from his arms. Right now he is trying to understand me or at least understand why I have turned away. He has tried to understand me from the very beginning. He always found my complexity very intriguing. Sorry David, you may be smart, but I don't think you'll ever figure me out, darling.

A third image takes focus. My grandma and god-mother comfort me as I sit on a whiskey-brown leather couch. I can't stop crying. Before I got here

I drank nearly half a bottle of rum, but that has nothing to do with my tears. My seventeen-year-old body is clothed in a hippie style dress of white with big flowers of various browns and greens. My dad hates the dress, and that is why I wear it on this day, December 6, 1996. In a few moments my father will be marrying a woman to whom I swear eternal enmity. I blame my father's now wife for everything that has made life miserable: my parents' divorce, and my lost relationship with my dad. "The affair that was never really an affair" (he swears to me) is what drove him out of love with my mother. It also drove him out of our house and out of my life. I have been fighting with him for nearly the last two years because of her. I don't think I will ever truly forgive him, and I am certain I will never like her. I am no longer his "little princess"; she is. The evil witch along with her big, pointy nose has cast a spell upon my father. She has changed him into a man almost as evil as herself. He used to be kind and caring; he used to give a damn about his family and friends. Now he only cares about the witch and keeping her happy.

After the wedding, I found David waiting for me when I got home. I didn't take David to the wedding, though he had wanted to go. I guess I just didn't want him to see me cry, though he did when I got home. That was the first time I ever really showed him my human side.

Long talks have always made a tight, special bond between my father and I. Now our long talks consist of only her. "Why can't you be nice to her, Joy? Why do you hate her? She makes me happy. Don't you want me to be happy? Why do you put conditions on your love for me?" he repetitively asks me as I sit on the stand during cross-examination. Is it my fault that his wife is a bitch? Our long talks are now long arguments, all of which end with my crying and nothing ever being resolved. He thinks they help though. "We have always been able to talk, Joy. These talks always make me feel better," he says after every one. I guess he is oblivious to the fact that they don't make me feel any better and that I still hate her.

I have treated her like she deserved to be treated ever since the day they officially started dating—like the evil and manipulative witch that she is. Now, in order to have any type of relationship with my dad, I am forced to be civil and say "hi" to her when I see her. I feel as if someone is stabbing me every time, but I do it. He is my dad; I can't change that. I guess I should say he is my dad whenever he feels guilty. I know exactly when that is because I will either get a call from him or a gift. "Mr. Father of the Year" himself. He is a bastard, but I do need him in my life.

He is the largest document in this painful file, but there are plenty of others to keep him company. New images quickly appear before me. Pictures of Sarah Burgmeier, Ashli Weis, Molly Weeber, and Abbey Smith. What do they all have in common? They were all close, some even best, friends I once had. People I loved and trusted and who repaid me by destroying any sliver of trust I had left after my dad got through with me. The cycle seems to be never-ending.

Sarah Burgmeier: dark blond hair, big turquoise eyes, cute button nose, sincere smile, and petite frame. Sarah, my best friend of close to six years, decided that my life was too screwed up for her to help me. I was a fragile piece of china that she dropped guiltlessly on the floor without bothering to clean up the mess.

Ashli Weis: dyed blond hair, small emerald eyes, toothy smile, tall, broad-shouldered and big-boned frame. Ashli picked me up, but it wasn't too long before a life of smoking pot and being promiscuous looked more appealing to her than a broken piece of china.

Molly Weeber: nearly black hair, deep brown eyes, crooked teeth, and model-thin body. Molly thought I was the best friend ever until guys started paying attention to her. At that point I was tossed back on the hard floor.

Abbey Smith: short blond hair, blue eyes, braces, and somewhat chubby frame. Abbey was on my side until she suddenly traded sides to give Ashli the 411 on me and talk behind my back. I took

back what few pieces she had of me.

"Joy?"

The downloading has been interrupted, but the images remain vivid. I have forgotten what started them.

"Why did you turn away?" David asks uncertain.

I breathe deeply and blink only to find my eyes wet with tears.

"You don't love me, David. You can't," I tell him.

"Joy, why would I lie? Why wouldn't I love you?"

"You just can't."

"I can and I do, Joy. Not everyone is out to hurt you."

I don't say anything back. I'm trying to hard to keep my tears back. You can't let him see you cry. You're a tough girl, Joy. Stay tough. Be strong.

He removes me from his arms and sits up. I don't look at him.

"Joy, I love you. I love that you're difficult. I love that you act like you don't need anyone but yourself. I love that you do your own thing and don't let anyone pressure you. I love that you're always right. I love that huge heart of yours that makes you go out of your way for people. I love your bitchy side. I love that you are smarter than I am. I love that you think everything through. I love looking at you. I just love you, okay?"

I'm crying now. How dare he say that to me! How dare he actually almost make me believe him!

"You don't have to love me back. I know that you probably don't."

I do love you, though, David. I am just too scared to tell you.

His hand moves my hair away from my face. He can see my wet eyes. His hand wipes away my tears. I close my eyes to avoid looking into his. He kisses my shut eyelids softly and lies back down next to me. "Please give me a shot, Joy. Don't run away this time," he says after a few moments. He had said this once before to me about two and a half months ago when I did almost give up on him. He was going to be just another two-weeker like I usually had. I wanted to avoid getting hurt, so I

gave up before I had a chance. I made an exception for David, though. Something told me to hang on. It was his eyes. His eyes are hypnotizingly beautiful. I wish I had turned away. I wish I hadn't listened.

His eyes are doing it again. I turn away. They won't get me this time. I do love him. How can't I love someone that makes me feel so beautiful and wonderful? How can't I love that set of breath taking eyes? Or his light brown Caesar-cut hair with blond tips? Or that smile that causes a chain reaction? Or that thin, muscular frame? How can't I love near perfection? How can I avoid the inevitable?

My body is bruised. I hurt so much already. I can't take anymore pain. My painkillers are all out, and the doctor's not around to give me more. I can't afford to love him. Not right now. But his eyes never lie. I can't give into them, not this time. He'll just hurt me like all the others did.

He kisses my cheek. I turn toward him. His mouth moves close to mine. He kisses me. I don't kiss him back. He sits back up. Now he turns away from me. "You're giving up on me, and I can't do anything about it," he says softly.

My mind won the battle. Over a year later, and my heart still weeps in defeat.

Evaluation: Joy has written a vivid, powerful narrative focusing on a moment of adolescent self-reflection and discovery. Especially effective is her use of dialogue to create characters and to express point of view.

Mechanization, Computerization, and Dehumanization

by Arwen Tyler
Course: English 101
Instructor: Martha Simonsen

Assignment:

Write an argumentative essay. Support your points with good evidence and sound reasoning.

Humans have always wanted to know more, do more, and build more. Since the beginning of civilization we have never been satisfied. We want always a more comfortable lifestyle: to do less work, have more options, and make our playtime all the more intense. This is one of the things that separate us from the other animals; while they're satisfied with food and shelter, we can never have enough. To achieve more we study, and build, and learn.

The byproduct of this is amazing technological success, especially in the last twenty years. Pens were replaced with typewriters, which were replaced by word processors, which were replaced by computers. Letters were replaced by telegrams, which were replaced by telephones, which were replaced by e-mail. Each advance brought faster communication, more options, and better quality for whatever people were trying to do. More new technology is created every year, and each discovery has the potential of wiping out the old.

But there's a price to be paid. We are building an empire out of concrete, glass, silicon, and steel,

becoming more and more dependent every day on the devices we have created. Before I started this paper, I took a peek at a friend's. His first sentence was "*Since my eldlementray school years in the late 1980's there have been a few peices of technology that seem to take excessive critisisum.*" As I looked at it, I realized that my good friend Jason had fallen victim to the most common of all English mistakes: reliance on the spellchecker.

Don't get me wrong; the spellchecker is a wonderful device; it's easy to use, keeps people from spelling anything wrong, and (for the most part) makes sure papers are grammatically correct, but because it's so easy to use it can become a crutch. My friend was never a fantastic speller, and I don't suspect he ever will be, because of the spellchecker. He's depending on a machine to do whatever people used to do on their own. Take away the machine, and he probably wouldn't be in Honors English; people would shake their heads in disbelief and ship him down a level.

Mechanization can be seen in all levels of school and the workforce. Calculus and trigonometry used to be done by hand; now we're lost without our scientific or graphing calculators. Once upon a time, a long time ago (okay, not so long ago), finance, insurance, and real estate agents didn't use computers at all. Now, according to David Garson, a professor of political science and editor of *Social Science Computer Review*, "Over 70% of workers must now use computers" (23). Notice the word "must." It implies that they can't do their job without their precious computers. Electric cash registers are in every store, taking away the simple math and reading skills that used to be needed for the job. Once, while I was waiting in line in a grocery store, the cash register broke down when the cashier was going to get the purchaser's change. We knew how much the food cost (including tax): \$18.47. The purchaser handed the cashier a twenty-dollar bill, but the cashier couldn't make out the change. She had to go to the manager and tell him what was wrong, and then she went to another machine to have it tell her how much change to give back. She

was completely dependent on the cash register; she couldn't even count out a dollar and fifty-three cents!

This dependency can be our downfall. We're becoming fat and lazy, living in our virtual lives and feasting on frozen, packaged meals and less and less of the world population farms and does blue-collar work. Carol Bly states that in a modern combine "you are so isolated from field, sky, all the real world, that the brain is dulled. You are not sensitized to your own mortality. You aren't sensitive to anything at all" (337). Some people take this isolation to a whole new level, remaining home all day, able to work via computer connections and shop by using the internet. Clifford Stoll, a self-proclaimed former internet addict, says, "I see my reflection in the screen and a chill runs down my spine. Even on vacation I can't escape the computer networks" (1). Humans are social beings; they shouldn't be hiding in their homes. They should go out and experience the wonders of real reality, of having a conversation with a face instead of a line of text. Do they get the same feeling when receiving an e-mail as they do when finding a four-page letter in purple ink sitting in their mailbox?

Because people want more machines, more and more computer programmers, engineers, and technicians are needed to continue this addiction to technology. These people maintain and build more machines, but as the number and complexity of these devices increase so does our need for more obscure jobs that deal with providing the machines' needs, not humans'. We're turning into the machines that maintain the machines, using our intelligence and sentience to repair the machines after breakdown. My mother was a data base administrator for Motorola; she helped run an entire network of computers. She'd almost always be on call, ready at a moment's notice to fix the machine when it broke down. She would spend countless sleepless nights working on code and giving advice by telephone or internet; she became a machine that maintains the machine. And much like machines, she had her version of breakdowns,

yelling and screaming and cursing her work and the job she had. But none of us could reprogram her to make everything suddenly all right.

At the rate we're going, jobs are going to be polarized. Either someone is highly skilled, or they don't need to be very skilled at all; the number of middle-skilled workers is dwindling fast, as is our touch with reality. The invention and spread of the internet promotes virtual reality and computer addiction. We can fall for these traps or we can slow down and, possibly, enjoy things as they once were. Machines don't have to be completely ignored, but other things can be considered. Stoll says, "When the only tool you know is a hammer, everything looks like a nail" (45), and he's correct; machines are the hammers. Walk to a friend's house instead of driving. Mail a handwritten letter instead of using e-mail. Actually grow your own food. Who knows? The old ways of doing things might actually be more enjoyable than the new. And as I finish typing this paper for English 101, I can't help wondering why I just can't seem to write with a pen and notebook paper anymore.

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- Garson, David G. *Computer Technology and Social Issues*. Hershey, PA: Idea Group Publishing, 1997.
- Stoll, Clifford. *Silicon Snake Oil*. New York: Doubleday, 1995.

Evaluation: *Whether we deplore or adore technology or have simply learned to put up with it, we can respond to the savvy argument and friendly voice of Arwen's essay. Colorful examples enliven her paper as well.*

The Use of Transparent Surfaces to Evoke Thematic Meaning in Robert Altman's Production of *Short Cuts*

by John Wiese

Course: Literature 112

Instructor: Nancy L. Davis

Assignment:

Write an analysis of Robert Altman's film, *Short Cuts*, in which you discuss how the director uses the language of film to evoke thematic meaning. Select from one or more of the following to focus your discussion: editing styles, music and sound effects, *mise en scene*, motifs.

In the film *Short Cuts*, an adaptation of selected Raymond Carver stories, director Robert Altman makes use of a number of cinematic techniques to add thematic meaning. Certain recurring visuals such as televisions playing in the background, long isolating corridors, fish (in and out of water), and conversations taking place through open doorways serve to unify the diverse stories and to reinforce the basic themes of the film. I believe that one of Altman's themes is that there are dark secrets lurking just beneath seemingly innocuous surfaces and he uses the technique of transparent surfaces to help us see through these innocent exteriors. In particular, Altman makes extensive use of glass, water, and mirrors to show a deeper reality beneath the surface level.

The nature of transparency is that the surface is clear and seemingly pure. Glass and the surface of water are smooth and perfect. Being so, how could there be anything sinister beneath? Similarly, people may appear normal on the outside yet have dirty little secrets in their hearts and minds. It is my belief that Altman uses water, glass, and other transparent devices to reinforce this message.

Transparent surfaces also serve effectively as agents of separation. There is one side of a transparent surface and there is another. There is the inside of a window and an outside just as there is a place above and below the surface of water. Separation suggests isolation and isolation is certainly one of the themes of "Short Cuts." Husbands are isolated from wives (Sherri/Gene, Marian/Ralph), parents from children (Grandfather Finnegan), and the lonely from the rest of the world (Mr. Bitkower). Glass windows, glass doors, and even fishbowls are separators, lying between one person and another. The fact that they are transparent suggests that they are not really there and do not matter, but, in fact, they are there and they do matter.

In one of the opening scenes Earl is first seen through the windows of the diner, establishing a separation between the film viewer and the protag-

onist and also subtly suggesting that there is something hidden below the immediate surface. Other characters viewed through glass include Stormy coming home to his wife, Bill peering at his neighbors, Grandfather Finnegan looking in on Casey, Bill calling his wife from inside a glass phone booth, and Ann Finnegan coming from behind the fancy cut-glass room dividers in her comfortable home.

Gene sees Stormy trashing his house as silhouetted against his front window and throws a rock through the glass, simultaneously expressing his frustration and breaking a barrier between the two rivals. The locked glass door of the bakery also creates a barrier between the Finnegans and Mr. Bitkower but, in this instance, the barrier is removed and the two rivals are able to resolve their conflict.

Altman even uses a screen door (Gene coming home with Susie) and a slatted fence (Jerry spying on Zoe) as transparent surfaces separating yet also joining the characters.

Although there is no physical surface involved in the technique, Altman frequently uses open doorways between people who are talking to each other. They can see and hear one another but they are in separate rooms, and there is a clear sense that they are separate and perhaps not really communicating.

Some of the more complex uses of transparent surfaces are literally done with smoke and mirrors. Smoke is frequently used as a transitional device between scenes (barbecue fire/Zoe's suicide/smokey nightclub) but also serves as a translucent surface through which some dark reality can be dimly but unmistakably seen. The use of mirrors in *Short Cuts* is particularly interesting and sometimes quite complex. Earl is reflected in a mirror in his trailer and Ann is indirectly shown in her bathroom mirror, further separated from the viewer by an open doorway. This use of reflected images suggests that these people are not really there or, at least, not as they appear to be. Something else is going on,

and the director wants us to think about what might be going on inside these people.

In another series of scenes, Bill is seen in a mirror talking to Jerry about sexual fantasies while, at that moment, Jerry is watching Zoe swim in the nude through a fence. The parallelism of the subject matter (sex) and the media (mirror/fence) is yet another way in which Altman uses transparency to make a point.

Perhaps the most complex use of transparent surfaces is one shot of Honey as seen through a fish-bowl, reflected in a mirror, and wearing the makeup of an abused woman. This use of multiple levels suggests that there may be more than one level of meaning beyond the obvious. In fact, it is initially unclear what is going on as Bill says, "I didn't really mean to do that." Does this mean that the marks on her face were inflicted by violence? What is real and what is not? The subsequent staging of a murder scene says much about Bill's underlying mentality as well as something about Honey's own secrets. Although makeup is not a strictly transparent surface, its extensive use in this film (Bill/Claire) is another way of suggesting that there is a different reality beneath the visible exterior. In another, somewhat comic scene, Gene asks Claire to remove her sunglasses, a superficial masking surface, in spite of the fact that she is wearing full clown makeup which is a far more complete reality-masking surface.

Probably the most dramatic use of a transparent surface is the body floating just underneath the surface of the river. It is a beautiful day in the gorgeous setting. Good friends are together and doing something they enjoy. The sun is shining brightly and the water is sparkling clean. Yet just inches away and clearly visible is the naked body of a young girl who has been violated and murdered. On one side of the surface all is good and clean, on the other side, there is pure evil. All that holds them apart is a thin film of clear water. What really separates the two? What keeps you and me from being on the "good" side

instead of on the "bad" side? Is it not the randomness of fate and the unexpected nature of life that separates the two sides, and is not Altman trying to help us see that distinction clearly?

In summary, Robert Altman has a message to convey in *Short Cuts*. It is not a pleasant message, dealing as it does with hidden evil and human weakness. These are not things that anyone really wants to see, and there is a strong temptation for one to pretend that they do not exist. Through the cinematic use of transparent surfaces, Robert Altman forces us to see what lies beneath the outer shell of reality and come to grips with the thin line which separates good from evil, right from wrong, and life from death.

Evaluation: John writes with knowledge and precision about a difficult film whose thematic purpose and fragmented style have eluded many. He has mastered the language of film and film analysis, doing justice to both Altman and Carver.

Sunflower Resurrection

by Cassell Wong
Course: English 102
Instructor: Kris Piepenburg

Assignment:
*Write a literary analysis of a poem,
working through its details and explaining
what the poem has to say.*

"You were never no locomotive, Sunflower, you were a sunflower!" Do we need to be reminded of this? American Poet Allen Ginsberg says yes. In his poem "Sunflower Sutra," Allen Ginsberg describes the scene of a grimy junkyard setting at sunset and draws parallels with the society in general. As urban society generates negative side effects and we are caught up in a meaningless life, we must not forget our souls.

In the first ten lines, Ginsberg describes the setting, which is a junkyard along a river at sunset near San Francisco. Ginsberg is sitting with his friend, Jack Kerouac, in the shade of a Southern Pacific locomotive, surveying the surroundings. From the vivid description of the two friends, "bleak and blue and sad-eyed" (line 5), as well as the description of the gnarled steel and polluted stream, we can envision that Ginsberg will be commenting on what can happen to the human condition in a modern urban environment.

Then, starting in line 10, as Ginsberg first notices the sunflower, he is taken aback by the "crackly bleak and dusty with smut and smog and smoke..." condition of the sunflower (line 20). The sun has always meant "life," and the sunflower is often taken as the spirit of life. The sunflower becomes a person as the description focuses on "smoke...in its eye," "seeds fallen out of its face," "soon-to-be toothless mouth," "its hairy head," and "a dead fly in its ear" (line 21). As Ginsberg continues to describe the sunflower, he is figuratively telling us what the human condition can become when exposed to the negative effects of society. He does a good job in helping us visualize a once-magnificent flower becoming ever more encrusted with dirt and grime. He goes on describing "the smut and smog and smoke of olden locomotives" (line 21) and the "rubber dollar bills, skin of machinery, the guts and innards of the weeping coughing car, the empty lonely tincans...entangled in your mummied roots" (line 37). He lays the blame for the sunflower's demise on "artificial worse-than-dirt—industrial—modern—all that civilization" (line 34). All of the discarded items Ginsberg describes are those that

transformed society and made it what it is today. So just as the rubbish and other pollutants are killing the sunflower, the individual is suffering from the deteriorating society. Ginsberg makes several references to locomotives in lines 2, 21, 31, and repeatedly starting in line 51. These locomotives represent our drive for success in the material world. Like the locomotive that is killing our lovely sunflower with its smoke and smog, this powerful drive inside of us which pulls us through our lives can also be stifling our passion for life.

In line 43, the tone becomes less resigned and at first more desperate. Ginsberg reminds us that inside we are still sunflowers. He is telling us we must remember who we are— “a perfect beauty of a sunflower” (line 45). In the final lines of the poem, Ginsberg says that while we all have “our skin of grime” and “our dread bleak dusty imageless locomotive” (line 60), “we’re all golden sunflowers inside” (61). He is not saying that we need to avoid the dust of society, but that we need to remember the passion within us and continue to live that passion.

“Sunflower Sutra” was written 43 years ago, just preceding the social movement that Ginsberg was a major part of. This social movement, like social movements in general, was critical of the state of American society at that time. However, instead of just criticizing the evils of society, Ginsberg is telling us in “Sunflower Sutra” not to give in to the smoke and grime of life and to not forget who we once were. We still do have passion in our soul which we must find as we are “growing into mad black formal sunflowers in the sunset” (line 62) and we need to keep reminding ourselves that we are sunflowers, not locomotives.

Evaluation: Ms. Wong provides an accurate interpretation of Ginsberg's poem and keeps the reader close to the poem by smoothly and meaningfully integrating quotations from it.

What Is Good Writing? The Anthology Judges Give Their Standards

Jack Dodds

Whenever I read I look for details, details, details appropriate to the writer's purpose or the occasion: descriptive details, fresh facts or figures, supporting instances, insightful observation or explanation. Good writing is dense with information. Good writing is also alive with voices: the writer's voice (persona), dialogue, quotation, and allusion. Good writing always talks to me.

Barbara Hickey

In Mark Twain's words, "Eschew surplusage."

Richard Johnson

Like bees, good writing should be methodical, meticulous, and prolific; like bees, good writing stings like hell.

Kurt Neumann

Last week we received a call from the editor of the *Harper Anthology* asking for a statement on what makes good writing. It is presumably our responsibility to comply with such a request and almost certainly our pleasure.

Surely the editor knows what good writing is. It is linear, logical, and orderly; or the other way around: digressive, analogical, allusive. It is highly crafted, like ourselves, and therefore vulnerable. It is seldom profound, often interesting, and always individual. It is personal, social, ideological, and political. Sometimes it is practical and sometimes it exists for its own sake. And the best writing, for my taste, is salted with a little irony and humor, much like a telephone call from the editor of a prestigious anthology asking for a definition of good writing.

Kris Piepenburg

All writing begins with reading—whether reading of physical or mental reality or another text. Good writers "have their feelers out" before and as they write, to soak up the details and depth of experience, whether lived or read. For whatever world a writer recreates and brings me to—whether involving technical concepts, a topical issue, a historic moment, a state of mind, a literary work, or a meaningful memory—I want to hear about that world through a focused, frank, unaffected, and unpretentious voice, and I want to get a full sense of that world, to be able to move around in it as in a "virtual reality." When a writer has strong sensitivity to actual reality and brings meaningful detail from it into his or her writing, the virtual reality becomes as rich and deep as the actual.

Peter Sherer

Writing that focuses and boldly goes where it promises to go alerts and engages me. I like writing that is intelligent, consistent in its logic, and concrete in its detail. I like examples and I want to hear an honest voice which speaks to me in sentences which are fresh, crafted, varied, economical, and musical.

Joseph Sternberg

I like writing shaped for a specific audience and powered by a well-delineated persona. I like economical writing. I like writing infused with fresh, vivid words and graceful sentences. I like details and clear purpose.

Tony Trigilio

Good writing is fearless. I do not mean that good writing jumps out of airplanes or straps itself to bungee cords for bridge dives. Thus, I do not mean good writing is reckless. Good writing is not afraid of honesty and detail. Good writing is not afraid to challenge the reader to see the world with a more detailed eye than s/he is accustomed to using—or, even better for our era, to challenge the reader to see with more clarity than generally allowed by flash-cut images and mainstream media soundbites. Good writing does “go in fear of abstractions,” as Ezra Pound said, and it pursues concrete detail with a pioneer’s courage and zeal. Abstractions, like sound bites, afford me (as a reader) the unfortunate ease of adjusting everything a writer says to my own particular world view. However, writers who refuse abstraction for the sake of concrete detail are writers who teach me new frames of reference, or teach me to reshape my perspectives according to those I have not considered before in depth. Good writing, then, is altruistic. If a piece of prose or poetry has widened my range of consciousness, then I call that writing “good”; as a result, my standards for “good writing” have been raised, and I am excited for the next, even better piece of writing.

Andrew Wilson

A piece of writing might describe a chair. A piece of good writing might have a man in that chair. A piece of super writing might show that man fidgeting—sitting, standing, sitting again; speaking, laughing, crying, moaning, babbling incoherently, drooling, or all of these. Super writing would tell the reader how that man’s shirt clashed with the fabric of that chair, and how that fabric *shooshed* as the scratchy wool of the man’s shirtsleeve brushed across it, bringing cigarette to mouth. Super writing would describe not only a chair and not only a man, but also the state of that man’s hair, and how he smelled, and the peculiar timbre of his voice. In other words, in my view, super writing features illustrative details—not exactly to the point of saturation or exhaustion, but I’d eat an overcooked chicken before I’d eat a raw one.

Harper Students on Writing

Kristen Campbell

I write to understand and to learn. Through writing, I can take what I learn in Sociology 230 and apply it to what I read in English 102 and gain a better understanding of the material in both classes.

John Gross

To me, good writing comes from the heart. Good writers entice their readers and make them experience what is going on in the story. When I write, I try and let my audience visualize the experience I lived. I want them to know how I felt physically and emotionally.

Natalia Kida

For me writing is a window to my inner world. This world is sometimes dark and intense, but it is also full of vividness and life. With each piece I create I learn something new about myself.

Brenda Kitchka

Writing this story provided me with a wonderful opportunity to reflect on two family vacations. The story reflects my memories of these trips and questions whether my family will share the same memories. As we prepare for another trip, this time to North Carolina, I wonder if I'll be moved to write another essay. Perhaps one star-lit evening in North Carolina I'll share my story of Minnesota memories. Who knows? This may become a new tradition!

Shannon Plate

Even as a child, I always loved to write. There is something immensely satisfying about stringing words together into poetry or papers, and I am very grateful for the help and encouragement of Dr. Hickey as I've attempted to hone these skills.

JoDee E. Swanson

The joy I receive from writing comes at different times depending on who my audience is. If I am writing solely for myself, the joy comes as I write. If my audience is someone else, I pour over each line and think through each word, kneading the piece until I am certain that I have conveyed the message. The process is tedious; therefore the joy only comes when I declare the work completed. I find writing to be cathartic and satisfying. I especially enjoy immortalizing the people and experiences in my life!

This assignment gave me the forum to discuss an issue that has been on my mind for twenty years. We must all weigh how we treat other people. The act of ridiculing others—for any reason—is one that can leave permanent emotional scars on the victim. I am extremely fortunate to have regained a sense of self-worth. There are those that never get that chance.

Isabella Tenerelli

As a writer, I can full-heartedly state that composing essays has been one of my greatest challenges throughout years of English classes. I have always found it difficult to come across the perfect phrasing of my thoughts and ideas or even to decide on a thought upon which to center my paper. However, although I still shudder at the thought of upcoming nights of endless typing and utter frustration, I now understand that all the frustration experienced in the composing process is equivalent to the amount of pride I feel when the final, perfect configuration of my thoughts and ideas is lying in front of me. What I have come to learn, especially within the last year, is that writing is all about reading over your final piece and feeling, in that moment, a sense of pride and confidence in what you have created.

Julie Threlfall

Writing is my way of communicating with the world. We rush through life, listening to only bits of what we hear. In taking time to read, we take time to think. In thinking about humanity's historical conduct, we gain the consciousness needed to improve the world. We choose the path.

The Secret Work of the Writer

by Greg Herriges

Picture this: you are a writer. Some people, the uninitiated, think they know what you do—you write, right? You sit at the computer and put words on the screen, and then on paper. But you've written before, and you know it is not that simple. You know, for instance, that you are not just a processor of words. You are, in essence, an air traffic controller of ideas, but without the luxury of radar. It is your charge to spot that incoming concept the moment it descends, to chart its course, to integrate it with all the other stimuli vying for your attention, never allowing any near misses, collisions, casualties.

Yes, you are fully aware that writing is much more than putting words down, but did you also know it is much less than that, too?

Certainly, during times of high idea traffic, you are a busy person. The rest of the time, however, you might be confused with the chronically unproductive. Truth be told, drafting is only a fractional portion of a writer's day, a fact that is not widely recognized by most readers, or even casual writers. Indeed, it's a pretty well-kept secret.

So, having been at this writing business for longer than I care to admit, I thought it might be a sort of public service to un-shroud the secret, to take the casual, the uninitiated among you with me on a typical day of writing, pointing out with interest along the way all the non-writing, unglamorous activities that rarely or never share the spotlight with their gaudier partner—actual composition.

* * *

We are in my writing room, a modest-sized, semi-austere enclosure that houses a desk, a chair, a computer, stacks of books, a Mr. Coffee machine, and filing cabinets. As I sit, I face a window that looks out on to a charming but typical suburban street. I find it therapeutic to take my mind off my writing at times, to follow the simple course of life as it unfolds just outside my home. The only luxury I have allowed myself is the chair itself, a large, leather recliner that adjusts by means of a gas cylinder. It looks like something Bruce Wayne would sit in, makes me feel like Batman.

The piece of writing I am at today is one I have been working on for over a year, a novel. I am on chapter ten. The narrator is in Washington DC, on a mission to convince a renowned medical specialist to come back to Chicago and examine, perhaps even save a person he cares deeply about. And though this is a work of fiction, the process is nearly the same as writing an expository essay. I've done my research. I know what I want to communicate. I have my strategy.

To the left are my notes. They suggest that I begin *before* the protagonist arrives at his hotel, thereby whisking the reader through the streets of Washington as a means of transition from the previous scene—an idea I find sound.

I re-read yesterday's work. It reads well, smoothly; I am satisfied.

I look out the window. Almost time to mow the lawn. Some dandelions that will have to be dealt with, mercilessly. I am a lawn tyrant.

Okay.

I forgot to mention that to my right is a small table upon which I keep two cups of coffee at all times. I have a sip. Mmmm. I like coffee.

Okay.

I write, *Chapter 10*.

I sip some more coffee. The 10 looks good on the page. Gives a sense of progress. I check my notes again. "Good idea to begin before protagonist arrives at hotel." That's right. That's what I have decided on.

On the far front left of my desk is a navy blue Harry Mark Petrakis mug, celebrating his years as an author. We were at some award ceremony together. I keep it filled with pencils. I do not write with these pencils. I put them in my mouth. Occasionally I chew them. I do this because in former days I was a smoker, and still at times I miss having a cigarette as I diddle (you should pardon the expression) the keyboard.

I reach for a pencil. I put it in my mouth.

Chapter 10.

I can't believe I'm on chapter 10 already. I remember when I began this novel, oh, a year ago last April. Or was it March? I remember—it was March, because the leaves hadn't appeared yet, and the Harry Mark Petrakis mug was on the *right* side of the Mega Plus low-radiation monitor.

Wait...I can see the narrator. He is in a cab. He has one of the windows rolled down part way because the weather is warmer in Washington than he is accustomed to. The words come to me:

Washington was stately, wide streets, buildings with slate exteriors, friezes, and engraved Latin phrases. It exuded government, hinted at timelessness. If it affected me this way, I could well imagine how it impressed foreign visitors. I kept the passenger window open slightly in the cab and found pleasure in the unusually warm, earth-scented air. Spring, merely a memory in Chicago, was here an early-arriving old friend, making me feel as though my soul has resurrected. *I would like to walk upon that brick sidewalk, I thought, visit that café,* but only after I had finished my business with Dr. Ries.

Say, that's not bad. I can live with that. I wonder momentarily if I should finish the thought in italics, that part that says, "but only after I finished my business with Dr. Ries." No—it's an explanation, and the explanation is part of the narration, not the thought. Okay.

I sip some more coffee. There's a *hair* in my cup. That is really revolting, even though it is probably my hair. I speculate on some correlation between writing and balding, a word-to-follicle ratio. I get up, go to the kitchen, get a clean cup. Back in the room I pour more coffee.

Mmmm. I like coffee.

The neighbor lady, I see, wearing a terry cloth robe, is vacuuming her pool, long, even strokes with the vacuum arm, rhythmic, calming strokes.

I adjust my gas cylinder-powered chair. I remember my friend, Tom Kennedy, telling me a story about one of these chairs. What was it? Something about a man in Denmark—oh, yes! Incredible story, really. He was in his office, and he had one of these chairs, and when he pushed the button to adjust the height, the cylinder somehow detonated and shot him through the ceiling. He died.

I stand up quickly. Maybe the chair isn't such a hot idea after all. It's so comfortable, though. Perhaps if I just don't adjust it.

Right through the ceiling. My God.

All right. Forget all that. Forget Danish men exploding through ceilings. Back to the text. He's at the hotel. Which hotel? It doesn't matter. Just get him there.

By the time I checked in, stowed my bags in my room, splashed some water upon my face, unpacked a legal pad, and went downstairs to find the next seminar, it was nearly 1:00 p.m.. Business-suited people returning from lunch strode past me, crisscrossed the large, open corridor, looked certain of their destinations. A momentary wave of loneliness gripped me, but I swallowed it away and joined the quiet stampede.

I can't believe the son of a bitch went right through the ceiling. Could that happen? Killed by a chair?

But that last section came out well. We're waiting for something to occur, but that's good. Build anticipation, and at the same time accentuate our

man's acute sense of isolation. But I wonder what hotel it is? I could just make it a generic, seen-one-you've-seen-them-all Hilton. Sure.

But that would be the cheater's way out. The reader deserves something honest, concrete, some Washington local color.

I have never been to Washington.

Looking out the window, two pencils in my mouth, I see the neighbor lady. She is finished with her pool chores, stowing away the vacuum. Off comes the terry cloth robe, flung to a deck chair, and—Jesus, look at *her*. I never realized that she...

I really should research Washington hotels. I exit my novel and go to the internet. Enter my pass word. Those sublimely preposterous sounds—wait. Today they sound different, feeble, like the dying gasps of a man who foolishly trusted his leather recliner. My provider is down! It never fails! Just when I need something—

I stand up, pace. Pacing is good.

Pacing sucks. Now I'll have to go to the library right in the middle of a pretty good morning's work. Well—actually, it's closer to noon by now, and a ride wouldn't be so bad.

Good Lord, can that woman do the back stroke, or what?

I have a sudden impression of the narrator taking a walk outside the hotel—he says something like:

The wind was mild; the sun felt good on my cheek. Glancing up I took in the—

The what? What did he take in? One minute I had the image, the words, the next—it all vanished. What now?

Get in the car; go to the library. But I must keep that line running through my head so that I don't forget it. I'll drive to the library, but I'll be writing internally. The process doesn't have to cease just because my fingers are no longer touching the keys. "*The wind was mild, the sun felt good on my cheek. Glancing up I took in the—*"

What would you be taking in as you walk in Washington? "...*the dome of the Capitol Building.*"

That is so *stupid*. So predictable. How do you even know the Capitol Building is in sight of the hotel? You don't! That's why you're going to the library.

No, you're going to the library because your lousy internet provider is incompetent. The only thing it does with precision is bill your credit card on the 15th of every month.

"*The wind was mild; the sun felt good on my cheek.*" I'm in luck. The library is fairly empty. Just me and a man who looks remarkably similar to Tony Perkins. He has a book open on his lap and string in his hands arranged like a cat's cradle. I scan the computer for travel magazines. I walk to the periodical desk to request several issues, conscious the entire way that the eyes of the Perkins look-alike are following me. What does he want? I didn't do anything to him.

"Sir?" the periodical woman says. "You can't take those magazines out of the library."

"I know," I say.

"But you just put them in your briefcase."

"I did?" I click open the case. Sure enough, there they are. I slap my head. "Absent minded," I say.

The Perkins character, it's all his fault. Got me so jittery. But now he's vanished, giving me pause. One minute he was there, the next—Ah ha! *L'Enfant Plaza Hotel*—on page 27 of the first magazine I open! It's perfect, a microcosm of Washington itself, shops, even its own underground Metro subway stop. *That's where my man is staying.*

I photocopy the article and a picture. My work here is done. I walk out to the parking lot (keeping my eyes peeled for nuts with string) more hotel *accourant* than when I went in. It looks as though it may rain, but what do I care? "*The wind was mild; the sun felt good on my cheek. Glancing up, I took in... the budded branches of cherry trees, the crystalline azure sky, and a jumbo jet suspended there as if for decorative purposes.*"

Yes! Behind the wheel now, the full force of the text unfolds before me like Huxley's rose in *The Doors of Perception*. I head out to the Ryerson Trail, in need of a more bucolic setting, a place

where afflatus may find me. And still the words keep flowing. I click open my briefcase, retrieve the photocopied article, begin scribbling on the back, even as I continue to drive:

I lighted a cigarette, drew hard upon it, exhaled, looked at my watch. Three and a half hours till my appointment with Dr. Ries. I wondered what in the world I expected from him. The smoke made me pleasantly dizzy as the neoprene heels of my shoes clicked upon the sidewalk.

The car halts with a thud. I am pitched forward, caught by the seat belt harness. I've hit something—another car. I've had an accident. How is it possible? I only looked down for a second.

A woman gets out of the car I have struck. I get out to join her. She assesses the damage to her rear bumper. Barely a scratch, by my estimation.

"I'm terribly sorry," I say. "It doesn't look like any damage was done."

She suddenly holds her neck and winces. We must call the police and file a report, she tells me. I hear the subtle strains of "The Whiplash Blues." My legs feel rubbery, but the words keep spinning in my head. "... *the neoprene heels of my shoes clicked upon the sidewalk.*"

The police officer wants my insurance card. It should be in the glove box but—oops. I wrote some dialogue upon it last week and took it up to my writing room, the black hole in my house where written information gets sucked into an invisible vortex and disappears more or less forever.

I am given a ticket for following too close, and one for not having my insurance card. The police leave. The woman drives away, still holding her neck. My car won't start. I get out and find a pool of antifreeze beneath it. Radiator.

It begins to rain. I am three miles from home. Yes, I love the old, scenic Ryerson Trail, but I sure could use a little technology right now, a cell phone, for instance. I always thought Thoreau was full of crap, anyway.

The rain falls. It falls and falls. Now it comes at me horizontally, like a wave pool. I hike blindly into it as the words continue to whirl about. I try to memorize them. They make less and less sense. "*Neoprene—there was a discovery. They could refine rocket fuel out of it to blast you far, far away from this world, or use it for an adhesive to render you fixed, stationary. Make paint out of it to hide the flaws of your living room walls, or else just shoe heels, shoe heels to click upon the concrete of Washington DC, as you try to find some softness or a sign of acknowledgement in the faces of strangers.*"

It is five p.m. and I am home. The rain has stopped. I ring the doorbell, having accidentally left my keys in the car. My wife answers the door; her eyes widen to hard-boiled egg proportions. I am a sight—shirt and trousers sopped, hair stuck to my forehead, a rain-smearing traffic ticket in either hand.

"What, in God's name," she demands, "have you been *doing?*"

I let the tickets splat to the doorstep, wring out the tails of my shirt, mindfully remove my shoes, sloshing water from them while doing so. "Writing," I say, dripping my way past her into the house.

I must have left the coffee machine on; I can smell it.

Mmmm. I like coffee.

With any luck I can get another hour in before dinner.

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Contributing Faculty



an·thol·o·gy (an thol' əjē), n,
pl. -gies. 1. a book or other
collection of selected
writings, often in the same
literary form, of the same
period, or on the same
subject. 2. any collection



of selected works, as songs,
paintings, etc. [1630-40]; <L
anthologia <GK: collection
of poems, lit., gathering of
flowers. See ANTHO-,
-LOGY] - an·tho·log·i·cal
(an' thə loj' i kəl), adj.