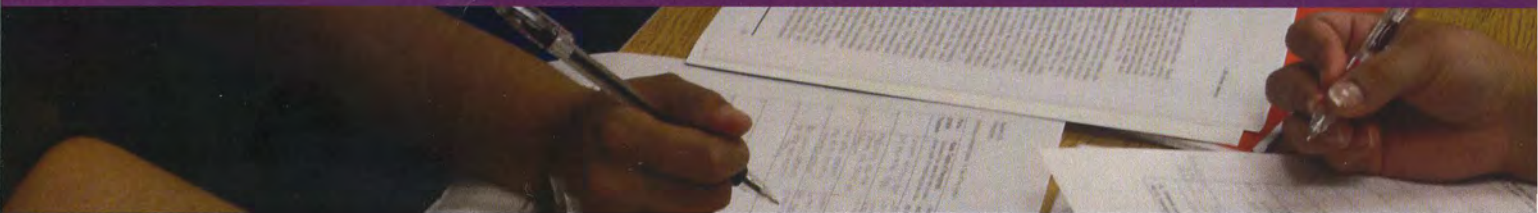
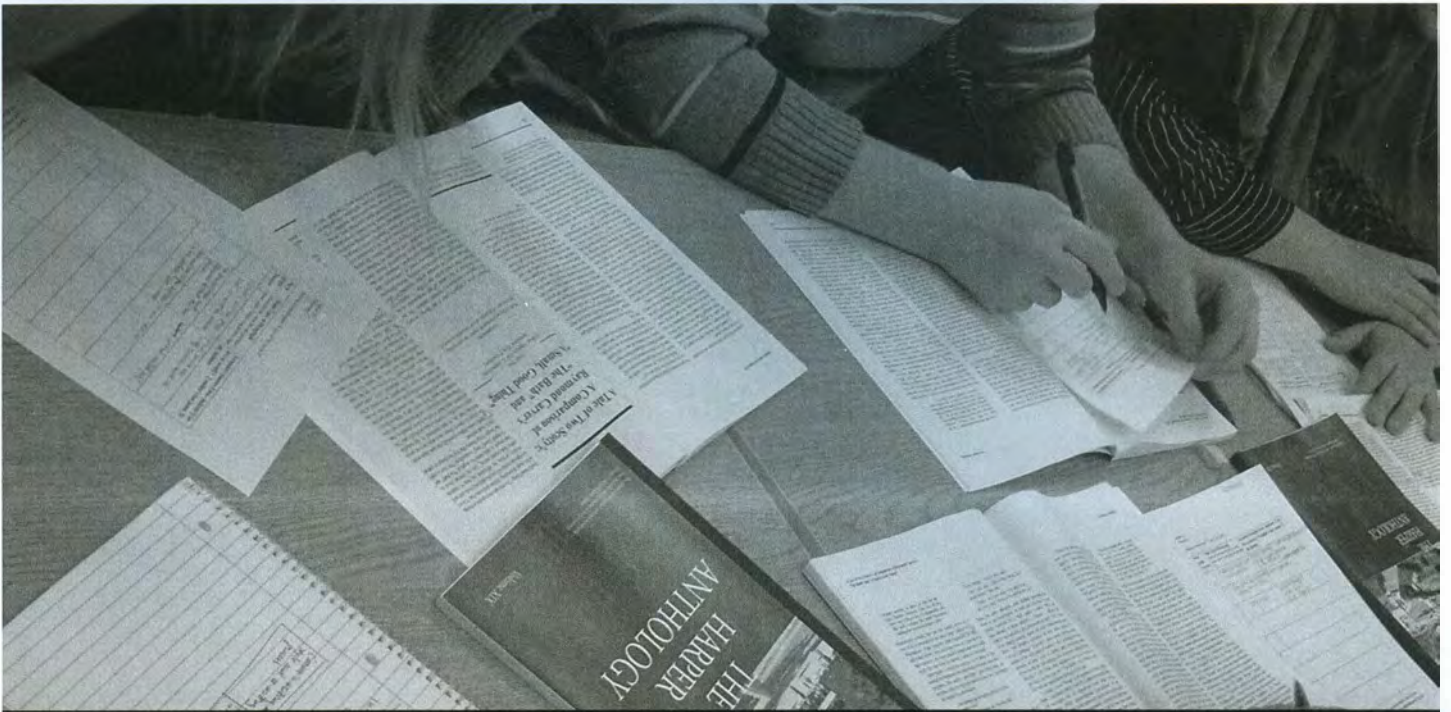


THE HARPER ANTHOLOGY

An annual, faculty-judged collection honoring the best academic writing,
campus-wide, by students at Harper College, Palatine, Illinois

Volume XX





Student Authors



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Michael Balaban	Sviatlana Hantsevich	Megan Stemm-Wade
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Brian Clark	Muxiang Liu	Tim Whalen
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Jeffrey Robert Cygan	Bob Mackey IV	Jessica Wolfe
Ashley Fill	Hannah McHugh	Joanna Yau
Penney Gainer	Virginia Nye	Mary Yoakim
Tyler Garms	Peggy Rodriguez	

The Harper Anthology

Volume XX

Foreword

The pictures on the front cover of this Harper Anthology speak clearly about one of this publication's purposes, that of serving as an instructional text in classes at Harper College, particularly those involving the teaching of English composition. Here, in these pictures from an evening section of English 102, students from all over the world are reading, together, a research paper published in an earlier edition of the Anthology, as a model for writing research-based papers of their own. The analysis of a student-written text in this format is invaluable for providing direction and inspiring confidence.

The Harper Anthology has served in this capacity for twenty years, now, with countless students in Harper classrooms having read the work of hundreds of other Harper students whose papers have graced these pages. This latest edition of the Anthology should serve well in continuing this tradition of guidance, as it features numerous essays and papers from English composition courses, as well as a few from outside of the English discipline, and a number of papers from Harper's Learning Communities program. The richness and diversity of academic study at Harper is evident in this volume, featuring papers on oft-read "ancients" such as Shakespeare and Aristotle, but also incorporating a paper about a comic book series (p. 71); an account of a Harper Honors Program trip to Japan (p. 9); an analysis of a novel by a Nigerian author (p. 144); and an insightful review of Israeli-Palestinian relations (p. 76). Also, the various entries for the "Harper Students on Writing" feature that follows the Table of Contents are some of the most intelligent commentaries on writing that I have ever read.

The evening class in which the cover pictures were taken experienced a process of discovery as they read and outlined another Harper student's published work. I can recall the engaged group reading and discussion as being a high point of the semester, and the reading and writing experience developing from that evening resulted in a high number of questions about "the research paper" being asked and resolved. On behalf of The Harper Anthology committee, I thank all faculty who have submitted papers to this journal in the past and who use it in their classes, and I encourage more faculty to incorporate the reading of Anthology essays in their classes. These essays are the finest cross-section of the Harper text and can be extremely valuable for instruction in the classroom.

—Kris Piepenburg, Chair, for The Harper Anthology committee: Charles Brown, Barbara Butler, Teresa Chung, Keith Jensen, Josh Sunderbruch, Anthony Wisniewski

Submission Information

Deadlines

Submission deadline, 2009 issue:
January 20, 2009

Submission deadline, 2010 issue:
January 20, 2010

To Submit a Student's Manuscript:

Complete the submission forms included in the back of this issue, or available at the "Publications" tab of the Harper College English Department website:

www.harpercollege.edu/libarts/eng/dept.

Send manuscripts (hard copy and disk) along with submission forms by campus mail to Kris Piepenburg, English Department, Liberal Arts Division, or attach a Microsoft Word file of the student paper to an e-mail, and send it to kpiepenb@harpercollege.edu.

Manuscript Evaluation and Publication

Student manuscripts are read by the Harper Anthology committee once a year, during the winter break. Faculty and students are notified of manuscript acceptance and upcoming publication in February. Printing takes place in July and August, and a free contributor's copy of the publication is mailed to each student writer in September.

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Harper Students on Writing

Joseph Ayers

Writing is an art form unlike any other. Ideas articulated verbally vanish in an instant, but ideas committed to paper and ink are immortalized, forever captured and ready to influence any mind ever willing to read them. Writing is traditionally thought of as a way to implant new ideas into the minds of the public, and it is certainly that, but it also provides an effective and oftentimes surprising way for the writer to plumb the depths of his own mind, yielding not simply new ideas, but new understanding: new understanding of his consciousness, his creative process, and his circumstances in reality.

Writing is many things to me. It is a way for me to organize my thoughts, for me to enlighten not just my audience, but also myself, and in the case of the work published here, it is catharsis. In the time this paper was written, my parents were beginning what has become a bitter, acrimonious divorce. The task of writing this paper was instrumental in enabling me to cope with that trauma. It forced me to immerse myself in the world of Hamlet and pay attention to the details of someone else's pain. It forced my mind to sharpen and focus on organizing thousands of details, hundreds of lines of dialogue and criticism, and a handful of large and sometimes conflicting ideas into one cohesive work.

I have long said that writing and reading are inseparable from one another. Reading is the writer's key to good style, to exceptional vocabulary, and to a vast depth and breadth of ideas. Writing is the reader's key to understanding the minute gradations of meaning implied by the use of one word over another otherwise very similar word. They are both, however, superior tools which, when used properly, provide enlightenment and immersion in a mental space not one's own.

This paper is something that I am indescribably proud of, but it could not have been possible without Dr. Elizabeth Turner. Without her incomparable guidance, this would have been just another unremarkable paper.

Anmarie Carlson

Each new writing experience is a new learning experience. In this particular essay, "Cathedral and Buddhist Ethics," I learned two invaluable techniques from two invaluable instructors. I always seem to write in a conversational context. This is not something I do purposefully, but something I have realized that I do. Words on paper aren't inspiring to me, but a thought, a message, a conversation on paper is purposeful. A flaw I faced writing in a conversational context was that I would often write: "I feel..." or "I believe..." Mr. John Garcia noticed this and told me that it was not necessary, that the read-

er already knows that these words are my feelings and beliefs. Aside from being just good writing advice, this made me feel empowered. "That is right, these are my words!" Also, I always felt quite awkward starting a paper. I could have the entire story in my mind, but I never knew how to start the process. Mr. Andrew Wilson gave me examples of how to begin a paper with a story. This helps to engage the reader, and further more, set the stage for the story to follow. *I believe* that a student writer is only as good as the instructors at his or her wings.

Brian Clark

Order often has a tendency towards stifling creativity, yet somehow in writing the two are expected to coherently meld. This delicate process has left me staring at many a blank computer screen throughout the years, and it can be a toss-up at times as to whether this balance will be struck. I owe a slew of brilliant and inspiring instructors (many of whom reside at Harper) for the ability, and, perhaps more importantly, the desire to seek challenges within these assignments. It seems that only in this painstaking pursuit have I ever been able to accomplish anything worthwhile on paper. So as I transition from my academic career into the professional world, I hope to sustain this ideal, as it seems to me that these arduous tasks often blossom into the most fulfilling, and I urge Harper students to reflect on this approach. For I believe character and perspective are born from such challenges, and in maybe no capacity can this personal struggle bear more fruit than the simple wringing of one's mind onto an empty page.

Tyler Garms

Writing, while it has always been considered an academic process, has never really been seen as such for me. While I have always felt it important to re-read any writing that I have done for general errors, I haven't ever really done any major reworking of any of my literary work. I feel that's why my writing has achieved any kind of success. I have always subscribed to the "gut feeling" theory of writing. As such, I think it is most important for any writer to just sit down and get after it. For me, the best place to start has always been the beginning. While I can't always relate authentically to those who find they need to jump right into the meat of their argument, I can understand that approach. However, I have always thought that arriving at a strong and genuine introduction at the onset of my work was the key to setting the tone for the rest of my thought process. I guess what I'm trying to say is that intro-

ductions are meant to be a struggle. A strong introduction is the key to not only quality writing, but life, as it will be the foundation for everything that is to follow. The only advice I would have to give to any writer, or person for that matter, would be the advice I struggle to follow myself: Start at the beginning.

Joel Jacobson

I love movies, so last summer I took a Literature and Film class because I thought I could have some fun seeing some movies and honing my writing skills. Having multiple disabilities puts me in a position to express myself through writing as a necessity. My professor was one of the best writing critics I have had the pleasure of knowing. I was able to adapt my writing skills to the art of film critique. I'm thrilled to have one of my essays published in the *Harper Anthology* and hope to continue my journey of critical thinking and self-expression through writing. Having my essay on Marlon Brando's interpretation of Marc Antony in *Julius Caesar* recognized as worthy of publication has infused a confidence in my psyche that inspires me to continue expressing my thoughts through the written word.

Svetlana Kushner

Writing is a very time-consuming process and fully absorbs my attention. I must leave my problems behind and direct all my thoughts towards the topic. When we read great novels, they seem so flawless and outstanding. At the same time, we might not realize how much of an author's time and effort stand behind them. Sometimes it takes years to collect, analyze, and put the information on the paper. A writer can spend hours looking for the perfect phrase to express their thoughts. However, in the end, writing can be very educational and rewarding and can provide much personal satisfaction. In my opinion, writing is both an art and a science. The science component of writing entails consistency, precision, and following standard writing protocols. The art component allows writers to express their personal thoughts, feelings, and creativity. To write well, I try to observe the world around me, collect information related to the topic, and come up with interesting insights. Good writing is very powerful and can transport the audience to different times and places. The best writers are able to shed new light on issues and to lead the reader to sometimes subtle insights that they had not considered before. These are my goals and I try to keep them in mind when writing.

Luz M. Lopez

It took me some time to understand the real meaning of writing. It is something that people have to discover by themselves. Despite the efforts of teachers, most people do not realize what an important and valuable tool writing is until something triggers that insight. Some people may have experienced injustice; others might have feel lonely, or perhaps moments of extreme joy were enough to prompt a person to share that feeling with others. It is not until that special moment, when one truly understands the meaning of writing, that one can compare it with power, freedom, even justice: the right to express ourselves and be "heard" in front of every one, in front of no one.

The writing process can be exhaustive, filled with challenging choices we have to make in selecting the right ideas, the right words, the correct sequence of events, in order to lead the readers into the right direction, our direction. However, it is in this process of transforming our thoughts into tangible material, the quest of personal introspection, that we find our very own way to express ourselves through writing, and that very act makes us unique.

Hannah McHugh

Every story that has been recorded on paper, whether it be written by student or published professor, has one thing in common: its genesis. The writing process begins with a foreboding sheet of blank paper that has the knack of staying in said blank state for an insufferable amount of time.

So often, I struggle to darken my paper with anything more than strike-throughs and side notes as I search for inspiration. Over the years, I have found that to take full advantage of the beautiful gift we call writing, we must often start and restart our hard work. If we hold fast through that tedious beginning process, then our completed work will hopefully be something others will find worth reading and, better still, worth remembering.

One challenging aspect of writing is the ability to grasp that perfect word or phrase needed to relay something too beautiful for words. I can look out into the horizon at a breathtaking sunset and see it with my eyes, smell the atmosphere around it, and almost taste the beauty that radiates from it, but who am I to presume to be able to harness the moment and portray it in black and white? The same challenge is presented to each writer, new or experienced, and it is only when that challenge is met head on that we will taste the sweet fruits of victory.

As with any form of artwork, we must have a vision, know our limitations, and yet be flexible enough to allow our stories to take us beyond what we could have ever dreamed. It is only then that that blank piece of paper in front of us will become not so much an enemy as it is an adventure with endless possibilities.

Peggy Rodriguez

I love reading and writing, and two of my life's passions are literature and history. Here at Harper, I have been able to not only nurture these passions, but to hone my skills as well. The commitment and talent pool here at Harper is superior, in my mind, to any other two-year college in the region. I believe that good and effective writing does not take obtuse or fanciful words, but the writer's ability to speak to the reader and not at them. Effective writing takes thorough research and the desire to make any subject interesting and understandable. I have enjoyed every paper I have written for a Harper course, because every professor I have had has motivated me to do my best. An effective writer is always learning and always hunting for treasure. When a true writer finds treasure, he or she must share it with their readers, and that is what I plan on doing with the rest of my life. As a future English and History teacher, I look forward to sharing my found treasures, as well as teaching my students how to share theirs. Effective writing is indeed a two-way gift!

Joanna Singer

I think writing is a discipline that is tragically misunderstood. Writing is respected and encouraged, but simultaneously feared, banned, and trampled. Add these mixed feelings to the common misconceptions about writing, and we have a problem: students dread writing, therefore missing out on a highly effective means of communication and self-expression. As if that wasn't bad enough, imaginary standards of academic writing demand the use of large, obscure words and dry, unappealing language.

In order to avoid this, I write by some rules. To bypass the long word effect, I use words that are formal enough for academic writing, but nothing more complicated than what I would use in everyday conversation. This is the best way for me to establish my voice in each piece I write. The creation of a voice is the best way to elude the boring language that often accompanies analysis and research papers. Rather than relying

on quotations to speak for me, I let them speak with me. This way, the reader can gain insight into my thought process, which is, after all, what writers strive to communicate in a composition.

I try to keep my writing simple and honest. If my ideas don't have to find their way out of a maze of complex language, they are allowed to convey their intended purpose. That purpose is a combination of communicating knowledge, observations, and my own personal views on the subject. Through writing, my thoughts and feelings are allowed to reach other people's minds, with much more impact than if I had not expressed them at all.

Marguerita Whitby

I wrote my paper examining *Death of a Salesman* with respect to the ideas of Karl Marx long before "sub-prime mortgage" and "financial bailout package" were phrases every American knew. (*When things go sour, we look to see where we went wrong. Should we blame the greedy lenders or individuals who take out interest-only adjustable rate mortgages on homes they otherwise couldn't afford? Did the banks loan this money because they thought they could rely on the government to help out or because the government told them to make these loans to help more people to afford their own home? Perhaps the government wasn't involved enough through regulation, oversight, or insisting on more transparent accounting?)* The details may change, but the basic ideas of capitalism and free markets have always been up for debate, and I suspect they will be vigorously attacked by some and defended by others for as long as they remain the economic system for any society.

I enjoyed writing this paper because it required me to see both sides of an issue that I feel strongly about and truly explore both the logic and the emotions that impact the debate that continues today about personal responsibility, economics, capitalism, and especially the proper role of government.

Writing does not come very easily to me, but thanks to the endless patience of Professor Andrew Wilson, the essay you see today is free of comma splices and other grammatical errors whose names I cannot pronounce. I also would like to thank Professor John Garcia for his very helpful suggestions, depth of knowledge, and insistence that my classmates and I explore all sides of an issue before taking a side. Harper won't be a better place because of this paper, but the world is a better place because of them.

Pilar Wiener

I have wanted to be a writer for as long as I could remember. Since I was a kid, the idea of creating stories that might impact the lives of others in some way used to thrill me. Nevertheless, as time went on, my life took another path, and this yearned childhood dream was forgotten until it was unexpectedly revived in me some years ago. When I came to the United States six years ago with no English knowledge, I was so scared to express my thoughts using a complicated and sometimes puzzling language, that the only way I found for translating my thoughts and letting people know what I wanted to say was by writing. Using this instrument allowed me not only to communicate with others but to liberate my soul and resuscitate a long time deferred dream: a dream that seemed to be destined to oblivion. However, this would not have been possible without the guidance of my English 102 teacher, Julie Balazs. Although I have had other amazing teachers and tutors, and I had the opportunity of improving my writing skill a great deal during my subsequent classes, for some reason this feeling of transmitting my thoughts to others had a special connotation during that class. I could say that it was because I am a literature lover, and there, I had the opportunity of stating my opinion about amazing pieces of work. However, I truly believe that this statement is not completely accurate; in my particular case, this process happened because I found the pleasure of writing by the hand of my teacher. She pushed me and made me use abilities that I did not even know I had, increasing my analytical thoughts and transforming the process of writing into something easy and immensely enjoyable. Perhaps Ms. Balazs has no idea of the impact she had on me; hence, this is my opportunity to pay tribute and express how thankful I am for her faith in me. Gracias, Julie!

Joanna Yau

Writing, for me, has been like painting and drawing: it has the ability to bring about my deeper emotions and thoughts. A teacher in fifth grade once read one of my in-class essays to our creative writing class, and this boost of confidence led to my desire to write. I've realized that the biggest "trick" to writing is being real. No presumptions, posturing, anxieties, or phoniness should be brought to the writing table. My best writing has come about because I write what I feel, even if I haven't quite straightened out exactly what my feelings and thoughts are. In fact, this is when writing proves itself to be one of its most invaluable tools: a very inexpensive psychotherapist. Psychologists know that talk therapy - the very act of just talking to someone - is more beneficial than one would think. My writing in the form of journals has proven to be one of the ways that I have been able to look at myself a little more objectively. Just as important, I have been able to figure out who I am through writing. Now that I am older, my desire to write stems from many different experiences and feelings, and so when provided an opportunity to write about a piece of literature that I can relate to and feel strongly about, I am pretty much "in my element." Writing a literary analysis becomes just another form of a journal entry: my thoughts and feelings are simply now tied in to what I have read about, but I just have to be a little more organized in how they are expressed. This means revisions, which I hated in grade and high school. I now see how it is one further step in helping to organize one's thinking, and to therefore help one to better understand themselves and the world around them.

Redemption and Revenge in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

Joseph Ayers

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Elizabeth Turner

Assignment:

Compose and revise an interpretation of Shakespeare's Hamlet that includes secondary sources.

In *Hamlet*, William Shakespeare presents his audience with a tremendously conflicted character in Hamlet, the prince of Denmark. In a short period of time, his father is murdered, his uncle Claudius becomes king, and his mother Gertrude is married to Claudius. In the midst of his mourning, the ghost of his father appears and makes plain what has happened: Claudius has murdered Old Hamlet so that he can be king, and Gertrude, "won to [Claudius's] shameful lust," (1.5.46) has married Claudius in order to retain her status as queen. The ghost of Old Hamlet then charges Hamlet with the task of avenging his death and returning honor to the court of Denmark. Hamlet is initially eager to fulfill his task, glad at last to have a target for his considerable rage. Hamlet delays and stalls in his duty repeatedly, however, and each time he does, he allows himself more time to think. As Hamlet contemplates his father's murder, his focus shifts from avenging Old Hamlet to redeeming Gertrude.

Even initially, Hamlet's anger at the corruption of his mother's honor is well-established. As he speaks his first soliloquy, it becomes apparent that the cause of his malaise is his mother's hasty marriage to his uncle two months after the death of his father: "O God, a beast, that wants discourse of reason, / Would have mourned longer-married with my uncle...within a month" (1.2.150-53) His anger is spoken in terms that make plain not merely the rage he feels, but also the disgust by using terms that make his mother into something subhuman and unseemly. He explicitly mentions the marriage as the cause of his anger.

At the same time that he introduces the element of his anger with his mother, he hints at the cause for it. "O, most wicked speed, to post / with such dexterity to incestuous sheets!" (1.2.156-57). Again he mentions the haste of the marriage, but also for the first time the theme of incest is introduced via the first of Hamlet's continuous references to the "incestuous sheets," or the conjugal bed of Claudius and Gertrude. Niels Anthonisen notes that although according to Elizabethan standards, the marriage between Claudius and Gertrude is technically incest, it is only Hamlet who seems truly bothered by this (23). It is from this and the many other references to incest throughout the play that the concept of Hamlet being in love with his mother emerges. When Hamlet describes his mother's bed, he does so with such stark vividness that one could reasonably conclude that he is at least to some degree obsessed with his mother's sexual behavior. Whether this is truly due to an Oedipal issue or simply an extension of Hamlet's immeasurable disgust with the situation is unclear, but he is extremely focused on his mother even before the introduction of the theme of revenge: indeed, his default target is Gertrude.

The introduction of the theme of revenge comes when the ghost speaks to Hamlet. From the first mention of murder, Hamlet is eager for revenge. "Haste me to know 't, that I, with wings as swift...May sweep to my revenge" (1.5.30-33). Hamlet seeks to redress the chaotic circumstances into which he has been thrust as well as for the untimely demise of his father. His desire for revenge at this point is without a clear target. Hamlet is vowing to bring death to whomever the ghost

directs him at, be it Claudius, Gertrude, or whomever the ghost deems responsible for his death. "He is his father's son and namesake, and thus is he 'bound to hear' and finally bound 'to revenge'" (Kastan 111). David Kastan is discussing here Hamlet's filial obligation to heed his father's call to revenge. Hamlet's anger combines with his repeated statements of his admiration for and devotion to his father: Hamlet seeks revenge for his father's murder.

The ghost further incenses Hamlet by revealing the identity of his killer. "The serpent that did sting thy father's life / Now wears his crown" (1.5.40-41). The ghost's terminology is designed for maximum emotional impact. By describing Claudius as a "serpent," Old Hamlet calls to mind the sneaky, treacherous properties traditionally ascribed to such beasts. The entire phrase paints a vivid emotional picture of the good king struck down by his perfidious sibling, who then usurps not only his crown, but seduces the love of his life, Gertrude. The ghost never explicitly commands Hamlet to kill Claudius. He merely demands nonspecific revenge. "That the ghost never actually says 'Kill Claudius'...does not change the fact that for Elizabethans... 'revenge' implies...spectacular bloodshed and death" (Tiffany 114). Grace Tiffany provides insight into why the word "revenge" translates to "murder." Hamlet himself is an Elizabethan, or at least an Elizabethan character, and in so being he is subject to the implication that she notes. Because of this, although death is not stated in particular, to Hamlet's angry and disheveled mind, murder seems the only suitable punishment for Claudius. Martin Coyle concurs, saying, "However 'honourable' or 'legal,' the death of a father cannot be forgotten or forgiven until it has been avenged" (12).

The ghost goes still further to amplify Hamlet's fury by discussing Gertrude's betrayal of Old Hamlet, telling Hamlet how she has been "won to his shameful lust" (1.5.46). The ghost again employs vivid imagery to command Hamlet's emotions, admonishing him to "Let not the royal bed of Denmark be / a couch for luxury and damned incest" (1.5.84). The ghost exploits Hamlet's anger at his mother, using "the moral shock of the sudden ghastly disclosure of his mother's true

nature" to achieve his own vengeful ends (Bradley 123). Even when naming his assassin, calling Claudius a "serpent," he calls to mind the biblical connotations of the word, namely, the beast which seduced Eve into sin. By using these vivid, forceful terms, the ghost succeeds. Hamlet, when referring to his mother, calls her a "most pernicious woman," thereby betraying once again his intense rage at Gertrude (1.5.105). In the next line, referring to the "damned villain," he sets his anger at Claudius and at Gertrude as equal by joining them in his mind as equally guilty (1.5.106).

This equality presents a struggle for Hamlet until he comes upon Claudius in his prayers on his way to his mother's chambers. Confronted with the opportunity to fulfill his father's wishes, he appears at least initially to be prepared to go through with the vow he made, drawing his sword as he encounters Claudius. On the verge of action, however, Hamlet prevaricates when he realizes that killing Claudius in his prayers would cause him to go to heaven. This leads to a soliloquy wherein he discusses killing Claudius but doing it while Claudius is "in his rage / Or in th' incestuous pleasure of his bed" (3.3.90). Hamlet again introduces the topic of Gertrude while thinking about his business as an agent of his father. As Philip Goldstein points out, "Hamlet decides he ought not send to heaven the man who sent his father to hell" (80). This decision, however, is a rationalization Hamlet uses in order to fulfill what has become his true motive: redeeming his mother.

By the time Hamlet confronts his mother in her bedchamber, he has made up his mind that killing Claudius is crucial to salvaging his mother's honor and has at this point nothing to do with avenging his father. When addressing his mother, he speaks eloquently of his father, but these references to his father are only a vehicle to show Gertrude the ignominy of her ways. "...With increasing vehemence, he strives to show her the immense difference between his father and his uncle, and the immeasurable baseness of her new marriage" (Anthonisen 25). As he speaks, Hamlet becomes increasingly angry, and as his anger increases, so does the fervency with which he attacks his mother. This gradual increase in Hamlet's intensity sets the tone for the scene. Both Gertrude and Hamlet become more

frantic as the scene progresses: Gertrude because she is shocked by Hamlet's attacks on her and because she feels as though she is witnessing her son grow more insane as the conversation progresses, and Hamlet because his passion tolerates no resistance to his attacks. As Gertrude resists, she further infuriates Hamlet, and as Hamlet is further infuriated, his argument grows more frantic.

Even his murder of Polonius is treated in an offhand way, made secondary to his feverish quest to make Gertrude reconcile herself. "Queen: O, what a rash and bloody deed is this! / Hamlet: A bloody deed-almost as bad, good Mother, / As kill a king, and marry with his brother." (3.4.28-30). Hamlet has killed a member of the royal retinue, but his continued fury is directed at his mother. The murder is a tool that Hamlet uses to confront Gertrude with her immoral conduct; indeed, he even uses this particular event to implicate Gertrude in the murder of his father.

He remains relentless in his attacks on his mother, employing two main tactics. The first is his continued comparison of his father's unassailable virtue to Claudius's morally bankrupt nature, exemplified in his use of the coin. Of his father's likeness on the coin, Hamlet says "See what a grace was seated on this brow: / Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself...A combination and form indeed / Where every god did seem to set his seal" (3.4.56-62). In contrast, he offers the following in regard to Claudius: "...Look you what now follows: / Here is your husband, like a mildewed ear, / Blasting his wholesome brother" (3.4.64-66). Hamlet compares his father's features to those of the Greek gods, perfect both in appearance and in virtue. In doing this, he is planting an indelible connection in Gertrude's mind between Old Hamlet and perfection. The terms he uses to describe Claudius are sharply negative. He calls him a "mildewed ear," generally analogous to rancid grain. In doing so he directly assaults Claudius, but also makes the implication that Claudius, like poisoned crops, will bring ruin to the kingdom. In saying that Claudius's mere presence on the coin "blasts," or blights, Old Hamlet, he is pronouncing Claudius so repugnant that his appearance can make less of even so perfect a man as Old Hamlet.

The second tactic Hamlet employs conjures vivid images of the marital bed once shared by Gertrude and Old Hamlet. "Nay, but to live / In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed, / Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love / Over the nasty sty!" (3.4.93-96). In saying this, Hamlet not only denounces the marriage, but also makes the bed an analogy for Denmark, portraying the rule of Claudius as criminal and implicating Gertrude in its criminality. Their sweat, the product of their lovemaking, is "rank," just as the products of Claudius's illegitimate kingship are. The bed and the state are "enseamed," or made filthy, by the marriage and the new king, respectively. Their "honeying and making love" has "stewed [the bed and the kingdom] in corruption. Hamlet's use of the term "stew" has the added implication of a brothel, a direct cut to Gertrude. Finally, he registers his disgust that they are "making love" over the "nasty sty," in other words, they are blithely celebrating the hijacking and subsequent corruption of the government. Hamlet bludgeons Gertrude with his incalculable rage and disgust at her complicity in Claudius's rule. In addition, Hamlet is appealing to the sense of shame about incest and adultery that her Catholic faith has instilled in her. He hopes that the combination of these emotions will motivate her to renounce Claudius and redeem herself.

The ultimate turning point in Hamlet's shift in motive comes when the ghost appears in Gertrude and Hamlet's conversation. As soon as the ghost appears, Hamlet is derisive. "Do you not come your tardy son to chide / That...lets go by / Th' important acting of your dread command?" (3.4.110-112) His tone is mocking: his impertinence toward his mother has carried over into his treatment of the ghost. This impertinence is compounded by the fact that Hamlet is actively disobeying the ghost's command to exact revenge on Claudius. Hamlet admonishes the ghost, "Do not look upon me, / Lest...you convert / My stern effects" (3.4.131-133). Though "stern effects" has the implied meaning of avenging Old Hamlet, its true meaning is redeeming Gertrude, a task which he refuses to be diverted from. Tiffany voices the commonly held belief that Hamlet is still motivated to avenge his father's death when she posits, "...Hamlet's response to the

ghost's call for revenge demonstrates the felt obligations of a prince who 'may not... / Carve for himself'" (123). Yet Hamlet chooses his own path by refusing the orders of his father.

In choosing his own path, Hamlet provokes his exile to England, from which he escapes and returns to Denmark. Having experienced this close brush with death, both at the hands of the English authorities by way of the order of Claudius and the pirates whom he encounters on the way, Hamlet develops a cavalier demeanor toward his own mortality. The casual attitude is demonstrated in his acceptance of Laertes's invitation to duel and Horatio's reaction thereto: "If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all" (5.2.186-187). This statement is a reflection of Gertrude's advice to him at the beginning of the play; to wit, that "'tis common, all that lives must die; / Passing through nature to eternity" (1.2.71-72). This provides a sort of symmetry to the play and elucidates one of the themes of the play: everything dies. Hamlet does not hold his mother in such low esteem as he might have others believe. This new attitude toward death may not so much be his own independent realization as it is Hamlet accepting his mother's wisdom. Hamlet feels more than anger and bitterness toward Gertrude.

In accepting the duel, Hamlet initiates the final phase of the play and takes the final step toward his and Claudius's inexorable demise. In his treatment of those present at the duel, he is friendly and gregarious. Toward his mother, however, he shows only a stern and disapproving affect. "Queen: The Queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet. / Hamlet: Good madam!" (5.2.257-258). Given his earlier treatment of his mother, this exchange suggests that Hamlet is reproving his mother for expressing a desire to engage in unladylike or immoral behavior, in this case, drinking. Hamlet is an unyielding sentinel on his mother's behavior until such time as she repents for her misdeeds and resumes a life of virtue. He even goes so far as to decline to drink in order to appear more virtuous and therefore worthy of passing judgment on his mother. When she says, "Come, let me wipe thy face" Hamlet does not

even deign to reply (5.2.263). He is making a point of showing utmost disapproval to his mother.

This demeanor, however, undergoes a rapid and dramatic change when it is revealed that Gertrude is stricken. His immediate reaction to her poisoning is not one of satisfaction that she has reaped the ultimate reward of her wicked actions, but instead shock and anger. "O villainy! Ho, let the door be locked! / Treachery! Seek it out" (5.2.280-281). Gone is the Hamlet who accosted his mother in her chambers, rubbing her nose in her misdeeds as one would a dog. Gone even is the Hamlet of a few minutes ago, imperious and dismissive of his mother. Hamlet realizes that he will now never be able to help his mother toward redemption and that this failure has likely resulted in her eternal imprisonment in hell. Because of this, he is determined to find and destroy the person responsible for eliminating what was left of his family. Further, as Richard Fly notes, he is rather composed about his determination: "...although he knows that his death is near, there is present in his behavior no enervating acquiescence, no stoic posturing" (273).

Within seconds, the killer is revealed: it is Claudius. Hamlet, armed with a sword he now knows is poisoned and emboldened by the knowledge that his own death is imminent, sets upon Claudius, fatally wounding him with the sword. Not content to leave it at that, he forces Claudius to drink the poison that has killed his mother, and at last Hamlet's true motive is apparent. "Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane, / Drink off this potion. Is thy union here? / Follow my mother" (5.2.292-294). Hamlet does not mention murder first, but incest in his malediction. Claudius's demise has been invited first by his seduction and marriage of Gertrude and second by his murder, however unintentional, of her. He taunts Claudius with his inevitable damnation, knowing how it disturbs Claudius, having come upon him earlier in his prayers which were purposed to avoid just such a fate. When asking, "Is thy union here?" Hamlet is sarcastic, asking Claudius rhetorically if he can still benefit from his illegitimate union with Gertrude (5.2.293). Finally, Hamlet bitterly notes his own mother's damnation and sends Claudius into the void with this knowledge, commanding him to "follow [his] mother" to hell.

Hamlet dies minutes later, having failed to redeem Gertrude, but having punished Claudius for corrupting her in the first place. His quest to redeem his mother proves to be a journey of personal growth for Hamlet. When the audience first meets Hamlet, he is almost juvenile in his brooding, petulant in his refusal to move on, and unthinking, almost sycophantic, in his unending praise of his father. When he is told to avenge his father, he reflexively latches onto the concept without giving it much rational thought. At that point in the play, he is glad only for the opportunity to exact revenge. As the events of the story progress, however, Hamlet learns from himself and from his experiences. He learns that his anger at the situation has little to do with his father at all; at least, no more than any other person's loss of their father might. He realizes and becomes comfortable with the knowledge that his anger is derived almost entirely from the corruption of his family by the usurper and interloper Claudius, and from the degradation Gertrude brings upon herself in the form of cheapening her value by marrying Claudius simply to remain queen. None of this changes the fact that he desires to end Claudius's life, but it dramatically changes Hamlet's intentions throughout the play and ultimately, the meaning of the actual killing of Claudius. Instead of Hamlet's assassination of Claudius simply being the just killing of a murderer and pretender to the throne, this symbolizes the elimination of the "serpent" who has tempted his mother into the sin that causes her damnation.

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Evaluation: *Joseph's essay has a strong thesis that controls his interpretation. There are many instances of effective explication throughout the paper.*

Laertes: Just a Foil?

Michael Balaban

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Andrew Wilson

Assignment:

After reading Hamlet, each student chose from a list of nine or ten writing topics, one of which was simply to write a defense of one of the characters.

Since the early 1600s, when *Hamlet* was first published, scholars have struggled to interpret and understand the character of *Hamlet's* players. Four hundred years later, the debates still continue, and *Hamlet's* players have become the definitive examples of Shakespeare's ability to create complexity and depth of personalities in his works. The number of analyses of *Hamlet's* characters is astounding, and with the emergence of women's rights in the 1960s, the volume of analyses of Gertrude and Ophelia has also increased dramatically. Unfortunately, the one player in *Hamlet* that is often overlooked both in character dissection as well as importance to the overall work of *Hamlet* is Laertes.

Laertes has often been described by scholars as a foil to the character of Hamlet, so much so that the Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature actually defines Laertes as "The son of Polonius and brother of Ophelia, who serves as a foil to Prince Hamlet in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*" ("Laertes" n.p.). I do not disagree with this fundamental assessment, as I do believe that Laertes is a polar opposite of Hamlet in every way; however, I also believe that Laertes has an identity all of his own that is integral in guiding the tragedy toward its endgame.

The depth of Laertes' opposition to Hamlet's character is incredible, when it is examined closely. The first instance that we are shown of Laertes' contrariness to Hamlet occurs immediately in our first meeting of him in Act 1, Scene 2. In this scene, Laertes is petitioning Claudius to return to France now that the coronation is over, having received the "slow leave by laborious petition" (1.2.58) of Polonius. Some would say that this is indicative of his desire to abandon the responsibilities and formalities of the Danish court, in favor of a hedonistic lifestyle in France, the European capitol of decadence at the time (early 16th century France was ruled by Francois I, a proponent of the Renaissance, and the Reformation was in full swing as well). Laertes has deep concerns for the family he is leaving behind, as evident by his talk with Ophelia in Act 1, Scene 3, and thereby has plenty of reason to stay, but contrary to Hamlet, he takes his leave anyway. When we consider Laertes as a foil to Hamlet and compare the initial actions of the two, is it not apparent that Hamlet was petitioned by Claudius and Gertrude in Act 1 Scene 2

that he should not go back to Wittenberg and resume his own studies? Unlike Laertes, Hamlet exhibits no conviction to remove himself from the distasteful atmosphere of the Danish court. The true purpose of this small introduction to Laertes, in my opinion, is to establish him as a man of action, contrary to Hamlet, and not discredit him as a whoremonger and eloper, as Shakespeare portrays him to be on the surface.

The scene that opens act two between Polonius and Reynaldo is debatably more informative on Polonius than it is on Laertes. Critic James Calderwood believes that it demonstrates that Polonius is firmly in control of his son, and even further that it is an example of the dominance he has over Laertes. Calderwood states,

That their physical separation is belied by a psychological merger of father and son is confirmed in II.i, when Polonius coaches Reynaldo in the subtleties of surveillance. Control through precept is reinforced by control through spying. Even in distant, risqué Paris, Laertes remains very much in the sun. (340)

To be fair, Calderwood is attempting to justify how Laertes' view of Hamlet being indistinguishable with the King's Son (or the State of Denmark), expressed in his warning to Ophelia, exemplifies more than just a warning. Calderwood believes that this view is indicative of how Laertes cannot distinguish himself from Polonius as well, and by doing so, Calderwood revokes Laertes' identity and as well, his importance to the play. Although Calderwood sounds convincing, I believe that this is a convenient spin on a contrary scene, the only apparent purpose for such an interpretation is to support a reason for brushing Laertes off as superfluous. Taken from a time-enduring perspective of a late adolescent in the process of individuating from his family, an invasion of lifestyle such as Polonius asks Reynaldo to perform in his investigation of Laertes would be that of a father who has lost control of his son (and is not happy about it), and who is trying to discredit him and possibly even cause him to come home. If Polonius possessed absolutist power as a father, he would not have allowed Laertes to go in the first place.

If we also apply the first rule of foil (math lovers can pause to chuckle), and ask how this interpretation

would put Laertes at odds with Hamlet, we find that Calderwood's interpretation falls short. It actually gives Laertes and Hamlet a spot in the sun together. If we apply my aforementioned interpretation from 1.2 to the scene, it would serve to reinforce that Laertes is able to leave his father's shadow (and his father wants control back), while Hamlet is the one remaining in Denmark, dealing with his father's legacy. I believe that contrary to Calderwood's interpretation, Laertes has a distinct identity apart from Polonius, and an importance in the story that is centered upon upcoming events in Act 5.

The next time we hear of Laertes, much has happened in the world of Prince Hamlet, as the revelation and task of the ghost combined with his chosen course of inaction has caused his world to begin crumbling around him. Claudius is planning (and has tried to implement) his demise, everyone in Denmark thinks him mad, he has alienated his girlfriend, he has killed her father, and all the while the king still usurps his father's throne and sleeps with his mother. In the process of this calamity, Laertes has become all but forgotten and the audience has begun to sympathize with young Hamlet and his plight. Upon his return, Laertes is incensed by the death of his father and soon thereafter even further agitated by the drowning of Ophelia and Hamlet's graveside antics. Contrary to Calderwood, I feel that this is the time where some rules of foil are broken, as both Hamlet and Laertes have now had their father murdered, though their reactions are again completely opposite.

One curious contradiction between Hamlet and Laertes involves their reactions to the king's manipulations. By feigning madness and keeping his wit sharpened, Hamlet is able to dismiss Claudius' attempted exploitations, while Laertes is extremely quick to fall victim to manipulation by the king. Perhaps there is one of Shakespeare's hidden moralities here, in the form of a warning about letting one's passion overcome reason, and the ease of misdirecting overzealous behavior. Morality plays aside, I do believe that this manipulation of Laertes by the king is an essential occurrence in the development of Laertes' character, as without it, he may never be able to take center stage in the story during the climax in Act 5 and actually kill the king.

Laertes: Just a Foil?

You are probably saying to yourself, it was Hamlet who dealt the death blow, not Laertes, but I see it differently. To say that Hamlet is responsible for the death of Claudius is to say that the hangman is responsible for the death of the hanged man. The hangman may pull the trapdoor lever, but it is the people preceding him who charged, judged, sentence, and even put the convict's head in the noose. It is apparent that Claudius has perpetrated many heinous crimes, and Hamlet (the hangman) is incapable of placing the king on the gallows himself (having never even formulated a plan for exacting the ghost's revenge), so a catalyst is necessary to bring about the end of the king.

Enter now the true purpose of Laertes to the story of *Hamlet*. Late in Act 5, Hamlet has heard his mother cry out that she is poisoned, and he exclaims: "O, villainy! Ho! Let the door be locked. Treachery! Seek it out" (5.2.290). As of this moment, Hamlet still has no plan to kill Claudius, still has no knowledge of all the poison going around (let alone that he is afflicted), and has no idea what is happening around him. What follows are the catalytic lines that are what finally spur Hamlet into action, uttered by none other than Laertes:

It is here Hamlet, thou art slain
No med'cine in the world can do thee good
In thee there is not half an hour's life.
The treacherous instrument is in thy hand,
Unbated and envenomed. The foul practice
Hath turned itself on me. Lo, here I lie,
Never to rise again. Thy mother's poisoned.
I can no more. The king, the king's to blame.
(292 -290)

Immediately following this confession from Laertes, Hamlet wounds Claudius with the poisoned sword, finally committing himself to the act we have all been waiting for. This declaration of guilt by Laertes and subsequent implication of Claudius combined with Hamlet's mortal injury (all attributed to Laertes) are the calls to action that Hamlet and the audience have been seeking since Act 1, and justice (as Shakespeare would define it) has finally been served.

Act 5 is what makes Laertes more than just a foil. His dying confession is that of a non-dependent character, one whose words and actions stand alone to cause resolution to the main plot of the story. With an importance like that to *Hamlet*, how can so many critics and scholars be so interested in brushing Laertes off, or even labeling him as just a foil to Hamlet? There are no knight-in-shining-armor heroes in Shakespeare's works (as depth of character is too important to tragedies), but if one person in *Hamlet* is fit to be called one, it would be Laertes. He has shown us how endless personal debate and inaction solve nothing, served to warn us about the dangers of impetuosity and brash judgments, and has brought about the demise of the evil king. Choose I, Laertes should have been king, Laertes king.

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Evaluation: *The defense of Laertes' role in the play was a unique choice. Michael makes some noteworthy points here, regarding Laertes' importance to the play. The essay is a convincing argument and a very solid English 102 paper.*

Despite US

Michael Bentley, Jr.
Course: Humanities 115 (Honors)
Instructor: Andrew Wilson

Assignment:

Each participant of a week-long Honors Program educational trip to Japan, taken in Spring 2007, was asked to write an essay that included his or her observations while in Japan and perhaps some commentary about the differences between Japan and the United States.

What makes America so bad? Contrary to what many unfortunate souls (who have, at some point, been subjected to my rants and soliloquies of discontent) may conclude, I do not hate America. No, I must recant; I do not hate what America stands for. In fact, when it comes to pledging allegiance to those “American values” of liberty, equality, and brotherhood, you would be hard-pressed to find anyone who matches my unrelenting patriotism. However, because I embrace those values so passionately, I find myself obliged to be critical and outspoken if ever I believe that the America I see and experience has neglected those principles, all the while pretending that they are still in practice, still held dear. And since that is visibly the case, I rant, I soliloquize, and I ask myself daily, what makes America so bad? Here’s hoping that with the answer will come change.

I believe it is this nagging question, this budding expatriate growing within me, that compels me to travel and to explore foreign lands and cultures, hoping that I will some day, somewhere find answers, or at least a

new place to live: a place where liberty, equality, and brotherhood — or at least a convincing semblance of these — still grow genuinely and freely. In Japan, I found a little bit of both. To find a place so similar and yet so different from America provided me with a powerful and enlightening contrast. It gave me some insight on where we (Americans) might have gone wrong, and, more importantly, the experience showed me what things might look like when they’re done well. If nothing else, I now know where I’ll be going if and when “The Land of the Free” becomes unrecognizable.

“Capital” the Catalyst

It is no surprise and no secret that my rants and raves are never more impassioned than when the topic of debate is American Capitalism. No aspect of American culture is more telling of, or responsible for, the discontent of Americans as well as foreigners. The problem is clear: capitalism *is* contemporary American culture. The distorted American dream — the eclipsing of relics such as liberty, equality, and brotherhood by modern treasures such as financial bondage, economic disparity, and estrangement — has permeated nearly every aspect of American life. Even as fathers, mothers, children, and lovers, we are self-interested buyers and sellers. Clearly, any critique of American culture must start and end with capitalism. Surprisingly, though, what I experienced in Japan seemed to support and rebut my anti-capitalist arguments at the same time. Japan, like most places in the world, is definitely not without its share of corporate and consumerist attitudes and aspects. Whether in the bustling streets of Tokyo, or the semi-secluded hills and valleys of Koyasan, money clearly matters. Even the historic Kyoto, the city of a million shrines (slight exaggeration), offers its own fashion-forward metropolis, teeming with youngsters on the hunt for the latest fashions. For only a few hundred yen, you can purchase yourself some good fortune on the sacred island of Miyajima. Yearning to capture the history exuding from the ancient tombs and mausoleums of Koyasan? Dying to give your friends back home a chance to ogle at the grace of a geisha? Never fear, disposable cameras are on sale around virtually every corner.

The surprising difference, however, was that, though consumerism and the spirit of capitalizing have found

their way to the cities and villages of Tokyo — surely from the cities and villages of America — it seems that the money mentality hasn't completely infiltrated the culture. In Japan, I didn't feel as if I were forced to participate in the buying and selling. I was a consumer only when I felt like wearing that hat. I didn't feel bombarded by advertisements. The distinctions between haves and have-nots don't quite slap you across the face as they do here in America. Of course, some have more than others, but an underlying discontent with that inequality was not quite as present or pronounced.

The most shocking distinction between American consumerism and Japanese consumerism, however, is printed and pressed directly onto the money itself. Where we have decided to pay homage to presidents and politicians, the Japanese treasury has chosen to honor cherry blossoms, literary figures, and philosophers on their yen. This, to me, was the most telling of cultural differences. Though it seems insignificant, this difference completely distinguishes a nation that has printed its currency on its culture from one that has printed its culture on its currency. Apparently, for the Japanese, money and economy are appreciated for the positive change and advancement which they can bring about, but they are not given the power to define and govern life and living.

Smiling, the Pastime

The night before our departure for Japan, I went to Best Buy, my favorite store, to buy myself two new albums to enjoy during the fourteen-hour flight that lay ahead. I didn't think anything at all could spoil the experience of buying my first Clash album. But, unfortunately, America never fails to fail me. To my chagrin, but not at all surprisingly, I discovered that my former favorite store, Best Buy, had hired a handy African-American male to profile me, another African-American male. So, after being implicitly labeled a probable thief, followed around my favorite store, and (some hours later) efficiently selected and searched by the O'Hare "security staff," I waved goodbye to that old American first-class hospitality.

Kansai airport may as well have been a portal to an entirely different and distant universe. Confused, jet-lagged, and horribly limited in our ability to communi-

cate, we were greeted by fairly courteous employees and passers-by who helped us to navigate our way to our destinations. The galactic travel continued as we boarded our first Japanese train. Barely adjusted to the clean seats, and to the smell of urine that was so noticeably absent, I was almost knocked out of my seat when the train conductors bowed to us upon entering and leaving our car. This continued show of genuine courtesy and respect, disturbing to some, was profoundly refreshing for me, especially after receiving the "good-bye" I had been given back home. In Kyoto, after excitedly purchasing a Bob Marley album, I left the store so embraced by the bows, smiles, and graciousness of Japanese "customer service," that I felt truly like a king. Some days later, as officials at the Narita Airport respectfully searched and then guided me onward (back to America), I reluctantly waved goodbye to the other-worldly Japanese hospitality.

I'd almost forgotten what animosity felt like . . . but I was quickly reminded once again on March 31, back in Chicago's O'Hare.

Upkeep, the Foundation

I will not attempt to build an argument against the separation of church and state that (supposedly) exists within American politics. After all, I believe that the idea, at least, has some merit; moreover, I consider myself to be neither "religious" nor an adamant supporter of religious institutions. I am, however, an extremely spiritual person. Beyond that, I realize the importance of a moral base upon which to establish laws, institutions, and nations, giving them some merit, purpose, and meaning. And that foundation is missing in American policy. Or, perhaps, policy and principle have simply been severed. Either way, there is a dangerous inconsistency.

In Japan, that is not the case. Spirituality and moral tradition flow beneath — but close to — the surface of nearly every aspect of Japanese culture. Despite the fact that tourism obviously altered the environment of once-sacred sites such as Miyajima and its Itsukushima Shrine, it is clear that the spirit and essence of the place remain untouched, as we saw a Shinto wedding taking place, oddly unfazed by nosy tourists. Such is the case all throughout the culture. High-rises go up on a daily

basis, but the shrines and religious elements are not only preserved but also used. Yes, tourist money is welcomed in Japan, but if you choose to ignore courtesy and disrespect tradition, you will be kindly shown the way out the same *torii* gate through which you entered.

Yesterday, the Present

Little needs to be said, in the name of proof or explanation, of the level and amount of care and respect that the Japanese people have for not only *their* history but also history in general. Anyone who disagrees need only stay a night at a *ryokan* within the Gion District of Kyoto, or a Buddhist inn atop the hills of Koyasan, to be thoroughly convinced. If those aren't sufficient, though, there are always a tea ceremony, a Noh performance, or the "Philosopher's Walk" along the edge of Kyoto. There, and throughout each city and town, the Japanese people remind themselves and others daily about their history.

There is no better exhibition of this appreciation for history than the Peace Memorial and the entire city of Hiroshima: the city that has risen up from the rubble and ashes of American aggression. I may never forget the sight of young students sprawled out on the ground before the memorial of a girl not much older than them, a girl whose life was snuffed out by the indifferent violence of war. The unaltered devastation of the A-bomb Dome, a charred tricycle, and a "permanent shadow" rests permanently on my conscience. Thus, what I assume to be the intent has been achieved: I remember the lessons of yesterday. Unfortunately, inside the Peace Museum, tourists are given proof that those lessons are being ignored outside the borders of Hiroshima and Japan. On the second floor, a diagram shows that the amount of nuclear arms owned by each nuclear power grows daily. On the first floor, one can (very easily) find a wall entirely covered with plaque-like copies of actual letters sent to national leaders who support nuclear testing; those letters beseech the addressees to remember Hiroshima, and the most recent of these letters is addressed to our president, George W. Bush, and is dated only a few months before our late-March trip.

I, the Irrelevant

As is the case with capitalism, when the individuality that is a cornerstone of American culture is left unchecked and allowed to become extreme and distorted, the very things that made (and make?) America great begin, sadly, to make it abominable. One of my major reasons for wanting to go to Japan was my growing fascination and appreciation for Eastern thought and philosophy. The Eastern ideas that I find especially profound are the concepts of time and the self, which are quite different from their Western counterparts. I never expected, though, to find those weighty notions so deeply rooted in Japanese culture. Beyond the courtesy and respect that I've already mentioned, I learned in Japanese 101 that the selflessness encouraged by the Buddhist concept of the "no-self" springs forth in the very language the people speak. The term "I," for the most part, is used quite infrequently (and is in fact quite irrelevant) in everyday Japanese language. Considering how Francis Bacon's "Idols of the Marketplace" shows us how "words react on the understanding," one can only imagine how this selfless language reacts upon the thoughts and actions of those who speak it. (I, on the other hand, have tainted this entire observation with that Irrelevance Information.)

Roppongi, the Remnants

Knowing my time in Japan was soon coming to an end, I decided to utilize my free time and my last night in Tokyo to give myself a taste of the nightlife. Though the seclusion and peace of Koyasan is more my speed, I understand the importance of balance; furthermore, the subtle yet ever-present flame of youth that burns within me had me burning with the desire to be amongst the eccentric Japanese youth for at least a short time. So I at some point found myself venturing into what one of our sight-seeing guides called "the club and music capital of Tokyo": the Roppongi District.

What I found in Roppongi, however, was much more than music and nightclubs. What I found was America — New York City, to be specific (or at least how I imagine NYC to be). Here was that suffocating brand of the capitalistic spirit that I was so used to, the hustle that the bustle in the rest of Tokyo was missing. Come into my club, not theirs! "Buy my 'goods,' not

those!” “Care for a (clearly illegal) ‘massage,’ sir?” Here was the impatience and animosity. “Move!” “I was here first!” Here were the glares that shouted, “You don’t belong!” Finally, I’d found the obsession with the now, the discrepancies between action and values, and the “I’s” that were missing from so many Japanese phrasings. Here I found America embodied in the form of, well, Americans: drunk G.I.’s stumbling their way in and out of night clubs, harassing innocent bystanders, relishing the familiarity of the madness.

The mere presence of insensitive American soldiers bothered me only slightly, however. I’d grown up around such spectacles, so I was not at all surprised. What was far more disturbing, though, was the reality of the situation, the impact that these Americans had stamped on the very landscape of this foreign territory. For the first time in our entire trip, I saw streets painted with litter, grime, and indifference. After staying in Kyoto, the leader in eco-friendly policy — and even the lively but fairly clean Shibuya District — it was almost painful to see the chaos and carelessness that was Roppongi. It looked and felt as if this place, like the A-Dome, had been hit with the artillery of America’s worst — its aggression, its egoism, its near-sightedness — and had been left as is. In a strange yet very real way, that is exactly what had happened. Here, in Roppongi, had gathered the aftermath, the remnants, and the remains of that horrid event of August 6, 1945. As much as I wanted to believe it was not America that had caused this unfortunate scene, I was obligated, as a patriot, to be honest.

Hope, the Souvenir

My trip to Japan has left me with a lifetime of memories and lessons, and I could literally go on for days sharing them all. Bigger, though, than any memento, picture, or story that I could have brought back, is this feeling of hope and promise that has been budding within me since the moment we landed in Osaka. In Japan, I saw and experienced a living, breathing, growing example of liberty, equality, and brotherhood at work. I learned that, very contrary to what I’d previously thought, values and history do not have to be sacrificed for the sake of change and progress. Japan has proven this by adopting (and absorbing) so much of our

American culture — even the aspects that I previously thought were contrary to growth — yet remaining true to itself and its past, growing beyond us, even *despite* us. America’s flaw, then, is neither where it has been nor where it is going, but instead what it has left behind — and continues to leave behind — as it moves into tomorrow. Nothing can be built detached from its foundation. Nothing can grow severed from its roots. The answer is as old as time: “Be aware when things are out of balance.... Return to the source of being” (from the Tao-te Ching).

“America is the greatest of opportunities and the worst of influences.”

—George Santayana, *The Last Puritan*

Evaluation: *Mike was probably my best writer among the Japan-trip students, and I like the sometimes-cynical, sometimes-earnest, always-honest nature of his writing. He's an exceedingly observant young man, as the essay shows. I think the reader can pick up, too, on a philosophical inclination here.*

Polar Views: A Sociological Critical Analysis of John Updike's "A&P" and Toni Cade Bambara's "The Lesson"

Theodore J. Birren

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Kris Piepenburg

Assignment:

Write a literary research paper incorporating effective use of at least seven secondary sources.

The story "A & P," by John Updike, examines a point in time of the main character's life where he develops an appreciation of the cold, cruel world around him. The main character, Sammy, is working in an A & P grocery store when he becomes smitten with a group of female customers that enter one afternoon. The girls are dressed in only bathing suits, which are not part of the societal norm at the time and cause a stir of both the staff and other customers in the store. The manager of the store confronts the girls and advises them that they are underdressed and should be more appropriately attired if they want to shop there again. Sammy, a cashier at the A & P, feels that this rule is oppressive and quits his job over it, hoping that he will win the hearts of the girls. In the end, he realizes that he has lost both the girls and his job and that the harsh reality of the world is now apparent to him.

The story "The Lesson," by Toni Cade Bambara, examines a day in the life of Sylvia, the main character, as she becomes aware of a larger world outside her own. The main setting of the story is in the slums of New York City, and the introduction of Sylvia's college-educated neighbor, Miss Moore. Miss Moore tries to make an impact on Sylvia and the other neighborhood children by showing them parts of society that they may never otherwise be exposed to; on this day, she takes them to downtown New York to F.A.O. Schwartz to learn the value of money. Sylvia is a proud person and puts up a façade of fighting her all the way, arguing with Miss Moore whenever she can. Eventually some of Miss Moore's lesson of the day sinks in with Sylvia, though she will never admit it to anyone, and it causes Sylvia some discomfort in the realization that she actually learned something from her nemesis.

"A & P" is a relatively modern coming-of-age story that exemplifies life in the typical white urban landscape of the early 1960s, while "The Lesson" is a community-centered story that gives a polar view and defines life in the black urban ghetto of the later 1960s and 1970s. Sammy, a teenaged, white grocery store clerk, takes much for granted and eventually has a life-realization moment that gives him a different view of his place in society. Sylvia is a young, black pre-teen

girl who has a hardened, yet narrow, view of the world and the role she plays in it and in her community. Overall, with respect to the cultural, social and economic conditions of the two societies presented, it seems that "A & P" is an excellent representative of white communities and one view of daily life, while "The Lesson" provides background on the black ghetto while providing some comparison between the two different societies within the story itself.

Many of the details of the story "A & P" describe the economic conditions of the community and are typical of white, urban/suburban metropolitan communities. In the beginning of the story, Sammy describes the scene: "In walks these three girls in nothing but bathing suits. I'm in the third check-out slot, with my back to the door, so I don't see them until they're over by the bread" (641). This describes a person who is busy at work, but not too busy to be distracted by a pretty girl, and sometimes daydreams while working, about his social life outside of work. Ronald E. McFarland describes: "Sammy associates himself at the outset with HiHo crackers, and they are a fitting symbol for him – an ordinary, middle class ... snack item" (97). It sets the scene of a middle-class late teenage boy working at a job in a comfortable environment, earning money to spend on himself.

While checking out a customer at his station, Sammy describes, "By the time I got her feathers smoothed and her goodies into a bag – she gives me a little snort in passing, if she'd been born at the right time they would have burned her over in Salem – by the time I got her on her way, the girls had circled around the bread and were coming back, without a pushcart, back my way along the counters, in the aisle between the checkouts and the Special bins" (644). Corey Evan Thompson summarizes: "Clearly Sammy has been working at the A & P for a long time. Sammy routinely deals with customers for whom he has no respect, describing them as 'witch[es],' 'bums,' and 'sheep'..." (215). This suggests that Sammy is content in his position in a store that offers so much to everyone passing through, while feeling that he can also rise above the fray of society through his position. Sammy feels some

disdain toward his customers, especially older customers. He is still watching the girls while at his job. This demonstrates that there is some social struggle, but not so much that people feel uncomfortable, and that the girls are only being noticed because of the eccentricity of them being in bathing suits as mentioned earlier; otherwise, they may have faded into the background din of the store's operation.

As the girls are making their way through the store, Sammy gives the reader this description of one of them: "She had sort of oaky hair that the sun and salt had bleached, done up in a bun that was unraveling, and a kind of prim face. Walking into the A & P with your straps down, I suppose it's the only kind of face you *can* have" (642). This suggests that the girls are not struggling in society. Lawrence Jay Dessner describes Sammy as being "...entranced and made enviously defensive by his notion that the underclad younger shoppers inhabit a higher social station than his own" (316). The girls are able to spend the time in the sun and not have to worry about the basic needs of life or survival; their focus is on themselves and not about much else. The girls know that they are turning heads with their appearance in the store, which is probably why they are operating in a group. These details describe that the girls are from an upper-middle class segment of society; these details help define the community where the story takes place.

To establish the attitudes of the other customers in the store and their concern for others, Sammy details this account:

I bet you could set off dynamite in an A & P and the people would by and large keep reaching and checking oatmeal off their lists and muttering "Let me see, there was a third thing, began with an A, asparagus, no, ah, yes, applesauce!" or whatever it is they do mutter. (642)

This suggests a description of the social class makeup of the community. An impression is made of people shopping with few cares other than satisfying personal, individual needs without a lot of concern for the rest of

the immediate community. Sammy continues with further detail:

...our town is five miles from the beach, with a big summer colony out on the Point, but we're right in the middle of town, and the women generally put on a shirt or shorts or something before they get out of the car into the street. And anyway these are usually women with six children and varicose veins mapping their legs and nobody, including them, could care less. (642)

This suggests that the community is possibly a resort or summer retreat town, money is present, and not a lot of social suffering is taking place. The individual needs are present in the varicose vein statement – that nobody, including them, could care less. This is typical of an individualized, suburban society with many selfish needs, and continues to define the individuals and community where the story takes place.

Individuals make up a community, but the economic base is what drives a society. Sammy gives a short description of one point in the afternoon that speaks volumes to this point: “The store’s pretty empty, it being Thursday afternoon, so there was nothing much to do except lean on the register and wait for the girls to show up again” (643). This suggests that the employer (A & P) is content in its position in the community that it can afford to allow the employees to stand idle while ‘on the clock’; Sammy can lean on the register and girl-watch without recourse. This is typical of a service industry position, where the community supports the company to such an extent that the company can afford to keep staff on standby to be able to quickly serve the needs of the community so that the community will continue to support the company, and the circle goes around again in a prosperous society. This shows all sects of the community are financially stable, from the corporate level to the individual level.

After being admonished by the store manager, Lengel, the girls want to make a hasty exit. Sammy does not agree with the manager’s rendering of the store policy to the girls and makes his plan: “The girls, and who’d blame them, are in a hurry to get out, so I say ‘I

quit’ to Lengel enough for them to hear, hoping that they’ll stop and watch me, their unsuspecting hero. They keep right on going, into the electric eye; the door flies open and they flicker across the lot to their car...” (644). This suggests that Sammy is working in a plentiful community, is not overly concerned for his welfare, and is probably sure that he can get another job without too much personal sacrifice. Lawrence Jay Dessner further summarizes: “The running theme which links the bulk of the story’s incidents repeatedly demonstrates Sammy’s inability to imagine himself personally at risk” (315). The girls are old enough to drive and are probably driving “daddy’s car.” This further suggests that both actors have the financial backing of their respective families to not have to burden themselves with where the means are coming from to satisfy their daily needs. Overall, this passage develops the understanding of the family life in the community; the family unit is supportive and financially stable.

In contrast, “The Lesson” demonstrates an alternate view of societal living in a metropolitan environment. The story starts with the introduction of the main characters by Sylvia, the narrator of the story: “Back in the days when everyone was old and stupid or young and foolish and me and Sugar were the only ones just right, this lady moved on our block with nappy hair and proper speech and no makeup” (1107). This suggests that the narrator was egotistical and condescending toward the rest of her society. She is either uneducated or undereducated and doesn’t take herself seriously. This passage develops an inner-city theme, poor and lower-class. Also, African-American Vernacular English (AAVE), is the norm. Janet Ruth Heller explains: “... most of the have-not children in need of education speak AAVE. This dialect emphasizes the children’s distance from mainstream white bourgeois culture and economic power” (279). Heller further explains: “Sylvia’s language, which includes cursing, expresses her self-confidence, nonconformity, anger, frustration and inventiveness” (280). This passage sets the story in a certain part of society, of housing projects and a less financially well-off lifestyle.

Miss Moore has been voluntarily trying to instill some education into the children’s lives; she is not a

teacher but only their neighbor in a dense community, and usually works with the children against some level of difficulty. Sylvia describes the latest attempt of Miss Moore's enlightenment: "And she was always planning these boring-ass things for us to do, us being my cousin, mostly, who lived on the block cause we all moved North the same time and to the same apartment then spread out gradual to breathe" (1107). This suggests Sylvia's narrow view of the world, not realizing the educational value of the "boring-ass things" (1107) planned for her to do. Communal living conditions are described, as part of a greater poor environment. Sylvia and her neighbors are part of a large, extended family all living in the same area. Sylvia at times has multiple or no caretakers, depending on the day; she is left to her own devices most of the time for entertainment and upbringing. As a result, her cultural view of the world is limited to the surrounding neighborhood and the opinions of relatives.

Sylvia's attitude toward others that are better off than herself is a trait learned from the adults regularly around her. Sylvia describes:

And our parents would yank our heads into some kinda shape and crisp up our clothes so we'd be presentable for travel with Miss Moore, who always looked like she was going to church, though she never did. . . .e But when she came calling with some sachet she'd sewed up or some gingerbread she'd made or some book, why then they'd all be too embarrassed to turn her down and we'd get handed over all spruced up (1107).

This suggests that the parents are fully aware of where they are on the societal ladder; they want whatever they can get for their children and won't pass up an opportunity if one presents itself. It's almost as if they'd sooner deny Miss Moore, but they're embarrassed to do so. They make the kids presentable for Miss Moore and tolerate her differences because of the perceived benefit she is giving to the children. The parents are just about on the same level of a lax attitude toward society as the kids, that they will take what they can and put up with what they have to in order to make any gains for mostly short-term goals (one short-term goal might

be an afternoon without kids around) with few long-term goals to speak of.

Miss Moore gathers the children to attempt a demonstration of the value of money. The children comply, but with some resistance. Sylvia tells us,

So this one day, Miss Moore rounds us all up at the mailbox and it's purdee hot and she's knockin herself out about arithmetic.e... And Miss Moore asking us do we know what money is, like we a bunch of retards. I mean real money, she say, like it's only poker chips or monopoly papers we lay on the grocer. (1108)

This suggests that Miss Moore is looked down upon because she is trying to help the children understand a greater part of society. The children know what she is trying to do, but are afraid that they will look "bad" in the eyes of their peers if they are too interested. The general decline of the inner-city ghetto is partly due to the image struggle—that there is a need to maintain a certain appearance, albeit a façade, while grasping for an understanding of the world around them. The understanding will come with participation, but a lack of participation prohibits a full understanding, so the façade is maintained and the cycle repeats itself.

With children in tow, Miss Moore starts off on their journey of the day to visit an upscale toy store in downtown New York City. Sylvia describes her irritation with the adventure: "So we heading down the street and she's boring us silly about what things cost and what our parents make and how much goes for rent and how money ain't divided up right in this country. And then she gets to the part about we all poor and live in the slums, which I don't feature" (1108). This suggests that the narrator resents living in the slums and buys into the concept of society keeping them there because the money "ain't divided up right in this country" (1108). Sylvia is irritated by her position in society, but is not pleased having to work to better herself. Jerome Cartwright further describes:

Her [Miss Moore's] distinguishing quality is that she knows more than the children. And, evidently as a consequence of her knowledge, she has more money Finally, by virtue of

her knowledge and money, she enjoys more freedom. Sylvia, by contrast, is stubbornly ignorant, abjectly poor, and so unaware of any existence beyond her own that she is angered when Miss Moore says that she and the children are "poor and live in the slums." (62)

The characters of the story arrive downtown, and their initial impressions tell the reader that they are not regular visitors and are well out of their element. Sylvia gets out of the shared cab and describes, "Then we check out that we on Fifth Avenue and everybody dressed up in stockings. One lady in a fur coat, hot as it is. White folks crazy" (1109). This suggests that there is a general resentment of white society by Sylvia. Laurie Champion provides some additional insight into this analysis: "The fur coat Sylvia sees a woman wearing symbolizes both frivolous spending and ostentatious flaunting of wealth.... Although a fur coat could be functional, in this case it is yet another example of impracticality and economic waste" ("Literary Contexts," par. 10). Champion further describes: "Upon exposure to the lifestyle of those who travel in Fifth Avenue circles, Sylvia, however, never assumes an economic structure hierarchically" ("Passing," 73). Jerome Cartwright adds: "Although the cause of her [Sylvia's] plight may be traceable to an unjust society, one that seems to remain indifferent at best, it is her ignorance, conspiring with circumstances, that makes change impossible" (62). With her sociological background limited to the slums and opinions formed within, she does not understand other societies when taken out of her own. This seems typical of the average population of any sociological group.

The group gets to the storefront and looks in. The children start asking questions of Miss Moore prior to entering. Sylvia continues:

"This is the place," Miss Moore says, presenting it to us in the voice she uses at the museum. "Let's look in the windows before we go in." "Can we steal?" Sugar asks very serious like she's getting the ground rules squared away before she plays. "I beg your pardon," say Miss Moore, and we fall out. (1109)

This suggests that stealing is OK or roughly accepted as a mode of living within the slums. It comes as a surprise to the children when Miss Moore has some objection. The children are trying to fit the logic of their home society to the alien society of Fifth Avenue, with some difficulty. Sylvia's cousin, Sugar, uses her limited knowledge as her basis for comparison as to what is right and wrong when placed in a different environment. While the children are gathered around the display windows, Sylvia describes:

"Will you look at this sailboat, please," ... We all start reciting the price tag like we in assembly. "Handcrafted sailboat of fiberglass at one thousand one hundred ninety-five dollars." ... "Unbelievable," I hear myself say and am really stunned. I read it again for myself just in case the group recitation put me in a trance. Same thing. For some reason this pisses me off. ... "Who'd pay all that when you can buy a sailboat set for a quarter at Pop's, a tube of glue for a dime, and a ball of string for eight cents? It must have a motor and a whole lot else besides," I say. "My sailboat cost me about fifty cents." (1110)

This suggests that Sylvia is gaining some realization that the rest of the world is different than her own, by realizing that what she views as illogical could mean something completely different to a different group of people. Without knowing why someone would even consider buying the fiberglass boat, she cannot begin to justify the expense to herself. The children unwittingly come to a realization: "By showing them the pricey toy store F. A. O. Schwartz, Miss Moore has made them question the fairness of social and economic class stratification in America" (Heller 280). Sylvia feels that she can create an equal product (toy boat) for much less and derive the same satisfaction as anyone else. This demonstrates that the value of different objects to different societal groups varies depending on the perceived need of the group and the desired function of the object.

After her visit to the store is over, Sylvia reflects on the day: "I'm thinkin about this tricky toy I saw in the store. A clown that somersaults on a bar then does chin-ups just cause you yank at his leg. Cost \$35. I could see

me askin my mother for a \$35 birthday clown. 'You wanna who that costs what?' she'd say, cocking her head to the side to get a better view of the hole in my head" (1131). This suggests that Sylvia has an understanding of the role that money plays in her own society. She knows what \$35 is worth and that it is inappropriate to be spending that kind of money on a toy when that money could be used elsewhere. In economically disadvantaged communities, money cannot be wasted and can only be spent where it will make the most impact and will serve the most people. Laurie Champion describes: "'The Lesson' ... demonstrate[s] the importance of working together in a communal effort to achieve goals that will benefit African American society as a whole, rather than seeking self-serving goals that more often than not conflict with social progress" ("Passing," 77).

Both "A & P" and "The Lesson" provide an insightful look into two completely different societies and demonstrate the inner struggles of the main characters, but on different levels relative to the community they are based in. "A & P" deals with self-serving characters in a society that is financially stable and with little personal strife required to survive. "The Lesson" also deals with self-serving characters, but in a society that is financially unstable and depressed. In "The Lesson," sacrifice is required to survive, and the general tenor of living is about what is for the greater good rather than what will serve a member of society directly and fulfill personal immediate needs, as in "A & P." These polar views demonstrate the social, cultural, and economic differences of the communities; they allow the reader to experience the general climate of two different worlds and how a society is shaped by its membership and attitudes toward others.

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Evaluation: *This student's clear-sighted understanding of the sociological critical approach to literary analysis—reading the works for depictions of class, money, power, etc, and what the works reveal about these things—makes this paper a particularly mature, nail-on-the-head study of these two stories, depicting radically different worlds.*

Frédéric Chopin's Nocturne in G minor, Opus 37, No. 1

Greg Bruchert

Course: Music 120 (Introduction to Music Literature)
Instructor: Barbara Bowker

Assignment:

Write a five- to 10-page paper about a composer covered in class. At least half the paper should be in-depth coverage of a single composition.

Frédéric Chopin is considered by many to be an outstanding name for Romantic era music. Through his admiration for vocal music and fantastic ability playing the piano, he explored beyond the limits of the instrument. Though known for composing what is considered the “pinnacle work” on the instrument, he retains a reputation of being an admirable performer and a remarkably able instructor. Chopin developed classic forms such as sonatas and nocturnes to his liking, as well as inventing a few of his own such as the ballade. He composed around two hundred pieces solely for the piano, among other work, equally groundbreaking and idiomatic for the instrument. The life of Frédéric Chopin lasted less than a mere four decades. His music is still thriving today and is renowned everywhere.

Chopin was born in a village near Warsaw, Poland named Zelazowa Wola on March 1st, 1810. He was born to his father Mikolaj Chopin and mother Tekla Justyna Krzyanowska. Soon after his son was born, Mikolaj began to consider moving to Warsaw to teach the French language. The Prussians had been forced out of the Polish city by Napoleon Bonaparte and left the city partially empty, but with much potential. Mikolaj believed

he could help reform Warsaw into the cultural hub that it was before. With Frédéric being only seven months old, they moved their family to Warsaw that October.

Teaching French in Warsaw proved to be a worthwhile venture for Mikolaj. In 1817, he accepted the position of instructor of the French language and literature at the Warsaw Lyceum, a new school at the time. He was successful and was soon able to create a boarding school for the sons of the wealthy. This allowed the Chopin household to avoid poverty and enjoy a bounty of culture. There would often be chamber music once a week as well as access to an extensive library. Mikolaj encouraged his son to take advantage of these gifts. He would tell Frédéric, “Knowledge frightens the wolf away.”

All of the Chopin children were first given lessons from their mother, though Frédéric showed an unrelenting passion for it. At just eight years old, he had already published and performed his own music. He quickly developed a reputation in Warsaw for being a child prodigy, and was sometimes referred to as the “second Mozart.” Though he recognized his talent, there was a quietness and admirable modesty about him. It was rumored, though not proven, that Chopin would weep when listening to music. Another possible fabrication was that Chopin would sneak out of bed to play piano in the middle of the night as though he could not wait an entire night’s rest to play his instrument again.

Chopin’s abilities soon grew past what could be taught at home. His father employed piano instructors to feed and develop his son’s obvious talent. Albert Zwiny, a pianist that lived in their neighborhood, was the first to work with the young musician. Though Zwiny helped with his technique, Chopin’s father recognized his son’s improvisational skills when working with variations of Polish folk melodies. He realized technique is well and good, yet an education in music history and composition would be the precise additive. Mikolaj contacted Josef Elsner, a well-known and prolific composer in Warsaw at the time, to take young Frédéric as his pupil. Soon Elsner realized his pupil had surpassed his abilities as well. He wrote later of young Chopin: “Leave him in peace. If his method is out of the ordinary, so is his talent. What need has he of adhering rigorously to the usual rules? He follows rules of his

own.” Chopin studied at the Warsaw Lyceum with Elsner from about 1822 until about 1830. All the while, he developed his writing abilities through many compositions, was an adored performer, and became a more accomplished pianist.

When Chopin broke away from his studies in late 1830, he left Poland behind as well. He traveled to Vienna to perform and compose, but the trip was unsuccessful. Hoping to come across more fruitful endeavors, he traveled to Paris where it took him seven months to put together his first performance. Though this performance was poorly attended, local professional musicians welcomed him into their circle. Chopin was quickly enamored with Paris and made it his new home. He would never go back to Poland, but he never left it behind.

His years in Paris were good to Chopin. He made friends with such composers as Franz Liszt and Felix Mendelssohn. He continued his writing and performing at salons and halls and started to receive favorable reviews. One English amateur described Chopin: “Imagine a delicate man of extreme refinement of mien and manner, sitting at the piano and playing with no sway of the body and scarcely any movement of the arms, depending entirely upon his narrow feminine hands and slender fingers.”

In 1837, Chopin attended a party hosted by Countess Marie d’Agoult – the mistress of Franz Liszt. There he met a French romantic writer, George Sand. Chopin did not think much of her at first. In fact, he later told his family that “something about her repels me.” However, the unrelenting pursuit of Sand eventually led to a relationship with the composer. Soon after their relationship had started, Chopin began to have serious health problems. In 1838, Sand and Chopin stayed together in a cold monastery on Mallorca, a large island of Spain. This situation proved horrible for Chopin’s tuberculosis, and they both returned to Paris so Sand could take care of him. Chopin and Sand’s time in Paris was when he was happiest. His tuberculosis grew worse, but his relationship grew. He wrote what is considered some of his best work during this time in his life. In 1847, Chopin’s relationship with George Sand was coming to an end. Chopin had taken the opposing side of Sand in a family quarrel. This resulted with their separation. He then left to tour once again, though his health was getting worse.

Chopin gave his last concert for the city he called home on February 16th of 1848. He toured and threw himself deeper into his illness by doing so. His body became too weak to teach or perform. Chopin returned to Paris in January of the following year. His sister, Louise, came to nurse him back to health. Frédéric Chopin died of tuberculosis on October 17th, 1849.

Frédéric Chopin was a composer as well as an admirer of music. Because of this, he was very dedicated to the concept of the listener’s perception or viewpoint. As to avoid swaying said perception, Chopin willingly chose to catalog his work using a genre and number system which results as being chronological and meaningless to the piece. This allows the listener to feel what the music does to them and omits any preconceived notions. So it is with his Nocturne in G minor, Opus 37, No. 1.

The nocturne, historically, has been frequently associated with anything that has to do with the evening hours. It is usually considered a single movement character piece and was used often in the Romantic era. Being that the nocturne was usually written for solo piano, Chopin exploited this genre, writing 21 nocturnes. Opus 37, No. 1 was written between 1838 and 1839 when Chopin was enjoying the first years of a nine-year relationship with George Sand. There was a lot of travelling for him at this time. He stayed in Majorca for a good part of 1838, but did not spend more than a couple seasons at any one place thereafter. He started to feel his health waning in early 1839 while on the island. All the while, Sand would care for him, and their relationship flourished. This is the prologue to the happiest time in Chopin’s life and his most favorable work by most critics.

Chopin’s unique style is displayed throughout this piece. Staying true to his traditions when composing, this nocturne is in ABA rondo form. Save for a few surprises, Chopin has a consistent rise or fall, dynamically, about every four to six measures. This creates a relaxing mood throughout. You may even interpret this use of dynamics as a person breathing in and out as if they were sleeping. This may lead you to think the melody could be interpreted as a lullaby.

Chopin’s use of syncopation with this single-lined melody (in the A section) alone shows how much influence a singer’s voice has on his compositions. In a col-

lection of his ideas for piano technique that were passed on by himself and his students, he mentions that “hands should be held quite flat” and “Listen to great singers. From them you will learn how to phrase. ‘Beautiful sound’ is the secret.” Chopin achieves this cantabile, or song-like, melody through the aforementioned syncopation and what is called tempo rubato (or stolen time). It means slowing or quickening the tempo slightly despite what the accompaniment may be doing. Vocalists in the Romantic era often used this technique to give color to the subject at hand, or to make it seem more dramatic by dwelling on a certain word. It is used in much the same way with this piece, though in common time, the beat is consistently slowing to add a dramatic effect. You can almost hear a voice lulling the listener to sleep.

Nocturne in G minor begins with a single note from the melody in the A section. An F natural, in the right hand, is held over through the first measure where a low G initiates the rhythm in the left hand (0:03). The melody then teases as if it were moving towards the keynote in the first two measures of the right hand. There are rests within the melody right away. It’s as if this were a song and that’s where one would need to breathe. The left hand jumps between thicker sounding chords and open intervals, which could remind one of a beating heart.

You then reach the keynote by the third measure (0:10) and don’t stay there very long. The ascension in the melody, chords in the left hand, and crescendo in this measure all lead you to believe you are arriving at a small cadence (0:14), but you are immediately stolen away from it (0:15). A high descending line pulls you to the keynote, leading back to a similar rhythmic theme as heard before (0:17). This stop/start pattern repeats through the majority of the A section. Another characteristic of this section is the use of ornaments such as trills and grace notes, as well as quick chromatic scales. Some chord rolls are used in the left hand, but are to accentuate the notes in the right. The opening rhythmic theme starts once again (0:17), but the melody sounds as though it travels chromatically to the third of its relative major key (Bb) at about (0:30). Here, another rhythmic motif is introduced with a fast series of sixteenth notes and a rise and fall in the contour of the melody thereafter. This repeats and develops until a ritardando (slow-

ing) happens along with a crescendo (swelling of sound) (0:51). This climaxes and repeats the entire part of this section again (0:54), though the following repetitions of the first series contain more dense chromatic scales as they go on (1:43, 2:00).

We finally get a cadence that introduces the B section (2:15) and softly leads into its first chords (2:18). The B section starts out sounding as though it were in a major key and occasionally dances into a minor. That is similar to the A section, which is minor with occasional major. The B section has thick chords in the right hand and a single bass note in the left. It seems as though this section may have been reserved for teaching chords to Chopin’s pupils. There is an occasional grace note in the right hand, but the high note in the chord would be perceived as the melody line.

The B section ends with an almost disturbing, low register, dissonant chord (3:30). You are slowly pulled away by that same F natural and led right back into the A section (3:36). It repeats in kind, yet wakes you up from its lulling with a loud, crashing chord (3:53). The A theme starts again for the last time (4:33). This time, it cadences on the keynote a measure before the end (4:58), and the final cadence almost sounds like what would be considered a fade out today. It cadences on the Picardy third (B natural) and arpeggiates to its octave (5:12).

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Evaluation: *Greg, while primarily a bass player and rock musician, is also able to engage sensitively and accurately with many other types of music, as this paper demonstrates.*

Raymond Carver's "Cathedral" and Buddhist Ethics

Anmarie Carlson

Courses: English 102 (Composition)
and Philosophy 115 (Ethics)

Instructors: Andrew Wilson and John Garcia

Assignment:

*Write an essay that somehow blends
together the two courses.*

A blind man is seen waiting at a street corner with his guide dog. After a short wait, the dog begins leading the blind man across the street against the red light. First, a car comes screeching to a halt, inches away from both of them, but still the dog leads on. Then, a bicyclist almost wipes them out, and of course he curses as he goes by. Finally, in the last lane, a truck swerves and barely misses the two. After they reach the far corner, the blind man reaches in his pocket and pulls out a cookie and gives it to his guide dog. At this point, another person who watched the entire episode gently interrupts to ask the blind man why he would reward a dog who had just endangered his life, or who had almost left him flattened by a car, bicycle, and a truck. And the blind man responds, "I'm not rewarding him. I'm just trying to find out which end is his head so I can kick him in the ass."

In case you're wondering . . . that's an old joke that I heard a while back. What it signifies, however crudely, is that we with working eyesight should not underestimate those without. A blind person may not have vision, but he or she is not any less savvy than those who do, and thus a blind man is just as capable as any sighted person of punishing an ill-behaved dog: he just has to find the right place to aim his kick.

Why do we seem to assume that those with vision are the only ones who can see the world? Knowing the world and seeing the world have very little to do with sight. True, it (sight) is one of our five senses, and those of us who do in fact have it rely on it very much, maybe too much. There are some expressions such as "seeing is believing" or "I have to see it with my own eyes." If you really think about our over-reliance on our vision as our sole means to know the world in its full capacity, think about how much this puts us at a disadvantage. In fact, we who see (physically) are the often the ones living with a disability—more so, at least, than blind persons. Why would we think we are somehow luckier than those without vision, or even those without hearing?

"Cathedral," by Raymond Carver, delicately and honestly delves into that scenario—the difference between sight and insight—in a deliberate yet magical way. Looking at this story through the eyes of Buddhist ethics may help us to better understand the life and

transformation of a man who learns finally to see himself and the world with the assistance of a blind man, who frees the narrator

from the figurative blindness that results in a lack of insight into his own condition and which leads him to trivialize human feelings and needs. Indeed, so complete is his misperception that the blind man gives him a faculty of sight that he is not even aware that he lacks. He learns to see with his eyes other than that insufficient set that keeps him a friendless drunk and a meager husband. (Facknitz 108)

Our principal character in the story, the unnamed narrator, is blind in many respects. Although he has physical vision, he is blind to the world around him. The narrator is blind to his own prejudices and lack of compassion. He is blind to his own suffering, which he masks through constant attempts to make himself invisible. James W. Grinnell responds to the manner in which Raymond Carver depicts his characters in "Cathedral" and other stories: "Carver simply presents his people and their stark lives as if there were nothing richer out there..." (106). "Cathedral" is about a man who is living a stark life, but even more so, he himself is stark.

In "Cathedral," the narrator of the story, the husband of a woman who is friends with a blind man, is more than beside himself at the very thought that he is to play host to a blind man. "I wasn't enthusiastic about his visit. He was no one I knew. And his being blind bothered me... A blind man in my house was not something I looked forward to" (Carver 206). It could be that he dislikes this man not for his blindness, but because of a story that his wife told him of how the man had felt her face, probably as a way to "see" what she looked like, as blind people sometimes do: "She told me he touched his fingers to every part of her face, her nose— even her neck!" (Carver 207) But the husband, although jealous of his wife's past in general, just plainly and certainly does not like the idea of a blind man staying in his home; he seems to be exceedingly uncomfortable with that notion. He does admit that his version of a blind man is that which is portrayed in the movies: "the blind moved

slowly and never laughed" (206). He does try to tell his wife: "I don't have any blind friends" (208). Maybe this is a way to justify his feelings, or maybe this is just a sad attempt to defend himself from his intentionally insensitive joke pertaining to taking the blind man bowling. Even as the narrator tells his story, he does not even give the "blind man" the dignity to be referred to by name: "This blind man, an old friend of to my wife's, he was on his way to spend the night. His wife had died" (Carver 206). A review of "Cathedral" by Paul Gray remarks on this line: "The narrator's sympathy is initially in short supply" (105). Gray also comments on the "vibrancy" of Raymond Carver's stories: "achieved in offhand cadences, [it seems] that blessings can fall as unexpectedly and undeservedly as damnations" (105).

On first sight of the blind man (named Robert), the husband is quite astonished by Robert's ability to make his wife laugh. He is also taken back at his ability to start to get himself out of the car, and to then reach backward to get his own bag. Upon meeting Robert, the husband is equally astonished by the strength of his handshake, his booming voice, and "spiffy" attire (Carver 210). The underlying and somewhat obvious reason the narrator is uncomfortable and uneasy with Robert's presence seems to be due to his own inadequacy as to what behavior is considered appropriate. His thoughts and judgments are tough and condescending: Robert is, he thinks, "a regular blind jack-of-all-trades" (211); however, it is important for the reader to realize and see that Carver's narrator *does* try to make an honest effort—outwardly, at least—to do and say the right things, although he isn't always successful. The narrator slowly and remarkably seems to become a tad more comfortable in the presence of the blind man, but again . . . only slightly. This story demonstrates how although the narrator can see, he is visionless when it comes to fully understanding the capacity of the blind.

Robert, the blind man, is fully capable of living a fulfilling life. He was married (until his wife's death), he works, and he has friendships. Robert is aware of the world around him. He cannot see with his eyes, but he makes up for this through listening and touching. Robert can enjoy a meal, a conversation, and even a television program: "Whatever you want to watch is

okay. I'm always learning something. Learning never ends. It won't hurt me to learn something tonight. I got ears'" (213). Robert always uses an up-beat tone when speaking, probably much to the narrator's bewilderment and even dismay. Attitude is everything, and the one with the so-called disability is the psychologically and spiritually healthier of the two men. Robert's character shares what is also said of the Buddha: "a human being who realized the way to freedom and inner peace, to an all-knowing, all-compassionate being, 'the eye of the world,' 'the embodiment of wisdom'" (Habito 36). Robert is a catalyst and enables the narrator to "see." Just as Robert "liberates" the narrator, Robert could also be on his own journey, coping with suffering after just losing his wife: "The Buddha embarked upon his journey toward ultimate awakening not just for his own sake, but with a heart that embraced all sentient beings, seeking the liberation of all from their dissatisfactory mode of existence" (Habito 80). Buddhist ethics suggest that events do not happen in isolation, that all things in life are intimately connected. Robert's presence in the narrator's life is like that of a stone cast into a still pond: "It continues to affect all aspects of the environment in subtle but meaningful ways.... Our human actions produce their ripple effects upon...all other sentient beings" (Brannigan 259).

Because "Cathedral" is told from the first-person perspective, the reader quite easily gains insight into the thoughts of the narrator: his deepest battles, not merely with his initial displeasure at being conjoined with a blind man, but also with the darker parts of himself. According to one critic, for example, "He tries in vain to imagine how Robert's wife could have stood living with a man who could never see her, and in doing so exposes his own rather repellent insularity and lack of compassion" (Salzman 128). The tension that resides within the narrator creates character conflicts between him and the blind man (unknowingly to Robert), and seemingly also with his wife. But these are superficial to say the least. I believe the true conflict in "Cathedral" is man versus himself. This is not as prevalent in the beginning when he first meets Robert, but this conflict emerges as he realizes, increasingly, that he himself is the one with the disability. Simply consider how many

times alcohol is involved in the narrator's daily activities in his home environment. Too, the narrator seems to be trying to find a way to escape through smoking dope nightly, followed by falling asleep to the television.

The Dalai Lama has this to say about suffering: "at the beginning these more subtle forms of suffering seem pleasurable: they seem to afford us some happiness, but this is not true or lasting happiness, for the more we become acquainted with them, the more involved we become with them, the more suffering and trouble they bring us" (89-90). I believe that that exactly describes the vicious circle that the narrator has fallen into. I also imagine that his vices must interfere with his marriage. But again, the nitty-gritty of the conflict is not with his wife, but rather within himself. His vices, including his attitude, are used to block out the world, or make him numb and indifferent to the world. Maybe this attempt to *blind* himself to his life makes him now feel somewhat guilty. Here he is, a man with his eyesight, and here is this man *without* his eyesight who is *living* life. The narrator is transferring the inadequacies he feels towards himself onto Robert. The narrator does not realize his "true nature" or "anatman," which is what Buddhism describes as "no self" (Brannigan 257). In fact, the narrator sees only from his own perspective and therefore is dislocated from others: this, in Buddhist terms, is known as "dukkha," suffering beyond measurable physical pain. "We ourselves create our suffering" (Brannigan 261).

The turning point of this story, which in turn is the turning point of the narrator's life, is when the "husband... genuinely enters Robert's world of blindness" (Cushman 115). He [the narrator] initiates a conversation with Robert by describing the cathedrals on the television screen. Robert then asks his host if he is "'in any way religious?'" (Carver 215). Often, that is not the sort of question one asks a person he or she has just met. And yet, the narrator does not seem to mind answering Robert: "'I guess I don't believe in it. In anything'" (Carver 215). And that, I think, is the response that Robert expects, and he just wants the narrator to say it out loud. In the next and final part of the story, Robert asks his host to bring him some heavy paper. He has the narrator draw a cathedral, and Robert spreads his "seeing" hands all across the paper to feel the indenta-

tions that the pen makes. As a butterfly emerges from its cocoon, so does the narrator from his hardened shell. Although he is not an artist, he keeps drawing, not forgetting the tiniest details. The television has now gone off the air, and what he is drawing is no longer what he is seeing with his eyes, but with his mind. When Robert finds the narrator's hand and moves with his hand, the narrator is now seeing with his heart. He then sees with his soul when the blind man has him close his eyes, and he continues to draw, confessing to the reader that "It was like nothing else in my life up to now" (Carver 216).

The narrator has entered the world of the blind, the sightless. He has entered a new world that permits him to abandon his fear and judgment. The narrator seems to be finally accepting blindness and the blind. By physically shutting off one sense, he may be experiencing his other senses, in heightened form. Buddhism would refer to this as "right mindfulness," which is "the unity of mind and body" through meditation (Brannigan 264). The narrator continues to draw. When Robert tells him to open his eyes and take a look, he continues to keep his eyes shut. The narrator tells us: "I thought it was something I ought to do" (Carver 216). It is as if the narrator feels he owes it to Robert to live in his (blind) world a little longer, and if he were to open his eyes, as he so easily could, he would be cheating. This new perspective on the part of the narrator has given him compassion and humility, for this is the first time his eyes, though literally shut, have ever truly been "open" to the world and his deeper self.

Robert again asks the narrator if he is looking. It could be that the blind man is not referring to the drawing but, instead, asking the narrator if he is finally seeing the real meaning behind life. The narrator reminisces: "My eyes were still closed. I was in my house. I knew that. But I didn't feel like I was inside anything" (Carver 216). Buddhism describes this as the meditation practice to a path of purification: "One attains a state of mind transcending concepts based upon sense data and experiences a realm of infinite space. Transcending even this realm of infinite space, one then attains the realm of infinite awareness, [and] one arrives at a realm where there is nothing at all" (Habito 78). With his [the narrator's] eyes still closed, he ends the story with this deceptively simple sentence: "It's really something"

(Carver 216). Here, the narrator is not just speaking of the picture itself or of the task of drawing with closed eyes, hand and hand with a blind man; he speaks also of a seemingly magical, spiritual, or "religious" experience that has taken place within him. He seems to be experiencing a spiritual rebirth of his inner self or soul, which has been guided by a blind man; and now, an entire new life journey is awaiting him.

Buddhism does not believe in a self or soul but would describe that moment in the narrator's life as achieving a certain amount of enlightenment. Buddhist ethics show us that when we think in terms of "I" or "they," conflict, racism, and suffering will ensue. Instead, then, the path to enlightenment is when we realize that we are an accumulation of parts, and that these, in turn, are parts of a collective unit intermingling with humankind and nature. Buddhist ethics emphasize simplicity, and simplicity refers to "freedom from attachment to physical and sensual pleasure" (Sivaraksa 36). The example given by the Buddha encourages simplicity and humility: "We have to understand that all gain, honor, sensual happiness, and praise ultimately lead to loss and suffering... Whoever is enslaved by any of these shackles will never be free from the cycles of birth and death. Simplicity contributes to the realization of a noble life and to living nobly because it guides us down the Noble Enlightened Path" (36). Clearly, Carver's narrator is very much shackled; he is suffering, and Robert, the blind man, releases him. Robert holds the key to unlocking the narrator's suffering, whether this suffering is religious or, more likely, spiritual. Buddhism would suggest that Robert helps to give the narrator the "right thought" or the "right resolve." This means "having the disposition needed to pursue the path and therefore underscores attitude and purity of intention" (Brannigan 262).

It is no coincidence that this story is named "Cathedral," or that religion is mentioned. Had the narrator found a late-night program on the architecture of *castles* from around the world, this story might not even exist. The religious symbolism found within this story makes me think of the blind man (if not the Buddha) as a savior or a messiah of sorts. As I pondered this idea more, I came to remember the book by Richard Bach, *Illusions: The Adventures of a Reluctant Messiah*. In

that story, the savior is a simple man who gives airplane rides to the local folks. He is not wordy. He asks simple questions, gives simple responses. But his overall contribution is heaven sent:

"Don't you believe you're guided, if you really want to learn this thing?"

"I'm guided, yes. Isn't everyone? I've always felt something kind of watching over me, sort of."

"And you think you'll be led to a teacher who can help you."

"If the teacher doesn't happen to be me, yes."

"Maybe that's the way it happens," he said.
(Bach 32-33)

An unlikely savior to say the least, but he comes in a form that the other man can recognize and learn from. Similarly, our narrator (from "Cathedral") would probably never have actually walked into a church or a cathedral to seek help; it needed to come to him. Although our narrator seems to use alcohol as a vice, I do not think he necessarily has an addiction. But just as recovered alcoholics say, "I needed to hit rock bottom before I could climb back up," this idea applies to the narrator. He needs to hit *spiritual* "rock bottom" before he can be saved. This, I feel, is the moral of this story.

Once more, knowing the world and seeing the world have very little to do with whether or not we have eyesight. Knowing and seeing the world can only take place once we know and have seen our true selves, or life's true meaning. Understanding, compassion, and tolerance for people must come from within. We each need to learn our own limitations as people, and then we will learn to abandon our judgment(s) of others. "Your only obligation in any lifetime is to be your true self. Being true to anyone else or anything else is not only impossible, but the mark of a fake messiah" (Bach 59).

"Cathedral," by Raymond Carver, is a story of a man who has initial and unfounded prejudices towards a blind man. Buddhist ethics illustrate for us that the narrator's suffering is the result of only seeing the world through the "I" perspective, and this brings suffering unto him. Once the narrator relinquishes the "self," he is then free. We can all learn an important lesson from "Cathedral" and from Buddhist ethics: the benefits to

everyone when we engage in the practice "of cultivating love and compassion.o. The interconnection of all beings and how valuable it is to develop a sense of gratitude for all that others have done and continue to do for us" (Aronson 128). When we take care of our selves, our minds and bodies, we then can take care of others, and they will take care of us. The circle of life need not be vicious.

At last, it is worth considering how the narrator came to be an individual so wrapped up in his "self." What happened to him happens to all of us, or most of us: we disconnect ourselves from the world. From a young age, we are told what to do and what not to do, and this sometimes will prevent a child from being his/her "true self." The parent-child dynamic is often interpreted as meaning that a child's behavior "must conform to parental expectations or there will be a withdrawal of love and affection" (Aronson 134). Children therefore learn to inhibit any expression that they think may be contrary to the wishes of the parents, and they substitute their own feelings in order to make their parents happy. "They [children] want closeness yet fear it, since it has been withdrawn in the past" (Aronson 135). As the child ages, he/she becomes motivated by these dynamics and is continually in search of approval from others. "Their generosity is initiated by their need to get something in return" (Aronson 135). Identifying only with this "false self," a child's true feelings take refuge in the subconscious, in a deep and powerful manner, resulting in profound disappointment with both the self and others. Carver's "Cathedral" provides no information regarding the narrator's relationship with his parents, of course. However, what I have just described does not seem far fetched as a *partial* explanation for the narrator's initial divorce from society.

Buddhist ethics warn that although it is important to receive love and support, our motivation cannot be to gain approval or validation. Buddhism does encourage having a spiritual teacher and underscores the importance of being open to this teacher's spiritual love, "which can provide great solace and inspiration in times of difficulty and on occasion may touch us so deeply that it opens an entirely new vision of human experience to us" (Aronson 136). As I said, there is a great lesson

to be learned from "Cathedral" and from Buddhist ethics, but we cannot wait passively for the magical appearance of a spiritual guide—a gentle, kindly blind man, let's say, who visits our homes and awakens us. We must open our eyes, and keep them open, and learn most of all to embody love and compassion.

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Evaluation: *This is an original interpretation of a well-known story, and it certainly does an excellent job of connecting the content of the two courses. This is a model essay in every way.*

Reasonable Lives: An Overdue Analysis of Ancient and Contemporary Philosophies of Happiness

Brian Clark

Course: Philosophy 231
(History of Philosophy: Ancient and Medieval)
Instructor: John Garcia

Assignment:

In a 5- to 7-page paper, relate Aristotle's notion of happiness to the idea of happiness expressed by one of the other thinkers discussed in class and show how these ancient notions of happiness may be relevant to our world today.

Modern notions of happiness seem to surround varying levels of personal sovereignty. The ability to individually or as a collective family gain possessions, avoid undesirable circumstances, and indulge in life's available luxuries without restriction can be equated with a well-lived life here in America. These concepts, however, necessitate the presumption that happiness is an emotional state to be maintained rather than a certain lifestyle to be lived. Under such a presupposition, sen-

sations interpreted as happiness would paradoxically be obsessively sought but continuously returned with diminished effects on overall contentment. Yet more than merely a contemporary problem, controversy over the meaning of happiness has existed since the dawn of philosophical thought, with such historic figures as Aristotle, Epicurus, and Epictetus arguing for different approaches in our quests for happiness. By providing alternative views on the nature of reality, these ancient Greek philosophers offer nontraditional yet applicable ways to regard and pursue happiness from an intellectual standpoint.

Far from his only contribution to the academic community, Aristotle, legendary pupil of Plato, examines the human endeavor for happiness in a set of notes known as the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In an attempt to define this seemingly subjective term, Aristotle first argues what happiness is not. Thousands of years ago, many citizens also figured happiness to be the result of sensual satisfaction, a conclusion Aristotle considers to disregard the distinctiveness of our species in comparison to the rest of the animal kingdom. He then refutes the possibility of fame and status as being the epitome of happiness, since such classifications are strictly dependent on the opinion of others. Ultimately, Aristotle finds happiness to be a life lived well and in accordance with humanity's exclusive capacity for reason. Such a definition is formulated after Aristotle establishes that happiness is the "final and self-sufficient" end that guides our lives, and that in realizing this ultimate or supreme good, "we shall be like archers who have a mark at which to aim" (Aristotle 19-22).

In defining happiness this way, Aristotle also makes a clear connection between mankind's tendency to act for the sake of some higher goal and his discovery of mankind's function. Without first knowing what makes us uniquely human, Aristotle argues, we cannot establish a type of happiness suitable for human beings. After ruling out the characteristics of growing and feeling as candidates because of their broad applicability to life in general, the ability to utilize reason in our thoughts and actions is found to be the attribute distinguishing man from plant or beast. By performing our matchless function well, we can be said to be living our human lives

well, which can in turn be equated with excellence or virtue. And from the perspective of Aristotle and the ancient Greeks, living virtuously undoubtedly bears happiness.

So instead of translating happiness with certain feelings or emotions, it becomes a question of how to live. Aristotle describes the virtuous life as “being twofold, partly intellectual and partly moral” (Aristotle 24), and stresses the comprehension of both. Intellectual virtue is founded completely in reason and explained as a result of teaching, experience, and time. Moral virtue, however, must be established through proper habit, and is more *subject* to reason than *comprised* of it. Here Aristotle notes the importance of behaving between extremes. If, for every action and emotion, there exists a perfect mean equally distant from its two vices, moral virtue demands that reason be used to determine that mean and employ accordingly. Courage, for instance, can be expected to lie in the middle of a spectrum of relevant states with recklessness at one end and cowardice at the other. The extremes of recklessness and cowardice themselves do not include means, just as proper courage does not contain excessive or deficient opposites. Furthermore, the mean should be implemented in a way compatible to the person or situation, executed purposefully, and enacted for its own sake.

Equipped with Aristotle’s view of happiness and virtue as “a state of deliberate moral purpose consisting in a mean that is relative to ourselves” (Aristotle 27), we can now analyze the conduct of our own populace in relation to this new perception. Happiness, however, is seldom synonymous these days with a life devoted to reason, virtue, and temperance. On the contrary, these traits seem to encumber progression towards an Americanized version of success and happiness. Image, influence, and wealth seem to more appropriately represent characteristics that enable happiness in our culture. More specifically, vanity and superficiality are silently promoted through media and marketing schemes, power facilitates the exertion of free will, and money is prioritized by our highly capitalistic environment. Reason may be encouraged as a means to these ends, but rarely as its own reward. Virtue would only exist as an obligatory hindrance to such personal objectives. And temper-

ate attitudes seem to have no place within our impulsive and at times aggressive nation.

This lack of restraint would have been especially upsetting to the similarly unconventional thinker Epicurus, who relates happiness to an intellectually guided level of moderation in a fashion comparable to his contemporary Aristotle. Epicurus, however, focused on how the pursuit of and aversion to pleasure and pain (respectively) dictate happiness. So inescapable is this balance that, according to Epicurus, it defines our perception of the world if not reality itself. Contrary to popular belief, “Epicureanism” does not justify a gluttonous devotion to physical pleasures, but rather implies that such corporeal requirements should be mercifully attended to so that other more enlightened pursuits can be maintained. Overindulgence, Epicurus teaches, causes pain by allowing addiction to physical gratifications to form, detracting from moderation’s ability to provide relative contentment. He therefore advocates the avoidance of certain pleasures because of potential negative effects and possibly to attain more desirable pleasures. Such control and prioritization commands the strict obedience to and full utilization of our sense of reason to act correctly when confronted with such decisions. “He who has a clear and certain understanding of these,” proclaims Epicurus, “will direct every preference and aversion toward securing health of body and tranquility of mind, seeing that this is the sum and end of a blessed life” (Epicurus 60).

Again, we find that our country strays from this philosophy, rarely acting to modestly secure bodily health or significantly strive towards mental tranquility. Instead, America’s obesity, drug, and STD problems suggest an inability or unwillingness to let reason advise against fleeting physical pleasures in favor of greater gains. As noted with Aristotle’s hypothetical analysis of the U.S., moderation appears to be problematic in America. Our extreme lifestyles and focus on the physical most assuredly conflict with Epicurus’ attitude that restraint and reasonability lead to the attainment of mental clarity and peace. Some might deem, however, that Epicurus’ teachings instead support dull existences for fear of pain or death. Interestingly, Epicurus notes that death is “nothing to us, seeing that when we are,

death is not come; and when death is come, we are not” (Epicurus 59). Accepting the nature of reality to be one in which we do not interact with death when alive (and vice versa), Epicurus asserts we should therefore not trouble ourselves with such matters, but simply yearn to live well by reaching serenity of mind through prudence and reason, and thus obtaining his particular brand of happiness.

The more obscure Epictetus would concur that death is nothing to fear, but on the grounds that many events operate outside our ability to influence them and simply happen as they will. Similar advice abounds the self-help section of bookstores, yet to Epictetus such lessons preached in *The Handbook* are more than mere tips on how to beneficially view the world, but a commentary on the nature of reality itself. Born a slave in ancient Greece, Epictetus soon realized how much of his own life he could not control, and ultimately concluded that attachment to people and belongings was not only dangerous but irrational. After all, it is the nature of the physical world to change abruptly and without individual consent. The only thing actually within his grasp, Epictetus deduced, was his mind and its propensity to react negatively to the outside world. Death then can be viewed not as loss, since we never really control or own our loved ones, but as a personal judgment of an external and natural occurrence. These judgments apply to nearly all stressful situations, from sickness, to possessions, and even the opinions of others. By understanding how things truly are and reacting accordingly, we can use reason to decide what is within our ability to control, and happiness can be achieved in our turbulent and fragile universe.

Adopting the thinking of Epictetus would be difficult given all the common beliefs in America endorsing personal achievement. Our entire class system revolves around the idea that individual fortitude alone can determine one’s social and financial status, purporting the notion that we are responsible for our own fortunes. Epictetus, however, argues otherwise: “your business is to act the character that is given you and act it well; the choice of the cast is Another’s” (Epictetus 53). To truly comprehend this does not necessarily mandate an apathetic or defeatist outlook on life, but does entail grasp-

ing the nature of the modern world. We may still strive to achieve, but with the express understanding that failure is part of achievement. So too are disease, pain, and death as much a part of life as contentment, pleasure, and birth. Yet we have the power to cherish the good moments, reflect positively on life’s experiences, and thus ultimately design our own happiness.

The link between reality’s nature and the realization of true happiness did not escape these early scholars. Each describes how happiness is a function of their particular perspectives on life and attainable solely through reason. Aristotle explains how using our exceptional ability to wield reason well can yield happiness through virtuous living. For Epicurus, reason allows us to act moderately, appropriately, and helps us navigate through life with a priority on pursuing deserving pleasures. Yet to Epictetus, happiness can only result from effectively understanding, acting within, and reacting to life’s intricate events and inevitabilities. Though they disagree on how happiness can be ours, all would respond to our current lifestyles with disappointment and disapproval. Our petty search for temporary and trivial happiness would unanimously be seen as a misunderstanding not just of happiness itself, but of the fundamental truths reality holds. As we become more advanced both as a nation and a species, a reevaluation of our presumptions on how to live must commence before these misguided principles solidify in an irreversible flurry of overconfidence and self-righteousness.

Works Cited

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Evaluation: *Brian does a superb job explaining the ideas of the thinkers he discusses. His analysis goes well beyond the superficial yet is accessible to those who have little or no experience with the thinkers and texts he discusses. Most importantly, he does an exceptional job making the philosophical ideas he discusses relevant to our world today.*

The Blind Visionaries

Alexander Cox

Courses: English 102 (Composition)
and Philosophy 116 (Ethics)

Instructors: Andrew Wilson and John Garcia

Assignment:

Each student was asked to write a research paper that somehow connects the philosophy and literature read for this linked course.

Those that might consider a fool to be wise will heed the wisdom of the revolutionary. It is an assumed and well-known fact that the idealistic extremists of society are rarely given the credit they deserve until their postmortem days. Even in the offset of this acclaim comes the often disproportional amount of harsh criticism toward one's beliefs or especially one's practices. Often, such individuals as Malcolm X, Machiavelli, and Nietzsche, whose work is often thought to incite violent or extreme means to acquire desired effects, were dismissed in their day as rabble-rousing crusaders for unpopular causes. The infinitely more civil disobeyers of the law such as Henry David Thoreau, Martin Luther King Jr., and Mahatma Gandhi were also imprisoned and demoted for their steadfast resolve toward a certain ideal. But more perplexing, still, is the way in which seemingly peaceful individuals living the average life of the average American can rage a valiant and desperate war against all that they have unwillingly worked to build with their existence—to the point where that existence is devoid of life almost entirely. Now, to factor in the notion of near-bject poverty in this situational nightmare is to slowly wind the mortal coil to the end of its proverbial rope. Finally, and in my

opinion, most tragic of all, are those who sit: those who complacently remain within their limited circumstantial boundaries, searching in vain within the confines of their own depraved surroundings, without movement toward any change or any hope, for a means by which to prove to themselves and to the world that, under such extreme duress, they can fight the fight that allows them to prevail over the machine of an entire society. Such an idea extends beyond the realm of dreams, hopes, and desires, and penetrates into the realm of insanity caused by an underlying monster within the metaphorical belly of every human on the face of the earth. This monster's name is pride.

Pride is the machine behind the mask of each individual striving for his own niche in a world of very little head room left to be filled. Most people, therefore, duck beneath the limitations of this world, their circumstances, and their very nature, yet attempt to hold themselves high enough in the ranks of mankind that they might somehow be noticed and recognized and admired. To call attention to oneself in this world is a weary and yet restless art, but a low art nonetheless. Still beneath that is the art of enabling those individuals to sit upon one's shoulders in order that "attention... [might] be finally paid..." (Miller 52). Such a predicament is sadly the case in many incidents within the capitalistic society. The revolutionaries of the mundane existence, coupled with a stubborn yet willing pride, alongside those who would fuel the flames of such pride and those few who would criticize their brash application of such pride, comprise the primary focus of two famous literary works, both of which hold some degree of hostility toward the capitalist society and the burdens it places on those individuals who are unable to find their own share of the "American Dream." Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and William Faulkner's "Barn Burning" both unfold the stories of two individuals not so unlike the descriptions laid out above. The following attempt to reconcile the natures of these two individuals with a capitalistic society, in conjunction with their actions, their surroundings, and those who would aid and hinder them along the way, will lead holistically to examining the measure of a man and the pride which can swallow him alive.

Abner Snopes is inferred to have been born into an abject poverty which not only constrains and limits his ability to provide for his family, but chokes what might, in all other cases, be considered to be his innate right to rise above such abjection. Within a world defined by wealthy land owners and those beneath the bureaucracy of a fragmented, deep South culture, the world which William Faulkner cleverly contrives in his short literary piece called "Barn Burning," is the world in which Abner must toil for a mere existence. This countenance and disposition of such rough figure is the citadel of Abner Snopes, who can only be properly described as "a shape black, flat, and bloodless as though cut from tin in the iron folds of the frockcoat which had not been made for him, the voice harsh like tin and without heat like tin..." (Faulkner 538). Cold, black, metal, the kind whose edges induce a cringe which cuts to the spine, this is the material which, as described by the narrator, comprises quite literally the physicality of Abner, but also quite obviously, and without an attempt at subtlety, this description characterizes the enormity of the man's overbearing and imposing attitude and authority with regard to the world around him.

This story alights upon a treacherous tale recapturing that age-old idea of innocence lost, as well as the inability of a son to reconcile his father's perspective with the perspective of conscience. Abner seems to be the absolute extreme of one so engrossed in the focus and drive of his own personal vendetta against the society that did not ruin him, but instead, in his mind, had him ruined from the very first breath he took out of the womb. From between the mother's bountiful legs, some simply fall a bit further than others in the dram and drab of things; this is not a statement which Abner Snopes would accept as a definitive calculating scale for the measure of his life. He is solid in his convictions, yet his extremism comes with its consequences, and those are lived out in the lives of those most crucial individuals within his sphere of influence: his family. Sarty, his son, serves as the ultimate conflicted focal point of the story, and at the beginning of the prose, Sarty is placed in the difficult position of temporary mediator between his father and the state but is quickly relieved of that position through the unspoken conscience of a frustrated

prosecutor. He is given the temporary responsibility of testifying to his father's convicted crime, specifically the arson of his former employer's barn. The employer, Harris by name, realizes the unfair position in which he has placed young Sarty and lets him off the hook out of an expression of conscience. Nevertheless, this brief situation serves to set the tone for a conglomerate of instances in which the idea of family ties and the relationship between such ties and this notion of a higher moral conscience come into play from the perspective of Abner's family, particularly in Sarty's case; however, we will also use this notion to further this study of Abner himself.

The premise behind the Snopes family is quite simply the idea that they are a migrant family traveling about the countryside for Abner's work, farm labor, which is later implied as his line of business in the establishment of a crop debt which Abner owes to his employer due to the damage he inflicted upon this employer's rug (Faulkner 543-544). The cold, hard reality for the Snopeses is that Abner inflicts such damages freely and without hesitation upon his employers, whom he no doubt labels as the direct cause for his circumstances. The most severe extreme of these intentional damages is the arson of his employers' barns, the very crime for which he is on trial in the genesis of the story. While Abner is indefatigably conveyed as an unyielding individual of iron will, those within his immediate family are subtly developed more realistically, and yet they are clearly defined with distinct characteristics and traits that seem to coincide or contrast with Abner's purposes. All of Sarty's mentioned siblings are at some point in the text referenced alongside terms that place them on the level of cattle. Many times, Faulkner uses the term "bovine" to describe Sarty's lethargic sisters, and at one point, the elder brother is said to be "chewing [tobacco] with that steady, curious, sidewise motion of cows" (Faulkner 538, 545, 546). This odd comparison is not unintentional. Faulkner seeks to place them at that level for the very purpose of degrading their ability to understand the true purpose of their rationale other than to serve the will and purpose of their father, and their master, Abner Snopes. While Sarty's mother is slightly discouraging of Abner's ways, still her "duty" compels

her to hinder Sarty from making a very bold move against his father toward the end of the story, furthering this idea of family loyalty above any form of conscientious rationale. They are the blind followers of Abner in his visionary tirade against the machine. This is the true sadistic genius behind Faulkner's picture of their conviction toward the unconditional loyalty prescribed, etched if you will, in blood, the blood of our fathers.

The idea that "You got to learn to stick to your own blood or you ain't going to have any blood to stick to you" is emphasized and reemphasized throughout the Snopes family, yet it is all brought back to the immense, unforgiving pride of Abner Snopes as the tyrannical leader of that family (538). This is most crucial in the final episode of conflict within Sarty Snopes, in which he is aware of his father's plans to burn down Major de Spain's barn, and subsequently, in a moment of awakening conscientiousness, he attempts to hinder his father in some way. The ending result is the implied downfall of Abner Snopes due to his uncompromised need to prove his point to society through means of extreme disobedience. This need is ultimately backed by Abner's extreme sense of abject pride directly in the face of the abject poverty that he must endure. He expresses this pride in several ways, but in one specifically poignant instance involving a black servant of his employer, Major de Spain, he proceeds to accost de Spain's residence in a rampage of enflamed disdain:

The door opened so promptly that the boy [Sarty] knew the Negro must have been watching them all the time, an old man with neat grizzled hair, in a linen jacket, who stood barring the door with his body, saying, "Wipe yo foots, white man, fo you come in here. Major ain't home nohow."

"Get out of my way, nigger," his father said, without heat too, flinging the door back and the Negro also and entering, his hat still on his head. (539; emphasis added)

Faulkner monopolizes this opportunity to establish indignation within Abner's character, both towards the servant and the employer. The black man is clearly better dressed and presented of the two, and Abner's intrusion seems to be more than sufficient ground for the superior indignation

of the servant. Yet Abner retains his own selfish dignity in the scene as witnessed in the fact that he does not remove his hat, nor does he pay any heed to this man whom he refuses to accept as superior to himself. Imagine, a black man, at that point in history, placed in a higher position within society than Abner Snopes, a white man! This is just one facet of Abner's pride, a pride which leads him ultimately to an implied end through the betrayal of his own son.

In ethical terms, though, there is in fact an argument for Abner's abhorrent behavior when placed against the backdrop of the philosophy and sociological criticism of Friedrich Nietzsche. As a matter of fact, even if the practices of Abner Snopes are viewed, in the end, as misguided and reckless, there remains a profound grasp of perhaps the more carnal and foundational basis of humanity and a perspective very much in tune with that of Friedrich Nietzsche in his thought process. Here I will argue that this grasp on mankind actually allows Abner to be viewed as somewhat of a moral figure, all evidence to the contrary. Using Nietzsche's ideas concerning humanity with regard to society and with regard to the individual, I will carefully lay the groundwork for a means to give Abner a sense of moral culpability as well as an ounce or two of justification.

Friedrich Nietzsche is very prolific with his prose as well as his observations, and in this way he poses almost as a modern moral prophet of sorts. His works have received criticisms in the past, which claim that his ideas produce negative viewpoints when looked at from a sociological perspective. Putting aside any question as to the validity of such claims, there seem to be certain merits to his observations when looked at on the individual level, especially with regard to his relationship to society. Nietzsche has a very keen grip on certain aspects of mankind, which he expounds upon indirectly in his theories of the will to power and the master and slave moralities. Particularly, we behold his understanding of the degenerative society and the necessity for the "homogeneous individuals" within society to welcome such degeneration, for "Those who degenerate are of the highest importance wherever progress is to take place; every great progress must be preceded by a partial weakening. The strongest natures

hold fast to the type; the weaker ones help to develop it further" (Nietzsche, *Human* 54-55). The degeneration of this sort could be applied to Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, the assumed setting for "Barn Burning," as well as the breeding ground for such a homogeneous caste of white masters whose very well-being is essentially comprised of a history of "nigger sweat" (Faulkner 540). "Ab[ner] does see that part of the power of the beautiful and the orderly to command our respect depends upon our refusal to remind ourselves that they have been brought into existence by other people's labor" (DeMott 436) Abner Snopes, though ultimately out for the reclamation of his own dignity, seems to be, unknowingly, a means of degeneration within his society. His low level affords him a very Nietzsche-like perspective on humanity in that he seems to understand the ultimately degenerative and exploitive nature of man's homogeneity with respect to injustice. Clearly, he is at least capable of comprehending the rank, putrid injustices that placed him in his position for, unlike Nietzsche's claim above, his methods and means are anything but weak, which is the reason we factor in Nietzsche's formulation of the will to power along with master and slave moralities.

Along with the homogeneity within this society, follows an almost too blatant example of the master and slave moralities at work. This bourgeoisie of landowners, who passively exploit the labors of others to further their own comfortable existence, simply and subliminally seem to will the slave morality onto individuals like Abner. For as Nietzsche observes, "life itself is essentially... at its mildest, exploitation" (*Beyond* 393). The problem here is that Nietzsche most likely expects those of the slave morality to remain far too steeped in tradition and "moral righteousness" to consider fighting or willing themselves to power. Gayle Edward Wilson refers to this type of man as the "Apollonian man, [who]... 'keeps to the middle of the road, stays within the known map,' and strives to fulfill his civic roles in terms of the expectations of the community at large" (433). This is not exemplified in the case of Abner as we have already seen. Abner seems to understand a paradigm, which is not at all that we must seek to become tyrannical, for this is not Nietzsche's intent;

but rather, the paradigm lies in the idea that it is simply more human to will oneself to power according to a primitive, basic, yet profound understanding of history in conjunction with man's nature. "Lack of a historical sense is the original error of all philosophers..." (Nietzsche, *Human* 51). Abner seems to understand this historical idea of the will to power as well as he seems to grasp the historical situation in which he finds himself. He knows his place in history, yet he chooses, rightfully according to Nietzsche, to be a part of the degeneration of the injustices around him as well as the endorsing force behind his own will to power—not that this will strives, necessarily, for the acquisition of prominent sociological position, but simply for that raw power of the will which dominates the willpower of the forces that be.

After the terse description of such a man as Snopes, it is difficult to look at a character such as Willy Loman and make any comparison since, by nature, the characteristics of each of these individuals are on opposite ends of the spectrum; however, the circumstances in which they find themselves and the pride that plagues their characters conjoin these two men in their mutual struggles against the society which constrains them. Loman is a salesman living in Brooklyn amid the slums and smog of the urban apartment complexes and, despite his own false sense of optimism, Willy, along with his wife and two sons, lives in what most "normal" middle-class Americans would call extreme poverty. This poverty, perhaps, is not as monetarily limiting as that of Abner Snopes; however, it is clear that after 36 years of working beneath the machine of a capital-driven society, Willy has next to nothing to show for his life's work. However, unlike Abner, Willy lives in a distant reality of ideals, ignoring the reality of his own circumstances and putting his family in a helpless position monetarily and spiritually, all in the name of the "American Dream," which still holds fast to the aching, aged bones of this tragic salesman. Schneider explains the situation well:

The maniacal refrigerator, the life-sentencing mortgage, the ironic insurance: these things take on the aspects of sardonic gods of the mountain. They are symbols of one theme in

the play—that describing a society in which man is a wandering peddler lured from reality by the pink clouds of magic sales talk; a world... where the common man has nothing to sell but himself, his pride, his youth. (251)

The paralysis of the family is not entirely due to Willy's inability to face reality, however. Just like Abner, certain members of Willy's family are subliminally sympathetic towards Willy's fantasy existence. His wife Linda, for instance, is quite the enabler toward her husband's eccentricities, which is revealed in a conversation with Biff and Happy, Willy's sons, in which she explains Willy's essential suicidal nature:

Linda: ... And sure enough, on the bottom of the water heater there's a new little nipple on the gas pipe.

Happy, angrily: That—jerk.

Biff: Did you have it taken off?

Linda: I'm—I'm ashamed to. How can I mention it to him? Every day I go down and take away that little rubber pipe. But, when he comes home, I put it back where it was. How can I insult him that way? (Miller 59-60)

The gas pipe obviously denotes that a means to suicide is being considered by Willy, which, as we later learn, is, in his mind, a quick means to acquire \$20,000 dollars in life-insurance for his family. The details here are irrelevant, however, because any truly sensible and loving wife would surely show her concern for her husband by convicting him of his degenerative mindset and scolding him gently for it. Linda does neither, nor does it seem that she has convicted herself in any lasting way, for she has not even approached Willy with the obvious question: What is this doing in the cellar? Willy's son, Happy, is also indirectly supportive of his father's false hopes because he makes the mistake of attempting to follow in the footsteps by chasing after this "American Dream," hoping to make it to the top. This is one of the false notions that Miller is trying to criticize in the story: the idea that one day, you can make it to the top if you just try hard enough. Biff Loman, like Sarty Snopes,

provides the key source of resistance and self-identification within the story. He is the character most responsible for the harshest reality checks for Willy's character. Willy pleads and pleads with his broken fantasies for Biff, his eldest and, at one point, his favorite son, to be his ideal son and his legacy in the corporate race to the top of the ladder. But the reality of Biff's character is much more hard-hitting and genuine than the ideals of his father:

Biff: I am not a leader of men, Willy, and neither are you. You were never anything but a hard-working drummer who landed in the ash can like all the rest of them! I'm one dollar an hour, Willy! ... A buck an hour! ... I'm not bringing home any prizes any more, and you're going to stop waiting for me to bring them home! (Miller 132)

Biff rails upon *himself* and *his* fallen ability within a world of fallible individuals during quite a few of these furious rants against his father's unyielding grasp of a futile dream: a grasp as unyielding as the will of Abner Snopes. Yet for all of his self-degrading words and subtle pleas for the soul of his father, Biff is the more liberated of the two characters, while Willy is simply too blinded by the ideals of a visionary to understand any concept of reality outside of the necessity to reach the top of the capitalist ladder in order to prove the worth of a man.

This lack of sight is, like Abner, due to his own stubborn pride. One of the odd twists in the plot is that, repeatedly throughout the sequences of the play, Willy is offered a job from his peer and moneylender, Charley, and Willy repeatedly turns this offer down. This aspect of the play cuts beyond the simple plot of a man who couldn't make it in the world of capitalism and extends into the realm of the depraved human need for us, particularly and historically as men, to be the champion, the master, and the controller of our own lives. Willy truly has no logical reason not to accept Charley's offer, as is clearly proven in a conversation between the two in which Willy reveals to Charley the news that he was just fired.

Charley: Now listen, Willy, I know you don't like me, and nobody can say I'm in love with you, but I'll give you a job because—just for the hell of it, put it that way. Now what do you say?

Willy: I— I just can't work for you, Charley.

Charley: What're you, jealous of me?

Willy: I can't work for you, that's all, don't ask me why. (Miller, 97-98)

This is part of the insanity of the human mind: that we don't need help from the other guy, that we are self-sustaining in and of ourselves. What is all the more tragic is the jealous way in which we guard that right. In that same conversation with Charley, Willy states that he considers it funny how, "After all the highways, and the trains, and the appointments, and the years, you end up worth more dead than alive." This is truly Willy's ultimate failure: his utter resignation to a \$20,000 life insurance policy, the means of which is the displacement of his very self in the act of suicide.

Philosopher and economical thinker Karl Marx would probably say that this stage of utter abandonment of life itself, as a result of fiscal circumstances caused by capitalistic ideals, is the final and most horrendous stage of the personal alienation inherent within the systematic machine behind the very idea of a capital-driven society. Marx goes to great lengths in his essay, "Estranged Labor," to argue against the displacement of the foundations of labor and how these foundations apply to the individual with regard to their identity, their goals, and their self-worth. The three areas in which Marx argues that capitalism alienates labor as an all-encompassing practice are best summed up when he states that "Labor produces not only commodities: it produces itself and the worker as a commodity" (155). The key here is the alienation of the product, the labor itself, and ultimately the individual in relation to others, since each individual is, or should be at least, responsible for both the work and product that results from such work. A critic on Marx further points out that Marx distinguishes humanity from other animals because "human beings are capable of free production in the sense that they can produce in accordance with their will and consciousness in elaborate and unpredicted ways"

(Wolff 35). Marx looks at capitalism and sees this very element of the will and the consciousness behind labor distorted by the estranged workings of a system that focuses on the monetary benefits rather than the fulfilling aspects of labor. The disillusioning aspect of capital is a primary complaint of Marx's along with the disillusioning dream that accompanies it. This is the dream of Willy Loman, but more than that, it is the dream of every down-on-their-luck individual who has been promised through media and pop culture that this dream is accessible to everyone. Loman's only truly substantial sale at the end of a salesman's life is himself, and that is the fundamental complaint behind Marx's philosophy. His ultimate claim is that we sell ourselves short in the process of striving for capital and feeding a system that internalizes a false dream within its "subjects."

But, though society and economics play their parts, the true degeneration and alienation of these characters lies in their pride. This is the aspect that links the two characters. For Willy, pride is manifested in a much more subtle and perhaps even more depressing manner than it is in Abner. Abner is deliberate in his absolute compulsion toward the abject position in which he has been placed, and his responses are a testimony to this, while Willy seems more complacent, and yet just as driven, as Abner in the deeper, darker parts of his character. Each is profoundly influenced by their hopeless situations, and yet in a peculiar way, it seems as though Abner's response is more fitting for such a situation. Remember that his underlying purpose does not seem to be to will himself to the position of a tyrant, but rather he seeks to will himself to a metaphysical position beyond the oppression of those authorities in a fundamentally unjust system. Willy's lack of association to reality does not hide the fact that he is an "Apollonian man." He is mostly submissive toward "superior" men like his boss, Howard, yet he is manipulative because of a way of life which has engrained in his ideology the need to weasel his way into better relationship with those above him. But none of this is meant to diminish the responsibility of both characters toward their own moral culpability. Both Willy and Abner are faced with an underlying struggle with their own natures, and it is these natures, and not society, which are responsible for

their downfalls. There is always the factor of choice that must be taken into account both first and foremost, and when man meets his end. Nietzsche's understanding of man at his basis is profound, but his follow-through is flawed and dangerous. To condone a will to power as an essential function of man is to condone the vicious cycle that history has proven is detrimental to our race. Man's worst enemy lies in himself, yet man himself is the living proof of definitive morality. We appeal to morality subliminally in each decision in which right and wrong are a factor. It is only if we *choose* to ignore it that we are then able to question it. Nevertheless, pride is a common ground for man, which cannot be questioned. Whether one argues for or against the evil nature of pride itself, we cannot deny the countless evils that it has produced within man's actions.

This is the tragedy of Willy Loman and Abner Snopes, but in reality, it is the tragedy of the human race. There is no use pointing the blame at any one party, because the essence of humanity is the fallen individual. If the notion of pride is disregarded as fallen, then it follows that the only race which embraces it, namely humanity, is essentially evil. Perhaps it is both. So, yes, this is the clichéd conclusion to every argument within literature. The idea that literature is applicable in the daily struggles of humanity is not at all a new one. But the struggles of Abner—and Willy—like individuals against their own natures and against the natures of others—for really what is any society but a collaboration of individuals, each with agendas and wills of their own—does not reconcile the idea of how such a “progressively evolving,” supposedly self-substantiating race came to be in this state in the first place. We as a race have a history in which, by mere concepts, we have rationalized thoroughly and incessantly our ideals to the point of monotony. Our attraction to the revolutionary thinkers, the idealists, and at times the extremists is a testimony to our own desire for the renovation of the drudgery of “society.” Truly, though, what we seek is the renovation of humanity. What we strive for in our philosophy, and subtly in our practice is a search for purpose, a specific means by which to reconcile our pride-filled natures with some kind of order: a method to our madness. So stands the human

race: on the threshold of time, fighting with their broomsticks the inevitable tide of their own conflict and tragedy. When do we yield? When do we finally understand that our battle is not to be fought in the wasteland of our physical circumstances, but in the spirit? If man's degenerative nature is to be the hope of this world, bring on the rubber hoses and gas pipes.

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Evaluation: *This is a remarkable essay, expressing pity for Faulkner's Abner Snopes (who is actually pretty vicious) and for Miller's Willy Loman (who is pretty intolerable in about a dozen frustrating ways). Yet, the essay lets neither character off the hook. This is a wonderful essay that is truly, unusually fun to read, and beyond doing the job of combining the content of the two courses, it reflects this student's innate love of language and ideas. There is something like joy leaping off the pages here.*

Langston Hughes: Class Distinctions and Racial Frustrations

Daniel Cox

Courses: History 212 (Recent American History)
and Literature 115 (Fiction)

Instructors: Tom DePalma and Catherine Restovich

Assignment:

*Each student was to write a literary analysis that
incorporates a historical critical perspective.*

Langston Hughes wrote poetry during some of the most tumultuous times in American History. Yet, he wrote not from the voice of our history books (usually the voice of the white men), but from the voice of lower class African-Americans. Hughes was not only an amazing poet, but a brilliant social critic as well. It could be said that Hughes was a mirror of sorts, reflecting the thoughts and frustrations of the African-American community into the medium of poetry, where others could see them on paper. But even to use the “mirror” metaphor would still not be sufficient to demonstrate the humanity of Langston Hughes, for a mirror merely reflects outward; Hughes was a person who, being African-American, was forced to absorb the hatred, bigotry, the hypocrisy, the frustration, the hope, the violence, and the poverty all around him on a daily basis. It could be supposed that any African-American would have loved to have been a mirror, simply reflect-

ing the daily injustices off; but this was not possible, as the injustices indeed corroded the spirit and tortured the mind. Langston Hughes’ poetry is human, it has feeling, and it expresses human feelings under inhuman conditions. The poetry of Langston Hughes is incredible in its use of literary elements, but the real power of his poetry comes from its truths, its ability to speak for the millions of lower-class African-Americans, who had few mediums with which to voice their struggles, with clarity and feeling.

Hughes’ work traces the injustices, hopes, and dreams of African-Americans throughout their struggles; he does this so well because the struggles are also his own. When Hughes writes, “Here on the edge of hell / Stands Harlem,” he is not discussing a far-off ghetto, but his home where he spent his days and nights (4).

A main theme through much of Hughes’ poetry is the idea of class struggle. The theme of class struggle—and not just racial struggle—is apparent when Hughes writes in “Florida Road Workers,” “I’m makin’ a road / For the rich to sweep over / In their big cars / And leave me standin’ here” (41). The clear implication is that these poor working class road workers are not only left behind physically with no acknowledgement of their hard work, but also being left behind figuratively by mass society as a whole.

The terrible cycle of poverty mixed with the social marginalization of being African-American in a country where you were seen as less than equal (to put it lightly) compounded and forced African-Americans away from the “American Dream,” and into an American nightmare. This was a nightmare that one could not simply be woken up from, to find themselves safe in their beds; at times when the rest of the country was experiencing excellent economic growth, African-Americans’ position in America was hardly touched. Hughes writes about the apathy many felt after fighting to better their own lot in life for years and finding themselves nowhere: “Too many years / Tryin’ to get up there- / Done broke my ankles down, / Got nowhere...If you want to see me, / Come down” (50). The struggles of living on meager wages and trying to further oneself when the economic system, as well as the social system, are working to keep you down in every way can easily break one’s spirit.

Meager wages were only one problem; in order to get even the most meager of wages, one must be able to get a job. For people living in the slums of cities, where many African Americans found themselves, it was “easier to get dope / than to get a job” (13). Here is a major issue of frustration, a frustration with the inconsistencies between the dominant culture’s norms and the social realities of ghetto life.

Where are the opportunities in this land of opportunity? How are you going to pull yourself up by your own boot straps if you can’t even afford tennis shoes? The reality of unemployment among African-Americans and other minority groups was something that the majority of Americans seemed completely indifferent about. After a people are held down so long, their ambitions and their hopes eventually atrophy from lack of use. When “a nickel costs a dime,” your hopes of getting ahead, or even maintaining a respectable place, wither away, and so the wicked cycle of poverty turns one more click (5).

When it is easier to get drugs and momentarily forget the world than it is to find a job, naturally many will choose the former. Hughes writes about the problem of drug addiction within African American communities in “Junior Addict”: “The little boy / who sticks a needle in his arm / and seeks an out in other worldly dreams / ... cannot know, of course, of ... a sunrise that he cannot see (12). The addict Hughes is talking about could not see the sunrise because he was kept from seeing it, the hope was so distant that it was too far to visualize. The system did not care that this young addict—and millions of others disillusioned people—were always stuck on the outside looking in.

Hughes explores the different “roles” African-Americans played; most often, these roles were ones that were subordinate to whites. These roles were impersonal: the black guy that cleans up after you at your office, the black guy that fixes that darn pothole that you keep running over, etc. In “Office Building: Evening,” Hughes speaks about the role of janitor that cleans up after the white workers have gone home: “When the white folks get through / Here you come: / Got to clean awhile” (40). In “Dinner Guest: Me,” Hughes writes of a black man over to dinner with a

party of affluent white liberals: “The lobster is delicious, / The wine divine, / And center of attention / At the damask table, mine” (73). Only when a black man was invited to a fancy dinner so the white liberal could show off his “black friend” to all of his sophisticated guests was the black man allowed into the exclusive world of privilege that was almost completely closed off to African-Americans.

The few African-Americans that made it to higher levels of society were often accused of joining white society and looking down on the poor ghetto dweller. The black lower class felt that they were often looked down on by the black middle class with a certain contempt, similar to the way which the white middle class looks down on the poor white man. Instead of looking down on others with a sense of collectivism, the lower class—whether they be lower racial or economic class—is looked down upon with a haughty disdain. Instead of recognizing the commonalities with one another, our system has conditioned us to look upon others as other players in the market’s chess game: looking up with envy and reverence at those above us, and looking down at those below us for just long enough to roll our collective eyes.

It is the wide range of injustices that pushed so many African-Americans toward avenues with which they believed they could change the world as it was, and turn it into the world that it needed to be. Some chose the teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and joined in nonviolent direct action against the oppressors; some found King’s adherence to nonviolence as something they were not patient enough to share. Violent struggle was in no way the first option chosen by the African-American community, although one would have a very tough time trying to make a case for why they would not be justified. Hughes writes, “Don’t know why I / must...lift my hand / Against my fellow man / To live on my own land” (64). There were injustices being done, and Hughes expresses the feelings of despair that accompanied oppression. Resistance—nonviolent or otherwise—was simply a way to obtain the rights that free people deserve.

One could read many of Langston Hughes’ poems today, and if unaware of when they were written, he or

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she could easily believe that they were written last week. The point is that most of the of the injustices, feelings, and roles have not changed; African-American people have come a long way, but the fight did not end the day the Civil Rights Act was signed, it did not end the day Dr. King was shot, and it did not end the day the 1960s came to a close; it continues to this day.

People can only remain downtrodden for so long. The poetry of Langston Hughes is important as poetry and historical text. In this writing, someone can begin to recognize the true emotional terrorism that was being waged against the African-American lower class. It must be said that reading Hughes alone allows one to claim that they completely “understand” the African-American experience, but that is impossible; the poetry of Langston Hughes merely digs that much deeper and pulls the veil that much more off the wounds that have yet to heal.

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Evaluation: *Cox's analysis of Hughes' poetry moves beyond a traditional interpretation of tone and symbolism and defines his poetry as historical text.*

The Darker Side of White

Jeffrey Robert Cygan

Course: English 101 (Composition)

Instructor: Trygve Thoreson

Assignment:

Write a personal response to E.B. White's
"Once More to the Lake."

Standing in sharp contrast to the majority of essays and apologies college English students must gag down with shovelfuls of sugar, "Once More to the Lake" is a stark reminder that the appearance of all things, whether pleasing or upsetting, cannot be taken at face value. In this case, what is dressed like a kitten reveals itself a tiger; what appears black-and-white is actually vibrant; and nostalgia falls away to expose a darker heart bleeding inside E.B. White's descriptions of aromatic pine trees and ancient tennis courts. Although the essay is centered on a family vacation White took with his family to a Maine campground (a vacation spot he had visited as a young boy), it is not the perpetuation, but *finality* of life White wishes to express. By withholding that minor but essential fact until the breathless final sentence, the author ensures "Once More To The Lake" will be remembered forever; not only as a fond farewell to the carefree days of his adolescence, but also to remind us of the trepidation we will all feel (or have felt) as those carefree days visibly perish before our eyes. White's gentle humor and low-key style is in full effect, but it is that same understated style that forces readers to chuckle and shudder concurrently as their eyes dart over the concluding paragraph.

Initially, White's essay may strike a discordant note with readers. A passing glance over the introductory paragraph reveals the author's recollection of some trip he once took to a Maine lake, while a glimpse at the second reveals more of the same, but with the added attraction of White mentioning dragging the family along his trek down the tarred roads of his vanished youth. The author says, "I took along my son, who had never had any fresh water up his nose and who had seen lily pads only from train windows" (200), effectively guaranteeing readers a bevy of slushy reflections on the value of familial camaraderie, but such does not occur. In fact, White never once wastes readers' time with such digressions. Here, in the very beginning of the text, it becomes plain that the heart of "Once More to the Lake" is something quite different from the ramblings of an aging writer living in easy circumstances.

A closer look at the text treats perceptive readers to the subtle themes lying just below the sparkling surface of White's reflections. Comparing himself to his father,

White makes no secret of the surreal sensations he feels on several occasions, but the true nature of those sensations is slyer, sneakier, costumed as an aging man's lighthearted reminiscences but much darker in heart and spirit. Speaking of the strangeness he feels when assuming the role and posture of his father in bygone years, the author relates, "I would be in the middle of some simple act, I would be picking up a bait box or laying down a table fork, or I would be saying something and suddenly it would be not I but my father who was saying the words or making the gesture" (201). While this statement should not come as a shock to readers (for we all have experienced similar feelings at some time or another), it nudges the essay's tone away from pure nostalgia and shifts the focus to a new theme: age, and the effect it has on all things.

Something vaguely ominous has slithered into White's descriptions of jollity, triggering pricking sensations in readers' thumbs. The crystalline lake and bucolic setting remain, but are now vaguely overcast with the first stirrings of disquiet and unease. White is trying to relate something larger and more important than the happiness he feels while spending time with his family, but what is that message? What is its true nature, at heart?

At this point, readers cannot be sure; but the next sentence, as short and sharp as a wasp sting, "It gave me a creepy sensation" (White 201), invites them to discover the deep, unsettling source crouching in near-silence behind White's graceful sentences and vivid descriptions of summer thunderstorms. This source does not become apparent immediately; like a snake eyeing prey, White is patient, and knows the value of the element of surprise. By not exposing the heart of his motives here, White virtually guarantees a successful "knockout punch" upon delivering the essay's main point, which occurs in the final paragraph. By foreshadowing with this sentence, the author tantalizes those who have not yet turned on the television or thrown the essay into the trash, although it is likely that many do not realize the mention of a "creepy sensation" is foreshadowing. Regardless of that, the essay's conclusion is a powerful one; while it may not necessarily *shock* readers, the message it conveys may compel them to reread the essay with a pair of new

eyes, in order to grasp the deeper connotations revealed in the stirring final sentence.

The essay continues as essays will, with neat transitions and figurative language inserted at the most effective places. Always an avid artist of brilliant mental portraits, White chooses a sudden thunderstorm as the backdrop for his essay's climax. By providing a thrilling account of this unexpected maelstrom, the author both struts his artistic stuff and forces his audience to devote their thoughts solely to the brilliant description unfolding before their eyes: "In mid-afternoon (it was all the same) a curious darkening of the sky, and a lull in everything that had made life tick; and then the way the boats suddenly swung the other way at their moorings with the coming of a breeze out of the new quarter, and the premonitory rumble" (White 204). The paragraph carries on in this manner, with all thoughts of aging, nostalgia, and lost years of youth temporarily vanishing as White stokes his coals and lets art surge from his pen like blood from a wound: "Then the kettle drum, then the snare, then the bass drum and cymbals, then crackling light against the dark, and the gods grinning and licking their chops in the hills" (White 204).

Some students may be surprised by this paragraph, for it is not the conclusion to "Once More to the Lake." With a wry twist of his wrist, White follows this paragraph with one last little thought—a parting shot to convey to readers that his week at the lake was no day at the beach, at least not entirely. Describing his son putting on a pair of cold, rain-soaked swimming trunks, White says, in a superficially casual manner (as if tacking on some ephemeral observation just for kicks), "As he buckled the swollen belt, suddenly my groin felt the chill of death" (204).

Whoa.

Death? White makes no mention of that dreaded noun prior to this final paragraph. He makes references to his long-lost boyhood years, to the changes that have taken place at the camp since his childhood, even to the temporary yet disturbing discrepancies in his personal time-space continuum, but never does he mention *death*. But by electing to conclude with these words, White exposes the essay's grimmer undertones and allows the piece to take on a plethora of new meanings.

Surely this sentence, not any that came before it, is the heart of White's entire essay; without it, "Once More To The Lake" would truly be little more than another prolonged diatribe detailing the sentimental reflections of an aging human. White's morbidity (applied sparingly and wisely, without using hyperbole or juvenile cynicism) remains pasted in readers' minds long after the essay's title has faded from their memories, for while the final sentence is grave, it illustrates the essay's sharpest point: that we humans are equally unable to grasp the distant past or prevent the inevitable future, and that that unalterable reality is scary as hell.

E.B. mainly enjoyed his week at the Maine lake, and wrote a fine essay about his experiences there. His descriptions of fishing with his son and the mostly pleasant atmosphere of the camp, combined with his brief and entertaining ruminations, comprise an essay that is both amusing and informative to read. It is easy to take "Once More To The Lake" as little more than some maturing man's description of family fun under the pines with a few instances of "snazzy" language tossed in for cheap dazzle, but more discerning readers will find that between White's chuckles and the memories lies a shadow; between the mourning for his lost youth and his frank love for his son, between his reminiscing about the grand past and his anticipation of the grim future, between the calm pattering of warm August rain upon a tranquil country lake and the thunderous voices of wrathful gods devouring their sons in the sizzling heavens...lies a shadow.

This is the way White's essay ends—not with a smile, but a shudder.

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White, E.B. "Once More To The Lake." *One Man's Meat*. Gardiner, Maine: Tilbury House, 1941. *The Freshman Essay: A College Writer's Companion*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006. 200-204.

Evaluation: *Mr. Cygan's response shows a deep awareness of the complexities of White's essay, and the writing here is exceptionally sophisticated and expressive.*

Assimilation Proclamation

Ashley Fill

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Catherine Restovich

Assignment:

Write a literary research paper.

Throughout our history, minorities have been considered “less than,” not only in numbers, but in their supposed equal civil rights. In the United States, a type of caste system has often been formed of two extremes, the privileged white men and then everyone else. Although written laws have been enforced to level the liberties of every American, members of society have found it difficult to associate themselves equally with those deemed “less than.” Ironically, this traditional law, the unwritten law of society, has continued tension between races. Yet minorities such as African-Americans have been bolstered and encouraged by the promise that, “all men... would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (King 1). In their struggle to achieve such promised equality, African-Americans’ “pursuit of happiness” (1) transformed into a pursuit of being perceived as a white American. Since Martin Luther King Jr., African-Americans no longer want to be viewed as watermelon-eating, blues-singing, plantation-working negroes of the south; somewhere in history, these characteristics have created ghastly connotations. King and fellow black peers stood up for civil rights and expressed that they were akin to white men. They talked like white men, dressed like white men, and displayed an overall great sophistication that society grants only to white people. In acting white, they thought that they would then be granted the liberties that had eluded them for decades. However, alternative thinking black activists, such as Amiri Baraka, viewed this assimilating farce as toxic to the black culture.

In 1964, Amiri Baraka’s play *Dutchman* cautioned the black man about such conformity to his white adversary. In the play, a black middle-class man, Clay, is riding the subway on his way to a party. Lula, a sultry white woman whom he had been staring at through the window of the subway car, approaches him. She then engages Clay in a flirtatious conversation. The encounter goes sour when Lula’s endless uncouth racial slurs offend Clay. He responds in a violent rant, but while he attempts to exit the doomed underbelly of the subway, Lula stabs him in the chest. Baraka’s play is raw and bares tremendous emotion.

Some critics view *Dutchman* as over the top and unnecessary. Perhaps Clay's outburst stating that sanity for the black community is to murder the white people who coerce them (Jones, *Dutchman* 35) makes this play hard for most readers to digest. John Simon commented in a review, "*Dutchman* [is] merely propaganda," (Simon 22), as if to say that this play imposes no theatrical quality other than to enrage the black society against white people; consequently, Simon implies it rejects progression of relationships between the two races and furthers segregation. On some levels Simon is correct; the play is a political statement directed toward the black community. However, these critics seem to miss Baraka's statement altogether. This work actually has little to do with black people versus white people; it is about black people versus themselves. Philip Uko Effiong in his essay "Revolutionary Violence and Race Relations" sees Clay as a black man struggling with self-acceptance in a society where black men are constantly taught self-hatred (90). Baraka himself was a victim of such lessons while he attended Howard University. In his social essay "The Myth of a 'Negro Literature'," Baraka comments that Negro colleges taught young black men "how to make out in the white society" (108), in turn by acting as if they were white as well. Thus, *Dutchman* reflects Baraka's fear that the black bourgeoisie mentality of trying to assimilate into white society to further African-American equality in America will be the death of black society and its hope for equality.

Contrary to popular criticisms, *Dutchman* is not a "kill whitey" play. In fact, it is perplexing that many critics have such a pessimistic reaction to the play when it is Clay who is slain at the end. On its surface, *Dutchman* can seem to cause an uproar in the black community. However, although one might assume that Clay's aggressive monologue and the overall racism that he has to overcome throughout the play was intended to outrage Baraka's black audience and in turn lead them to riot against white Americans, the major theme in *Dutchman* is not to hate white, but rather to love black. Thus, white society has no reason to fear Baraka's play: "This 'black is beautiful' movement in and of itself posed no real threat to white America" (Hamilton 155). When the

character of Clay is analyzed, it is clear that Baraka wants his black middle-class audience not to fear white people, but fear their own dire need to assimilate into white culture.

Baraka wants the reader to feel an overall sense of hopelessness for this character, because his "type" is indeed set for self-destruction. Clay is doomed from the start of the play. His death at the end seems to be inevitable from his first glance in Lula's direction. She is clearly "forbidden fruit" and a white temptress, an idea indicated by her bag full of apples that she and Clay indulge themselves in. In a time of such racial divide, it was forbidden to pursue sexual relations, if any relations, outside of one's own ethnicity. It was even a greater taboo if the relationship was between a black man and a white woman. Yet, the conversation between the two characters consists of Clay's hope that he may actually be able to sleep with Lula. Consequently, sex is a great way for Baraka not only to imply impending calamity, but also to show how Clay desperately wants to infuse into white society, which is a detrimental desire. Great novels such as Richard Wright's *Native Son* and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* explore the heinous consequences given to black men who share any kind of relationship with a white woman. Any association with a white woman was often misconceived as rape and castigated by death. Clay's bold attempt to sexually evoke Lula and break the taboo of interracial relations is parallel to his attempt to evolve into a white man. Ultimately, Baraka suggests his desire is not particularly for Lula herself, but the idea of what it means to have her. It is Clay's ominous need to merge into the white mainstream that continues his fatal attraction.

Baraka makes it utterly obvious that Clay is "unfit" in his attempt to be white. His suitcoat that he wears to resemble a French poet is too tightly fitted. Clay is trying to be something that he is not and can never be. His conversation with Lula seems to be extremely uncomfortable. She is in complete control of what she is saying and speaks freely and at ease. Clay, on the other hand, has short responses, as if he is afraid to overstep his boundaries. He is programmed for well-mannered "white talk," and his head is racing with the repeated question, "What would a white man say?" Clay has an

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agenda to make Lula believe that he is white enough to sleep with her, and he is not the black man that she sees him as. However, Lula's agenda is to make a fool out of Clay, and she succeeds.

Clay's deadliest flaw is not that he is making a complete ass out of himself or allowing himself to be a victim of Lula's ignorance; instead, it is his total denial of his Black heritage that makes him a true tragedy. "Clay is a victim of racism, an object of love and hate, but because of his apathy to Black suffering he is partly responsible for his own downfall" (Effiong 90). For example, Clay lets Lula's racial jabs roll off his back. The *first* time she calls him a "black nigger" (Jones, *Dutchman* 19), Baraka explains Clay's emotion as, "stunned but after [his] initial reaction, he quickly tries to appreciate the humor" (19). This is Clay's way of separating himself from his black culture. Clay no longer wants to be seen as a black man because being Black is being unequal in society and beneath his white oppressors. Rather than fighting to be an equal black man, Clay instead wants to resemble what he sees as greater. He is constantly trying to white-wash his history. Clay is quick to distance himself from his black heritage when Lula pokes fun at his sorry attempt to resemble Baudelaire in his tight three-button suit and his striped tie; she states, "Your grandfather was a slave, he didn't go to Harvard" (18). He responds that his grandfather was not a slave, but a night watchman. His slave heritage makes him a product of a people that were looked down upon as objects of society. He does not want to be connected to a culture that is viewed by the majority as the pit of society.

However, no one can escape his or her history. The idea that Clay, or any other African-American, can rebuild his own history is total lunacy. Lula states, "... we'll pretend the people cannot see you. That is, the citizens. And that you are free of your own history. And I am free of my history" (21). Society will always see Clay as a black man; therefore, to not be a white man, a black man must embrace his history with a sense of pride. This sense of dignity will make other members of society respect him as their equal. Baraka expresses the true absurdity of forgetting one's history. No matter how any black man acts, he is still seen as a black man. He will never physically be a white man, and therefore

assimilation is a hoax and merely a denial of black heritage. It stalls the advancement of black equal rights because it sends the message to the white community that black people want to resemble them for their moral superiority. Black society needs to display honor because they are in fact morally superior to white culture. Slavery was not a blight on black society. It is white society that needs to be ashamed of the slavery that it imposed on black people. Lula's vulgarity throughout the play disgraces the white race and reflects its history of uncivilized behavior toward people of color.

Clay fails to embrace his black pride, and as a result, his death came long before Lula plunged a knife deep into his chest. In fact, it was Clay himself that took his own life. Lula is correct to call Clay a murderer (21), for he had killed his black self. He has killed everything that has made him who he was, a black man. He existed in a white society without any structure, merely "molded clay," mimicking the people who resented him for the one thing he couldn't destroy, the color of his skin. However, when Lula pushes him over the edge by calling him a "liver-lipped white man, nigger," and "dirty white man" (30), her taunts, which have some truths, rejuvenate Clay from his assimilating coma. Enraged and awakened, he finally defends his black self, and says, "I could murder you now. Such a tiny ugly throat. I could squeeze it flat, and watch you turn blue, on a humble. For dull kicks. And all these weak-face ofays squatting around here, staring over their papers at me. Murder them too" (33). He makes it very clear that he indeed has a pumping black heart that no white member of society could possibly understand. "You want to do the belly rub? Shit, you don't even know how... Belly rub hates you" (34). His attraction to Lula is broken, and, therefore, he is freed from his desperate need to assimilate with the white culture. However, when Clay is reborn as his black self, and accepts his blackness, Lula drives a knife through his newfound black heart. Thus, Baraka truly captures the hatred white people bestow onto African-Americans. Lula rejected him as a black man trying to assimilate into white culture, and also as a black man accepting his own culture. Clay is a helplessly doomed black man in a white society.

Yet the “damned if we do, and damned if we don’t” message in *Dutchman* was not supposed to discourage black America from pursuit of equality, but was trying to awaken it to the harsh reality of what black equality is. Baraka imposes a question on the black bourgeoisie: what does it mean to be equal? He knew that African-Americans would never be accepted as equals in society if they constantly turned a blind eye to those who were oppressing them. His message is that African-Americans should not have to take responsibility for the acts that have been forged against them. Inequality should not be blamed on the black man who is not white enough; the fault lies within the white society who oppressed him in the first place and denied him equal opportunity as an American citizen. Equality can not be achieved if one merely pretends that he is equal. By pretending to be a white man, Clay creates a false illusion of equality. By acting white and refusing to fight for his equality as a black man, Clay implies that white people are right and black people do not deserve equality.

Baraka reminds the black bourgeoisie that civil rights is not about transforming into a white man, but about achieving equality for every black body in America. Clay’s tragic character is meant to instill fear into the black middle-class that insists on assimilating with white culture. Their yearning for white acceptance overrides their longing for equality and in turn creates a black society unwilling to demand change and respect from their white oppressor. Martin Luther King did not dream of becoming a white man but of living as a black man who could achieve unlimited goals without the burden of inequality. Baraka asks that his black peers embrace their blackness, for black is beautiful. By accepting the reality of their black selves and respecting their own culture, African-Americans can then demand the respect they then hold for themselves from other people. However, in rejecting their black culture, Black Americans will continue to ride the catastrophic subway of society, which travels the same impervious tracks, with no light at the end of the tunnel.

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Evaluation: *Fill's essay intelligently responds to Baraka's critics. By acknowledging issues of class as well as race, Fill reminds the reader of Baraka's purpose. I assigned Fill's essay in my "1960s" class, as well as in English 102. This essay is helping me teach!*

Elizabeth Bishop Fishes for Truth

Penney Gainer

Course: Literature 105 (Poetry)

Instructor: Anne Davidovicz

Assignment:

Write a literary analysis of a poem.

There are no experiences in life that are ordinary; each one has the potential to offer insights that have never before been explored. Self-discovery, therefore, can occur on a drive down a familiar road or while having a drink at a local bar. Elizabeth Bishop captures the process of identifying with these personal truths by transforming a fishing trip into a significant personal experience. Bishop has truly found the extraordinary in the ordinary in “The Fish” by creating a noteworthy character out of the fish that not only has a role in the poem but has an impact on the speaker. The simple message of realizing the stage in life one has reached and the truth of its implications has been reflected in “The Fish,” not by merely describing the speaker, but by the speaker discovering herself in her encounter with a creature that is typically not considered a crucial part of life-changing themes.

The speaker that brings the reader her experiences in “The Fish” is not clearly defined. It cannot be absolutely concluded that the speaker is indeed the poet. However, Elizabeth Bishop was middle-aged when she wrote this poem and at the end of twelve years of travel, a distinguishing time in her life that perhaps brought her new images of herself (Gioia, Mason, and Schoerke 461). Although there are no written accounts of a life-affirming fishing trip taken by Bishop, the persona of the speaker suggests Bishop’s participation in the speaker’s self-discovery that perhaps was a result of the poet’s voyages.

The fluidity of the watery setting and immediate reference to the boat also provide a sense of wandering and searching. This allows the poet to create a sense of instability at the beginning of the poem, symbolizing the condition of the speaker’s life, which magnifies the importance of the epiphany that unfolds at the end. In addition, water is a symbol of life because of its capacity to support it. As the speaker sits in the boat out of the water, she is set apart from the reality of life. This separation could be due to simply leaving life ashore and sitting secluded. However, the nature of water also creates an image of the speaker hovering over the expanse of her life but free from it, allowing her to think about the present and future. Water also has the ability to reflect light and images. The first four lines of the poem are, therefore, extremely meaningful:

I caught a tremendous fish
and held him beside the boat
half out of water, with my hook
fast in the corner of his mouth.

The speaker has lifted a small portion of life from the water that harbors it. As I read these lines multiple times, I saw the speaker holding the line and looking down over the side of the boat at the creature she describes, as if she is looking at a reflection of herself. Perhaps this is the reason why the speaker continues on to note all the specific details of the appearance of the fish.

The similes and imagery of the next portion of the poem bring the speaker closer to the fish in that the speaker becomes aware of the qualities of the fish. This is probably not realized by the reader until he or she reads it a second or third time. The speaker describes

the fish in a glorified manner, however, although it is obviously old and tired:

He hung a grunting weight
battered and venerable
and homely.
Here and there
his brown skin hung in strips
like ancient wallpaper,
and its pattern of darker brown
was like wallpaper:
shapes like full blown roses
stained and lost through age.
He was speckled with barnacles,
fine rosettes of lime...

The diction of this section focuses on the age and decrepit appearance of the fish. However, the image created with this passage offers beauty to the creature's feeble nature in an innovative way. For instance, it is important to note that the fish is not only "battered" and "homely" but he is "venerable," respectable and dignified, because of the previous adjectives. The scales of the fish hang like old wallpaper that once was fresh and attractive. Although it is old and tattered now, it has an old charm that "ancient wallpaper" can add to a modern-day room, illustrating the enchantment of days past to its occupants. In addition to the charm of the fish, the shapes of his scales resemble roses, a symbol of beauty. These shapes, although they have become "stained" with time, still remain "full blown" and capture the old beauty in the fish. As the fish aged, however, deposits of lime have made their mark on the body of the fish, but at the same time, they add a unique beauty as they too are shaped like "fine rosettes." Thus, age, along with its weakening and deteriorating effects, brings a new physical beauty and worthiness of respect, as it has done to this "tremendous fish."

As the speaker continues to hold the fish out of the water, the fish gasps through its gills, unfamiliar and vulnerable to the environment that is so close to its own. The fish demonstrates this struggle when the speaker states, "While his gills were breathing in / the terrible oxygen." As the speaker looks at her inner self through the fish, she may realize her own vulnerabilities that life and older age bring. However, this is beautifully countered by the speaker thinking of the inner structures of

the fish differently than one may normally think of it.

I thought of the coarse white flesh
packed in like feathers,
the big bones and the little bones,
the dramatic reds and blacks
of his shiny entrails,
and the pink swim-bladder
like a big peony.

Although just before this passage, the fish was vulnerable against the heavily oxygenated air, the speaker can still see the lively spirit of the fish thriving through his frailty. The fish even as an old creature has powerful and an abundance of muscles, "packed in like feathers," working together with its bones to support it. The description of the intestines of the fish creates an energetic and animated image. The words used to do this are vital. The colors of the entrails are depicted as "dramatic." "Dramatic," denotatively, is defined as "vivid" or "striking," and one synonym includes "excited." "Shiny" is also used to portray the insides of the fish, which has one definition of, "to stand out; excel," and synonyms include "glisten," "gleam," and "look good." Lastly, the swim-bladder is illustrated as a "big peony," a beautiful flower with large petals. Such adjectives are important to take note in this section of "The Fish" because the content can be mistaken as gruesome when the speaker in actuality is finding the true character of the fish that is hidden beneath its decaying exterior.

After the speaker realizes this creature of the sea is something more important than her inferior prey, she looks into the eyes of the fish. Here, like the rest of the body, the speaker finds old, worn-out eyes:

the irises backed and packed
with tarnished tinfoil
seen through the lenses
of old scratched isinglass.

The sounds within this portion of the poem and the content give the reader a small sense of the harsh reality that the fish has undergone. Prior to this, the tattered appearance of the fish was opposed with imagery and symbolism that glorified the age of the fish. The plosives within the words "backed," "packed," "tarnished," "tinfoil," and "scratched" create an explosion of sound that wakes the reader up from the sugar-coated descriptions

Elizabeth Bishop Fishes for Truth

earlier in the poem. This is an important element strategically placed immediately prior to the discovery of the most significant physical quality of the fish.

In the last part of the poem, lines 46 to 78, the reader learns why the previous information offered about the fish is important. The most distinguishing characteristic of the fish is finally seen by the speaker and has a truly different effect than all the preceding qualities. Elizabeth Bishop creates an image of an honorable and wise elder by metaphorically linking the remains of fishing wire—hanging free from the hooks lodged in the mouth of the fish—to a beard. This image is important to the theme because of an ancient archetype of an old, gray-haired, and long-bearded man as a symbol of true wisdom. In fact, the poet also compares these artificial hairs to, “Like medals with their ribbons / frayed and wavering,” (lines 61-62) to ensure the reader understands not only that they are significant in her message but why they are significant. It is also interesting to note the only color used to describe one of the fishing lines was green, the color of envy. Perhaps this signifies that the speaker has a reason to be envious of those that have reached old age and therefore have experiences and knowledge gained over an entire lifetime that are cherished more than any person ever does their youth.

This portion is the focal point of the poem because it brings the rest of the poem into context and leads to its climax:

I stared and stared
and victory filled up
the little rented boat,
from the pool of bilge
where oil had spread a rainbow
around the rusted engine
to the bailer rusted orange,
the sun-cracked thwarts,
the oarlocks on their strings,
the gunnels— until everything
was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow!

The usage of “rainbow” is just as imperative as the usage of water within the setting, as it is created by reflecting light and therefore emitting each visible color that exists in nature. Thus, after peering into the “sea of life” and seeing a new reflection, the speaker

can now look forward to a part of life that she did not realize was so promising. The exclamation point after the repetition of the word “rainbow” suggests an excitement finally appearing after observing a creature that has obviously been distressed for some time. This excitement lets the reader know that what the speaker has observed and now understands about the fish is not discouraging for either the fish or herself.

The tone of “The Fish” fluctuates, especially during the first reading. The first half is dreary and saddened by the fish and his seeming hopelessness in his old age. Then, briefly, the poet creates an even greater harshness when describing the eyes of the fish, which reminds the reader that the fish was not always “homely” and vulnerable, but strong, in order to survive the abrasive reality of his life. The discovery of the imbedded fishing lines also provides the same tone of strength, but both images together begin to turn the poem away from a sympathetic feeling to honor, pride, respect, and gratitude. Suddenly, the speaker and reader seem to be the poor and weak creatures. The movement of tones aids the poet in constructing an overall unsteady feeling that matches the true quality of the speaker’s life, unknowing and searching for truth. Such variation also emphasizes the breakthrough that occurs at the end, a self-discovery that generates an exhilaration that cannot be found anywhere else throughout the poem. The last line, “And I let the fish go,” marks an overdue sense of certainty in that the speaker is ready to stop searching and questioning and begin finding what the fish has shown her about life. It is almost as if the water stills, and the rickety wood of the boat quiets with the speaker’s life-altering vision.

Elizabeth Bishop brilliantly composes “The Fish” in a way that may seem ordinary or simple at first glance, but her form proves that it is anything but that. Bishop’s descriptions are not complex but still unique and refreshing, making her writing a truly new experience. She captures novel and interesting images by using the objects of daily life that are overlooked for their descriptive and metaphorical power. She does just this, for example, in “The Fish” when using “wallpaper” as the skin on the fish. After analyzing the energy in her work, it is not difficult to understand why Bishop “preferred understatement.”

ment to grand gestures” (Gioia, Mason, and Schoerke 462). The way in which Elizabeth Bishop organizes the content and descriptions within “The Fish” allows the reader to see the events of the poem as the speaker does. For instance, upon the initial reading, the symbols in the beginning of the poem do not have much of an impact. Perhaps, they are meant to be overlooked because the speaker does not see the fish as a creature capable of inspiration, only “tremendous” in size.

Too often, human beings want to immediately understand the struggles in life, and they do not see the answers that are present everywhere. Such people are left drifting and searching, perhaps looking into the eyes of many fish, before one sparks the eagerness needed to discover the greater depths of life. The speaker in “The Fish” has inspected a small part of the world but in doing so discovered the virtues of growing older in order to approach the world on a broader scale. Elizabeth Bishop has taught her readers to be aware of their surroundings for the learning opportunities that may change their view of life. In doing this, one may find a new definition for a sign posted on a lost soul’s door that reads, “Gone fishing.”

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Evaluation: *Gainer’s careful assessment of this modern classic is insightful and thoroughly supported.*

Strout vs. Fowler

Tyler Garms

Course: Literature 115 (Fiction)

Instructor: Andrew Wilson

Assignment:

Write an essay on one or more of the pieces we've read for the class. Try to let the essay show your affection and admiration for the story or stories.

Batman has been the paragon of a hero since his inception. He is a man who dedicates his life to chasing criminals and keeping the streets safe for the citizens of Gotham City. Batman, however, operates outside the authority of the law. He is, in fact, a vigilante, and vigilantism, although widely praised and accepted in the popular films of superheroes, cannot be an accepted notion in reality. The law is to be respected and enforced by those who have been charged with its service and protection, and permitting everyday citizens to act on their own judgment of the law would result in chaos. In Andre Dubus' "Killings," the main character, Matt Fowler, enacts his own judgment on Richard Strout, the young man who murdered his (Matt's) son "off stage," well before the principal events of this short story take place. But through a closer look at this story's two murders—and through an unbiased, unpolluted look at vigilante "justice"—one can clearly see that while Matt Fowler may *seem* to be a more likeable character, he is no better (and maybe he is even worse) than the mean-spirited Richard Strout.

Before his brutal death, Frank Fowler, Matt Fowler's innocent son, was a young man in love. He had a great relationship with a woman and her two children, and it seemed that everything was going his way. There was only one problem: that woman was Richard Strout's estranged wife. Strout, a jealous man, could not stand to see his wife with another man. Because of his jealousy, he confronted Frank Fowler and ended up shooting him and killing him in what could be seen as a crime of passion. But oddly, after the murder, Strout drove home and awaited the police, meekly giving himself up to arrest.

The reader is led to dislike the character of Richard Strout from the word go. He is described as lazy because he failed out of college when he had a football scholarship, and he even refused to learn his father's business when he came home from college. At the same time, Dubus assures his reader that Richard is a human character, however distasteful. Although he might be a jerk, in present-day terms, it's said in the story that when people hear his name, they think of "the high school running back, the young drunk in bars, the oblivious hard-hatted young man eating lunch at a

counter, the bartender who could perhaps be called courteous but not more than that . . ." (Dubus 63). The story also suggests that the murder of Frank Fowler was not the first altercation between Strout and Frank. Strout had beaten Frank pretty soundly when Frank had begun to see Strout's wife, Mary Ann. This seems like a poor response to the situation, but it's a believable response that a jealous husband and hot-tempered man would likely choose. The murder of Frank is where Strout's character flaws come to a head. While in his adolescence he may have just been a jerk to some of the townspeople, he was about to become a killer.

The details of the murder make Strout out to be a sinister person, but at the same time these details expose him, also, as a victim of his short temper:

Richard Strout shot Frank in front of the boys. They were sitting on the living room floor watching television, Frank sitting on the couch, and Mary Ann just returning from the kitchen with a tray of sandwiches. Strout came in the front door and shot Frank twice in the chest and once in the face with a 9 mm automatic. Then he looked at the boys and Mary Ann, and went home to wait for the police. (66)

One would think that any caring father would not want his children to witness any murder, let alone one committed by their own father, but Strout not only murdered Frank in front of his children, he also looked them in the eyes afterward. That detail shines upon Strout a very negative light, but it contributes to his crime being one of passion. Had he actually gone through any planning of his murder of Frank, he might have made sure that there were no witnesses, or at least he would not have acted in front of his own children. Strout was overcome with jealousy, because his wife was with another man, and he could no longer take it. Certainly that doesn't justify murder, but it contributes to the man's thought process.

As the present-tense events of "Killings" get under way, Frank is now dead, and his parents are left with the burden of burying one of their children. Matt Fowler, Frank's father, is stricken with grief, as is the rest of his family. Matt, before Frank's death, had always worried

about something terrible like this happening to his children. He was always a fearful father: "when his children were young, at the start of each summer he thought of them drowning in a pond or the sea, and he was relieved when he came home in the evenings and they were there" (66). It would be safe to say that nearly every parent fears for the well-being of his/her children, but again this detail serves as character development for Matt. While Matt worries about his children drowning on routine swimming trips, Richard Strout is murdering mommy's boyfriend in front of his children. The comparison—the stark contrast, actually—is inevitable and serves to make Matt look like a good and decent man, while Strout is nearly cast as an evil person.

Again, after Strout committed the murder, he was arrested, but with time, he is released on bail to await his trial. Matt Fowler states that he forgot about bail and thought he wouldn't have to deal with seeing Strout again for forty years. Obviously, seeing his son's murderer has a searing effect on Matt. His son is now dead, and his killer is free to walk the streets. Matt personally doesn't see Strout frequently, but Ruth, Matt's wife, sees Strout on almost a daily basis, and it hurts her. Matt says that Ruth can't even go out for cigarettes and aspirin without running into Strout. Growing increasingly desperate, Matt begins carrying a gun, just in case he should he run into Strout and the circumstance would call for its use: "in case I see him, and there's some kind of a situation" (63). When Matt's friend Willis Trottier asks whether Matt's wife knows about the gun, Matt responds, "Ruth would shoot him herself, if she thought she could hit him" (63).

Matt's family is going through some obvious hardships, and it is putting a strain on his relationship with his wife. Ruth can't stand to see Strout anymore. She is a mess already, even without seeing her son's killer walking around town, so sightings of Strout only make things worse for her. While she never *directly* says so, she is pushing Matt to seek revenge on Strout and kill him. Both Matt and Ruth know (or think they know) that Strout won't be punished to the full extent of the law, and that he will be released from prison sooner than they feel he should be. Therefore, the silent pressure of his wife and his own personal pain finally drive

Matt to devise his plan to end Strout's life. With the help of his friend Mr. Trottier, Matt plans to abduct Strout after he leaves his bartending job, take him out to the New England woods, kill him, and bury him. During the actual abduction, Matt even has Strout go home and pack his luggage to make it look like he is leaving for a trip or skipping bail. During the drive, in which Matt keeps his gun pressed to Strout's head, Strout only says, "He was making it with my wife," as if to offer a basis for the murder (67). It isn't an apology; rather, it's an explanation. This again makes Strout out to be an insensitive jerk.

Matt continues with his plan, murders his son's murderer, and takes care of the evidence. He drives home to his wife, who upon his arrival home, asks if he has done it: "'Did you do it?' she said" (72). When she receives confirmation that he has, in fact, killed Strout, she tries to comfort him with sex, and she seems to want to know the details of the execution. Matt has just murdered a human, and his wife's response is arousal and curiosity:

Now she touched him, lying on her side, her hand on his belly, his thigh.

"Tell me," she said. (72)

That should speak volumes about Ruth. She is turned on that she is in bed with a killer. Yes, he may have eliminated her son's killer, but nonetheless, Matt has killed another person, and she is sexually excited. Like Matt, Ruth is supposed to be a good character, but her response to the murder puts her on the same level, if not a lower level, than Strout. After Strout murdered Frank, he felt nothing. He went home and waited for his captors, but when Ruth hears of Matt murdering Strout, a sick sexual excitement washes over her. A stereotypically positive character would not react this way; then again, Dubus appears to have little interest in stereotypes.

As for Matt, he *does* react the way one would think a decent person would react after committing a murder. That last statement, though, is a paradox. A decent person would never take the law into his own hands and execute another person based on his own mandate. While Matt has been made out to be this sensitive character throughout the story, he is now a killer, like

Richard Strout (the title of the story is not "Killing" but "Killings," not singular but plural). Even after the murder, Matt's reactions humanize him. He is genuinely disturbed by what has just transpired—"he shuddered with a sob that he kept silent in his heart" (73)—but perhaps he knows that he had control over his actions the whole time. Strout's murder was very calmly planned and executed. The cover up was flawless, and Matt will literally, at least from a jurisprudence standpoint, get away with murder. From start to finish, Matt acts as a murderer, a rather calculating one. He takes the time to devise a fool-proof plan to kill a man, and he executes it. Matt's murder of Strout is a more heinous crime than Strout's murder of Frank. While both Matt and Frank Fowler may be more likeable characters than Strout, the way in which Matt avenges Frank is more disturbing than the way Strout acted out his mindless jealousy.

Arguably, Matt's murder is defensible. His son's murderer is roaming free and is presumably going to serve a light prison sentence, so Matt takes the law into his own hands and executes Strout himself. That, however, is not law. While Strout's punishment may not fit his crime in Matt's eyes, Strout's punishment *is* the word of the law, which is a social contract. Law is the foundation of society, and one's decision to involve him- or herself in society means accepting the rule of the law. Strout murdered Frank in a crime of passion, and he made no attempt to avoid the consequence of this act. He accepted his wrongdoing and went home to await the action of the law. Both men are murderers, but their responses to their murders are what separate them as members of society. Had Matt murdered Strout in the same fashion that Strout murdered Frank, the reader could still elevate Matt as a person, but since he takes this cold and precise approach to murder, such an elevation cannot and should not be. By executing Strout in the fashion that he does, he denies the exercise of law, and fails at his duty of upholding the law as a member of society. If he were to turn himself in, then again, he would be accepting responsibility for his actions, and he could still be elevated as a "better" person for allowing the law to do its job. But Matt's actions—taking the law into his own hands and expertly dodging the consequences for the murder—*lower* him as a person, or at

least as a citizen. While Matt may be a more likeable guy, everyone in Western society is subject to the rule of the law, but Matt rejects this notion, which should make the reader reject the notion that Matt is on par with other, law-respecting members in society. Matt's many good qualities become irrelevant in the face of his act of retribution.

So while Batman might be out there cleaning up the streets at night, and he might be receiving praise for it, the same should not be given for Matt Fowler. Though he becomes a vigilante, like Batman, after he murders Richard Strout, he is no hero. Richard Strout acted irresponsibly when he was overcome with his jealousy, but he accepted responsibility for his actions; on the other hand, the otherwise mild-mannered Matt Fowler takes the law into his own hands and dodges any responsibility for committing an airtight murder. Matt Fowler's actions speak more clearly about his character than does his daily demeanor. Remember, Batman is initially wanted as a criminal vigilante until the law enforcement of Gotham City gives him a mandate to subdue criminals. Matt Fowler has no such mandate and is working on his own accord. Continued vigilante action in *real* American society, devoid of superheroes, cannot be tolerated, as it belittles the ultimate governing power of the country: the law.

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Evaluation: *This fast-moving, well-written essay looks critically at the violence in this story, and it casts Dubus' story as a rejection of violent retribution and as a defense of the Western legal system, as slow (and even as corrupt) as the law sometimes is in the workaday world.*

The Battle of Independence Day

Cheryl Gistenson

Course: English 101 (Composition)

Instructor: Anne Davidovicz

Assignment: *Write a narrative essay that employs opposition, sensory description, and dialogue.*

"What, no kiss?" Mom's comment momentarily pulled me back into the room. I think I hugged her and said goodbye, but my mind was outside again. The familiar jingle-jangle of her keys signaled the beginning of my journey to independence. A soft tail of wind grazed my cheek, following her as she turned left out of the door. She was gone.

One left turn out of my counselor Beth's room, one right turn into the hall from the Access and Disabilities Services office, sixty-five feet of carpeted hallway, one wooden door to push through, and one massive brick end to the forward march. Pivoting to the right on my cane's tip, I face a dreary hallway punctuated by an exclamation mark of the late August's sunlight.

"Good job," Beth says. I stumble up four steps. Unable to focus, I wonder how I'd just transferred myself from point A to point B. The tapping of the long white cane against tile pulsates in my mind. That is the only proof of a solid surface below. I am conscious only of the idea of the great wilderness that is waiting to consume me. One more hallway and two sets of sun-soaked doors to my destiny. Contact. An icy sensation dances from the door handle to my fingers. In that instant I am brought back to my body. Before heading through the threshold, I review what I have just gone through.

I feel a sense of comfort from the walls that contained me. How is this possible when a few moments earlier they hadn't existed? My adventure thus far had been short, maybe five minutes. On one hand, those five minutes passed in one fraction of a second. But on the other hand, they have yet to end.

Sun! My brain freezes. My body burns. Ninety-one degrees of white sunlight punctures my already scorching fear. There are people. Everywhere. The newest set of instructions Beth gives me maneuvers itself through the enormous labyrinth of perfume-spritzed conversations. I grab it. "You can do this," I think while coaxing myself into the concrete jungle.

I take seven steps toward my future and collide with hard, hot metal.

"Whoops, what is that?" Beth challenges me to examine my surroundings.

"Hmm," the cane feels its way along a rounded base as a stench seems to singe my nose hairs. "Garbage can."

Beth chuckles, "They certainly didn't construct this place with blind folks in mind."

"That's for damn sure." I make a mental note as the cane lurches around the can. A brick wall interrupts its path. Beth tells me to always find a straight edge to use as a guide. I place the wall to my left and walk on until it ends.

Suddenly I find myself in a kaleidoscope of concrete, grass, people, and trees. Sidewalks erase the rich green grass wherever they please. Corners of unthinkable angles abruptly alter paths. The only constant is the people. Voices explode from every which way, and the sun sparkles on the scene spinning around me.

At this point I have to make a decision: Do I try to rely on what little amount of tunnel vision I have left, or give it a shot in the dark? Since my genetic glaucoma abruptly and rapidly had begun to take my vision only three years ago, I don't yet feel comfortable depending on my other senses. This, I realize is a perfect opportunity to improve myself.

I enter timelessness... my cane hits brick.

I leave some of my fear at the doors as Beth and I walk into the H building, and follow this part of my route with only a hint of hesitation. It was relatively

familiar to me. I had practiced it multiple times the week before. My brain struggles to retain the outside route I had just finished as we walk up the stairs to my first class. Mr. Parsons, my history instructor, shakes my hand and gives me heart-sinking news. "This room is too small. We've been moved to J153. I'll see you guys in a few minutes."

Walking out of H building, from the opposite side of my entrance, I step into an entirely new world. Burning rays of sun beat the lingering air conditioning off my skin. I must try to do a better job of remembering the directions. Breathe. Good. Focus.

Finally, I collapse into my seat, relieved that my path from H to J was one straight line. Or was it? I couldn't remember the instructions once I left the area they pertained to. Inside the building was the same story. But again, I felt comfort in the surrounding walls. Now, I can relax for one hour and fifteen minutes.

My nerves are as rough as the concrete I'm standing on.

"All right," begins Beth. "Square off from the door. Walk to your right on a forty-five degree angle until you hit grass. Put the grass to your left."

I apologize to the owner of the foot I kicked while walking past a set of benches. With a jumble of left and right turns, varying angles and one ramp, I find the path leading up to the L building. I stop. Beth tells me to angle toward the right and listen for doors. I head toward the click-clicks. Ecstatic with anticipation of the cool confined air of the building, I lose focus.

"Where's your edge?" Beth asks. The tip of my cane sinks slightly as I find the grass. I walk along the edge of the sidewalk, sweeping my cane from concrete to grass and back. I take a few steps forward, and the grass becomes brick as my cane meets the L building. I follow along its side to find the large glass door entrance. My cane taps the metal frame. I reach up for a handle. It's not there?! My heart beats like a jack hammer. On my right is brick, my left glass. I'm cornered.

"That's why you need to make a big arch with your cane. The door is propped open." I back up and walk through the doorway while Beth continues talking. "You're early. Is there anything you'd like to go over?"

I try to remember my routes. Patches of grass float in my memory. Did I turn before or after those benches? That one corner turned me almost completely around, but did it lead to the H building or another corner? I could not remember the parts of the plans in consecutive order. I wanted desperately to go over the entire day again. Instead, I tell Beth about the stairwell with a direct exit from the building. "It may be easier to go left out that door straight to the parking lot instead of going right, back into the main hallway, and then left out of the big glass door entrance."

"Let's try it," Beth suggests. Cigarette smoke rushes at me as I exit the building. Beth advises, "Check if there's a sign to help you determine where you are." I find a sign posted to the outside wall of the building and run my fingers over the braille: "NO SMOKING." The conversation is as thick as the smoke, and I can feel the closeness of everything. This is confusing. This is not a good idea.

Beth agrees.

"Let's go back in." Again, I find the absence of a door handle. "Ah-hah. You can't get in this way. Good to know." She directs me to the original entrance once more.

While we walk toward room L311, Beth reminds me she will be leaving school before I finish this class. "Is your mom picking you up?"

"Yes. She'll meet me at the room to help me." I had not learned that part yet.

At the door of my English class, we agree to meet early on Thursday to practice again. Footsteps flood the halls. An arm brushes mine as someone leaves the classroom. I wait for the contents of the room to finish spilling out; then, I walk in. Beth helps me find a seat. She turns to face the hall, "I hope you enjoy the class!" And like my mom, Beth was gone.

Evaluation: *Cheryl's narrative allows the reader to enter the experience of maneuvering through a college campus after recently going blind. Her use of dialogue and detail is exquisite; she evokes the reader's sympathy by emphasizing strength and perseverance rather than self-pity.*

Themes and Artistic Techniques in James Joyce's "The Dead"

Sviatlana Hantsevich

Course: Literature 115 (Fiction)

Instructor: Anthony Wisniewski

Assignment: *Write an essay analyzing one of the novellas we read for class. Incorporate six outside sources into your essay.*

James Joyce's "The Dead" is one of the brilliant novellas included in his collection *Dubliners*, vividly depicting the life of middle-class Irishmen of the beginning of the twentieth century. With the use of his protagonist, Gabriel Conroy, Joyce illustrates the significance of the political conflicts of that period, the rise of Irish nationalism, and the opposition of British power in the everyday life of ordinary Dubliners. Using the description of the setting and symbolism, the characterization of the protagonist and his relationship with other characters, in his novella "The Dead," James Joyce depicts the themes of self-separation from origins, self-realization, and spiritual rebirth.

To start with, using the characterization of the protagonist and the description of the setting, the author portrays the themes of separation from origins and self-realization. The story is told from the third-person limited point of view, enabling the reader to follow the thoughts of the protagonist, while noticing the change in his own perspective and the difference between his own ideas and the surrounding reality. Right from the beginning of this novella, we are introduced to our main characters, who are invited to the Misses Morkans' annual dance. The story takes place in Dublin, on a snowy night around New Year's Eve in the beginning of the twentieth century, and being composed of several distinct acts with characters suddenly entering and leaving the main scene, it creates the impression of being a theatrical play rather than a story. Both the third-person limited narrator and the setting of the story are crucial in portraying the change in the protagonist's perspective from not accepting his nationalistic adherence and the truthful essence in the relationship between him and his wife to the point of total self-realization. Living in early twentieth-century Dublin, Gabriel Conroy is surrounded by the rising nationalism and powerful revival of the Irish ancestry and its culture and traditions. However, from the very beginning of the novella, it becomes evident that Gabriel is separated from the rest of the guests and the nationalistic movement in general. Being "the son of... Ellen, who had married T.J. Conroy of the Port and Docks," being raised in dignified family and receiving "his degree in the Royal University," it is clear that Gabriel distinguishes himself from the rest of the not so

educated Irish guests (787). For instance, as the narrator states, "He then took from his waistcoat pocket a little paper and glanced at the headings he had made for his speech. He was undecided about the lines from Robert Browning, for he feared they would be above the heads of his hearers....The indelicate clacking of the men's heels and the shuffling of their soles reminded him that their grade of culture differed from his" (782). In other words, it seems that he feels superior to the rest of the guests, and, moreover, he even thinks of himself as the center of public attention, giving everyone a notice when he starts his meal and saying, "kindly forget my existence, ladies and gentlemen, for a few minutes" (794). However, though he feels of himself as being better than other characters of the story, the public's opinion is still very important to him. As L.J. Morrissey wisely notices about Gabriel, "From the beginning of the story, he feels alienated from his culture and insecure as a result of his alienation... he feels inadequate before them" (22). Gabriel prefers the British lifestyle and poetry, he writes "a literary column every Wednesday in *The Daily Express*," a newspaper known for its British views, and he prefers to "go for a cycling tour with some fellows... to France or Belgium or perhaps Germany" rather than traveling in his own country, and, therefore, he truly deserves to be called West Briton (789). However, though he makes a statement "I'm sick of my own country," it seems that he doesn't want to accept his adherence to British thinking: "that did not make him a West Briton surely" (788). In addition, it is also fascinating that despite his unwillingness to be called Irish, he holds some warm feelings about his motherland. As it says in the novella, "I feel more strongly with every recurring year that our country has no tradition which does it so much honour and which it should guard so jealously as that of its hospitality. It is a tradition that is unique as far as my experience goes (and I have visited not a few places abroad) among the modern nations" (797). We get the impression that though Gabriel prefers more educated and sophisticated British culture, he experiences some sympathy toward his dear home. And though in the beginning of the novella he doesn't accept his true origins, it becomes evident that throughout the story, he goes through an

internal change, altering his perspective on his nationality and admitting his origins: "The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward" (810).

Also, Joyce depicts the themes of nationalistic separation and self-realization through Gabriel's interaction with the female characters, in particularly with Lilly, Miss Ivors, and especially his wife, Gretta. As Mitzi M. Brunsdale writes, "Throughout the first section of 'The Dead,' Gabriel, who has become successful by mimicking the behavior of Ireland's Anglo-Irish overlords, continually betrays 'Mother Eire' in the persons of the Irish women who surround him" (39). All of these women are highly symbolic of Ireland. The very first character we meet in the story is Lilly, the caretaker's daughter, a true Irishwoman in her appearance and style, pronouncing Gabriel's last name with "three syllables" (784). And this is the first character whose interaction with our protagonist enables us to notice his arrogance and his feeling of superiority over his fellow countrymen. Though the protagonist knows Lily's social standing, he intentionally puts her down, ridiculing Lily's lack of education and asking, "Do you still go to school?" (781) In addition, Gabriel thinks it is appropriate to ask her whether she is planning to get married any day soon. However, getting a rather rude reply, he can't stop thinking about it: "He was still discomposed by the girl's bitter and sudden retort" (782). It's interesting that though he tries to demonstrate his sophistication and superiority, Gabriel is very sensitive about the girl's reaction. We get the impression that he associates her with all the other guests at the annual dance and becomes nervous about their reaction to his speech, as well, as he thinks, "He would only make himself ridiculous by quoting poetry to them which they could not understand...He would fail with them just as he had failed with the girl in the pantry" (782). In addition, Gabriel's nationalistic adherence becomes noticeable through his conversation with Miss Ivors. She is another symbolic character whose appearance portrays traditional Irish characteristics. As Joyce writes, "She was a frank-mannered talkative young lady, with a freckled face and prominent brown eyes. She did not wear a low-cut bodice and the large brooch which was fixed in the front of her collar bore on it an Irish device

and motto" (787). In other words, Miss Ivors represents a very old-fashioned and traditional Irish young woman, and she is the only character to accuse Gabriel out loud of being a West Briton. The scene of them dancing with each other is crucial in understanding Gabriel's internal change and acceptance of his political views. At first, when Miss Ivors jokingly charges our protagonist with favoring British lifestyle, it seems that Gabriel doesn't want to accept that he is really a West Briton. However, when she starts persuading him to visit West Ireland, known for its "old-fashioned 'Irish' character," Gabriel comes to the realization of his truthful political adherence, saying "Irish is not my language" and "I'm sick of my own country, sick of it!" (789). Noticing how nervously Gabriel acts thinking about the public opinion on his revelation, we get the impression that this is the first time he says this idea out loud and, perhaps, for the first time admits it to himself.

In addition to the other characters, probably, the biggest role in Gabriel's realization and spiritual rebirth involves his wife, Gretta. Though she has only a few distinct lines throughout the whole novella, her role to the understanding of the novella's theme is so significant that she can be rightly called the second main character. Through the change of Gabriel's attitude toward his wife, we are able to notice his internal change and spiritual rebirth. As well as the previous female characters, Gretta also symbolizes the traditional Irish culture originating from the province in West Ireland. As Joyce writes in his novella, "A shadow passed over his face as he remembered her sullen opposition to his marriage...she had once spoken of Gretta as being country cute and that was not true of Gretta at all" (787). In other words, it seems that Gabriel tries so hard to separate himself from his motherland and its culture, that he prefers to stay in denial of his origins, and, moreover, he even doesn't want to accept the fact that his wife is a true Irishwoman. It is also very interesting to follow the change in Gabriel's attitude toward Gretta throughout the novella. In the very beginning of the story, when we meet our characters for the first time at their arrival to the annual dance, we get the impression that they share a rather dull and not a very passionate marriage, living without any closeness and tender care. For instance,

according to the author, "She broke out into a peal of laughter and glanced at her husband, whose admiring and happy eyes had been wandering from her dress to her face and hair. The two aunts laughed heartily, too, for Gabriel's solicitude was a standing joke with them" (783). In other words, it seems that no one even expects Gabriel to show some care toward his wife. However, our protagonist goes through the internal change, altering his view of Gretta, while looking at her, when she stands in the dark hall, and he thinks to himself, "what is a woman standing on the stairs in the shadow, listening to distant music, a symbol of" (802). At this point, Gabriel comes to the understanding that his wife symbolizes Ireland—his motherland—from which he so passionately wants to separate. This understanding is only reinforced at the climatic moment in the hotel Gresham, where Gretta makes a revelation about her first love, Michael Furey. Realizing how close Gretta was with her dead boyfriend, who shared the same West Irish culture with her, and that he has never had a relationship with her on the same level, Gabriel comes to the understanding that "he had never felt like that himself toward any woman, but he knew that such a feeling must be love" (810). Also, according to John Feeley, "In the climatic scene at the Gresham, Gabriel learns that to love Gretta is to love Ireland herself" (28). It seems that Gabriel comes to the point of total self-realization, understanding that in order to have any closeness with his wife, he needs to accept his true culture and Irish traditions and share them with her, as she did with Michael back at home. Therefore, this change in his view of his wife makes Gabriel change his perspective on his nationality.

Finally, "The Dead" is filled with imagery and symbolism emphasizing the themes of self-realization and spiritual rebirth. To start with, throughout the novella we come across the image of galoshes, and "Gabriel says everyone wears them on the Continent" (783). In addition, Gabriel devotes some attention to the Wellington Monument and to the King Billy's statue in his story about grandfather's horse Johnny, both symbolizing British control over Ireland. All of these images portray Gabriel as a West Briton. But, perhaps, more important are the symbolic images of snow and death.

To start with, the image of snow may symbolize the coldness and dullness of Gabriel's marriage. However, through the image of snow, we also can notice the difference between the protagonist's inner perception and reality. For instance, as L.J. Morrissey suggests, "Obviously, both of Gabriel's inner reveries about snow are in sharp contrast to the snow we see here. Once we experience the real Dublin scene of murk, slush, and menace, Gabriel's imagined scenes—'cool,' 'pleasant,' 'bright,' 'pure,' 'gleaming,' full of snow that 'flashed westward'—seem excessively idealized" (25). In addition, the snow serves as a unifying blanket, which becomes important in the correlation with the idea of death. The symbolism of death is delivered through the use of adjectives, such as "three mortal hours," "pale" or "must be perished alive" (781). Also, we notice "a picture of the two murdered princes in the Tower," and of course the image of dead Michael Furey. From one perspective, the image of death might be interpreted as the implication of Gabriel leading a dull existence and being confined in a loveless marriage. For instance, as Lionel Trilling writes in his criticism, "Gabriel Conroy's plight, his sense that he has been overtaken by death-in-life, is shared by many in our time" (82). However, the image of death, probably, possesses a deeper meaning. As Joyce writes, "His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead. . . His own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself, which these dead had one time reared and lived in, was dissolving and dwindling" (810). In other words, the image of death symbolizes the death of Gabriel's old beliefs, political adherence, and his old relationship with his wife, while at the same time it serves as an implication of his spiritual rebirth and creation of a new character. Moreover, according to San Juan, "The snow represents mutuality, a sense of the connection with one another of the living and the dead, a sense that none has his being alone" (213). Therefore, the image of snow can be interpreted as a symbol of unity between everything and everyone, the living and the dead, the British culture and the tradition of West Ireland—the sense that gives Gabriel the ability to alter his views and start life over.

To sum up, in "The Dead," James Joyce uses a variety of artistic techniques in order to depict the themes of nationalistic separation, self-realization, and spiritual rebirth. With the use of his protagonist, Joyce illustrates how a person struggles in making a choice between his origins and a more sophisticated culture, while coming to a realization about the main conflict in his marriage, and, luckily, receiving a second chance to leave his old life among the dead and experience a spiritual rebirth.

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Evaluation: Ms. Hantsevich courageously ventured to analyze Joyce's story, always a difficult task for students. She nicely delineates the thematic and technical means whereby Joyce chisels out his portrait of Gabriel and Greta. She uses much evidence from the text, and seamlessly weaves the secondary sources into her analysis. Her essay is an altogether fine performance.

Fatal(ly) Flaw(less)

Kristin Hicks

Courses: English 102 (Composition) and
Philosophy 115 (Ethics)

Instructors: Andrew Wilson and John Garcia

Assignment:

*Write an essay that somehow blends
together the two courses.*

As a young man, you greatly admire your father – a man who has supported you and your family. To you, he is the epitome of strength and masculinity. While you are away at school, he dies due to some unknown illness. You arrive a few days later to find your mother in love and happily married to another man whom you immediately dislike. One night, while you are sulking in your melancholy, you see an apparition of your father. Standing there, you wonder if the image is real or a figment of your imagination. The image tells you that your new stepfather poisoned him in his sleep; you as his son must seek revenge. Should you listen to this ghost?

In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Hamlet's answer to the question is to use the ghost's information to further investigate the claim. Because Hamlet doesn't just go kill Claudius, he is often criticized for being indecisive to the point of causing his own downfall. However, there are many points in the play where Hamlet acts spontaneously. "[T]he major conflict within Hamlet's mind and soul ... [is] a conflict between a view of human life and the universe as admirable and even blessed..., and a view of an individual supernaturally devoted to the single-minded and private pursuit of murder of an uncle, a stepfather, and a king" (Summers 148). I believe given the proof (or lack of it) Hamlet has that Claudius killed his father, Hamlet is not indecisive, and that he uses his intelligence and rationality in his planning the murder of the king.

The philosopher whose theory best fits the aspects of *Hamlet* is Aristotle. First, I will give a brief overview of his ethical theory. The main concepts in his theory are virtues, happiness, and rationality. He begins by stating that humans cultivate good character by fulfilling our purpose, which is to be rational, and by habitually living virtuously. To live virtuously, you have to find the "golden mean" between the two extremes (vices) of a trait, and then practice it until it becomes a habit. For example, courage is the virtue between being foolhardy and being a coward. It is only when we fulfill our purpose that we become truly happy. Happiness is what we ultimately seek because it is good by itself and we are not trying to achieve any other good. Also, happiness is an enduring condition (not temporary). Overall, Aristotle's main point is that "[i]t is not so much of

doing the right thing, but rather being a *good person*” (“Aristotle and Aquinas” 34). Throughout this essay, I will add how the aspects of the play pertain to Aristotle’s theory.

Throughout the first half of the play, Hamlet’s proof that Claudius killed King Hamlet is a ghost’s word. Intelligently, Hamlet considers the fact that the ghost may be the devil in disguise: “The spirit that I have seen / May be a devil, and the devil hath power / T’ assume a pleasing shape” (2.2.555-557). Apparently, Hamlet is being “indecisive” due to the fact he doesn’t trust himself. According to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Hamlet is brave and careless of death; but he vacillates from sensibility, and procrastinates from thought, and loses the power of action in the energy of resolve” (38). Coleridge appears to believe the only reason Hamlet doesn’t act is because he thoroughly thinks things through. In my view, though, the prince, being an intelligent being, knows that his view on the situation might be biased due to his dislike of his uncle, so it is a good thing that he is taking time to think about the situation. In his mind, his uncle is an ugly goat-like man who wins wars with letters instead of battles. Hamlet also knows that he, himself, is almost crazy with grief over the death of his father and betrayal of his mother. Naturally, the prince seeks further proof deciding the king is “innocent until proven guilty,” and with more proof, he can be certain that he would not be killing a man simply because he dislikes him. The plan is to have a play reenacting the murder of his father performed in front of the king, allowing Hamlet to observe his reaction; thus, Hamlet will “have grounds / more relative than [the ghost’s word]” (2.2.560-561). On top of that, Hamlet pretends to be mad to allow him to spy on his friends and family. Johnson points out, “Of the feigned madness of Hamlet there appears no adequate cause, for he does nothing which might not have done with the reputation of sanity” (31). I would have to disagree and say that the madness does allow Hamlet a certain amount of freedom in his actions without being chastised. Also, it allows him to be inconspicuous about his true intentions for his actions. Overall, yes, time does pass, but it allows Hamlet to intelligently further investigate the situation before he goes and kills the king and

his uncle. Not only is Hamlet not indecisive in his choice to seek further proof, but also he doesn’t want to wait so long to kill the king.

Aristotle points out that man has a specific function in life (something that is particular to him), which is to be rational. “Now this rational part is twofold; one part is rational in the sense of being obedient to reason, and the other in the sense of possessing and exercising reason and intelligence” (Aristotle 57). Hamlet appears to be the master of being rational. When the situation with the ghost first arises, Hamlet’s first instinct is to use his intelligence to contrive a plan. By doing so, he is fulfilling his purpose and is on his way to achieving happiness (until he is forced to murder and is murdered.)

Once Hamlet sees the king’s guilty reaction to the play, he doesn’t wait long to act. The next time he comes across the king, the latter is (or appears to be) praying in the church. Hamlet contemplates murdering him right there. He is stopped, however, when he considers the fact that the king would be sent to heaven when his father was not:

Now might I do it pat now ‘a is a-praying,
And now I’ll do’t – and so a goes to heaven,
And so am I revenged. That would be scanned.
A villain kills my father, and that,
I, his son, do this same villain send
To heaven. (3.3.73-78)

By waiting to kill Claudius, Hamlet is not being hesitant, but rather cruel. He plans to wait until the king is doing anything else, even sleeping with his mother, to kill him. This way Claudius will not be sent to heaven, but rather hell, making him suffer, therefore properly avenging his father, who also was not sent to heaven. After this scene, no other opportunity to kill the king is presented before Hamlet is shipped off to England, which prevents him from taking action sooner.

Near the end of the play, Hamlet is anything but uncertain in his actions. Polonius, thinking Hamlet is mad with love for his daughter, has taken it upon himself to find the true source of Hamlet’s madness, so he can report it to the king, allowing him to be in the king’s good graces. Unfortunately, Polonius’ plan horribly backfires. While hiding behind the curtains in Gertrude’s bedroom, Hamlet has decided it is time to

start taking action. A string of deaths by Hamlet's hand is set off by the killing of Polonius: "How now, a rat? / Dead for a ducat, dead" (3.4.23-24). Without hesitation, Hamlet stabs the person behind the curtains. As further proof that Hamlet is taking every opportunity to kill the king, he hopes the person he just killed is the king: "Is it the king?" (3.4.31). Once again, this is further proof that Hamlet did not take too long to act, but simply wanted more proof.

The next deaths to occur are those of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. They appear to be Hamlet's good childhood friends, as shown by Hamlet's greeting when they first arrive: "My excellent good friends" (2.2.34). They then continue to reunite by making dirty jokes and talking of their lives. Unfortunately, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are led astray by the king who enlists them to spy on Hamlet. Hamlet, who knows of his friends' betrayal, allows them many chances to atone for their sins against him, yet they are too dense to take the offer. When Horatio inquires about their deaths, Hamlet shows no remorse for killing them due to the fact that he had warned them repeatedly. Yet again, Hamlet shows that he needs proof (finding the letter) to kill someone, but once he has it, he will not hesitate to act.

Another part of Aristotle's theory is developing virtues. A virtue is a "state of deliberate moral purpose, consisting in a mean relative to ourselves" (Aristotle 62). If for a moment, we ignore the fact that the action Hamlet is debating to take is actually murder, which is wrong no matter what, we can debate the good of action versus inaction. On the one hand, it is important to be able to do something about a problem before things get out of hand. Therefore, action can be better than inaction. On the other hand, acting before you think about the situation and the consequences is not good either. This is where Aristotle's "golden mean" comes into play, meaning the middle of the two extremes (being rash versus doing nothing). I believe that Hamlet finds this "golden mean" by stopping for a short time to plan and seek further proof, but then starts to take action (as stated above) when he found out his uncle did murder his father.

Besides finding the mean between extremes, Aristotle points out that there are several points needed

for the action to be truly virtuous. "[I]n the first place, he must know what he is doing; secondly, he must deliberately choose to do it and do it for his own sake; and thirdly, he must do it as part of his own firm and immutable character" (Aristotle 60). I am not sure that Hamlet fits all of these requirements. The fact that the ghost of his father asked him to murder his uncle will make Hamlet fail the second requirement. Yet, despite the fact his father asked him to doesn't mean that Hamlet himself does not want to act. In other words, Hamlet could be acting on his own accord. Either way, Hamlet passes the first and third stipulations, because despite why he is doing it, he knows what he is doing and is going about it his own way due to his character.

Besides waiting to kill because of the need for more proof, there may have been a part of Hamlet that knew the extenuating consequences of killing a king and family member. I believe that Hamlet does not kill the king in the graveyard or earlier in the duel because he does not wish to murder him in front of people. Perhaps he fears being stopped, or traumatizing his mother. All of this is surpassed by the fact that in the end Hamlet had no choice but to kill his uncle. A duel between Laertes and Hamlet is set up by Laertes and Claudius as a plan to murder Hamlet. During the duel, Laertes will have a poisoned blade and as a back-up plan, Claudius will have a poisoned cup of wine. Their plan goes horribly wrong when Gertrude drinks the poison and dies. Then, after being injured, Hamlet switches blades with Laertes and stabs him with the poisoned blade. With his last breaths, Laertes reveals his own plan (made in conjunction with Claudius) to murder Hamlet. Because Claudius killed his father, because he also killed his mother, because Claudius is finally going to succeed in killing him, because he now has an abundance of proof, Hamlet swiftly kills the king: "Then, venom, to thy work" (5.2.301). In the end, despite all of the setbacks, Hamlet succeeds in killing the king.

One interesting aspect of the play is the fact that Hamlet's foil, Laertes, ends up suffering the same fate as Hamlet when he did the opposite. In other words, Laertes is proof that acting swiftly or rashly will not necessarily garner better results than slow, careful planning. Upon arriving in Denmark, after the death and

undignified burial of his father, he gathers a mob and goes charging into the castle ready to kill Claudius, who is innocent of the murder of Polonius. If he had succeeded in killing the king, he probably would have been imprisoned and never able to properly seek his revenge. Actually, it is this hurry to kill his father's murderer that ultimately ends up getting him killed. When did it become the right course of action to avenge deaths quickly and without proper thought? If Laertes had thought his vengeance through, he may have realized with a clear mind that he didn't want to kill Hamlet. Instead, during the duel, he begins to regret having to kill him: "And yet it is almost against my conscience" (5.2.274). "Laertes, with his over-dedication to 'honor,' must inevitably feel guilty about the treacherous murder he undertakes..." (Rosenberg 91). If Laertes hadn't been so rash, he would have realized what he is doing goes against his character. Unfortunately, by then he is trapped; Hamlet will not back out of the duel, for he is ignorant of the poisoned blade.

The difference between Laertes and Hamlet demonstrates Aristotle's point about the extremes and mean of virtues. Laertes is the one extreme of courage: rashness. He doesn't feel any fear when facing danger. Therefore, he doesn't stop to think about what he is doing. Hamlet, on the other hand, stopped and thought about the situation, and then followed through with his decisions fearlessly, demonstrating his courage, or the mean. Some of the critics say that Hamlet is actually demonstrating cowardice, the other extreme, due to the fact he waits so long to act, but as I have shown above, I believe they are wrong.

Clearly, I have shown that I believe Hamlet was not indecisive in his killing of the king. But for a moment, I will address the possibility that the critics are correct in saying that Hamlet is uncertain in his actions and that his hesitation causes mass death in the end. One of the critics' points is that "[a]fter he has, by the stratagem of the play, convicted the king, he makes no attempts to punish him, and his death is at last effected by an incident which Hamlet has no part in producing" (Johnson 31). If Hamlet had stormed in and slaughtered Claudius without a thought (like the critics wanted), Hamlet would have been charged with treason and sentenced to death. Gertrude, stricken with grief over the death of

both her husbands and now her son, would have nothing to live for and would commit suicide. War would most likely break out in the kingdom due to lack of proper rule and struggle for power, causing innocent people to be killed. This is one of the possible scenarios if Hamlet were not indecisive. I have shown that sometimes being decisive does not always turn out the way it was desired, by using Laertes an example of doing the opposite and by giving a possible scenario if Hamlet had acted quickly. Why is being indecisive so horrible?

The critic Samuel Johnson does make a valid point when he points out that Hamlet is in no way responsible for the situation that allows him to kill Claudius. He goes through his long, elaborate plan of staging a play and pretending to be mad to discover the truth to his father's death, only to have no plan to actually murder the king if it came time to do so. Schlegel points out, "he [Hamlet] has a natural inclination for crooked ways" (36). Yet, his "crooked ways" fail him when it comes to killing the king. Each of the opportunities to kill him is more from convenience than a vindictive planned revenge. I believe this uncertainty makes Hamlet more human. As E.E. Stoll points out, "the interval between the resolve and the deed must mean something—something inward and psychological" (39). He is having trouble planning the death of his uncle and would much rather just do it without thinking. The prince is not killing some good-for-nothing beggar (though I don't know that would be any easier); rather, he has to muster up the courage to kill the king, who is also his uncle. With the former, there may be some part of Hamlet who fears being charged with treason (possibly losing his popularity) and being killed. Despite the fact that Hamlet appears to dislike Claudius, the latter is still his uncle whom he may have grown up with. Plus, his mother is quite content with being married to him. It is a hard decision to kill family and to destroy his mother's happiness, one that should be debated within Hamlet's mind.

At this point I would like to address the fact that murder, for any reason, is wrong. Perhaps, Hamlet could have devised a plan so that Claudius ends up revealing his true nature to everyone. Therefore, the king could step down from the throne, but be able to keep his life. Aristotle points out that the good of the state is hard to

Fatal(ly) Flaw(less)

attain and sustain, but is more important than the good of an individual. In the play, it is pointed out that Claudius appears to be a good king who is loved by the people. He even avoids a war by writing a letter. On top of that, it would appear that Gertrude and Claudius truly love or at least extremely like each other. With all of this combined, it would seem to be better for that state if Claudius were not killed. Consequently, it is understandable that Hamlet hesitates to kill Claudius.

Hamlet was not being indecisive in his stalling to kill the king. He is clearly intelligent, as shown by his witty banter, so it is rational to seek more substantial proof. Aristotle believes that it is our purpose as humans to be rational. He does not know Claudius' plan or the chaos that would ensue. Using Aristotle's theory, it becomes clear that Hamlet is a decent character who practices quite a few virtues. He was on his way to be happy (the supreme good) until his father is murdered, and he is forced to commit murder himself. In the end, Hamlet's supposed flaw of indecisiveness is not what causes the deaths of himself and others, but rather Claudius' flaw to use whatever means necessary to achieve his selfish goals.

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Evaluation: *Kristin's essay is one of the sharpest and most economical defenses of Hamlet's (presumed) aversion to action that we've seen. In particular, she's willing to disagree with the critics, and this is something one doesn't see in English 102-level essays. It's a very good, confident essay from a quiet but confident (and competent) student.*

Brando's Magneticism Delivers Dynamic, Dramatic Flair to *Julius Caesar*

Joel Jacobson

Course: Literature 112 (Literature and Film)

Instructor: Kurt Hemmer

Assignment:

Write a comparison/contrast essay examining a character, a scene, or a theme from the drama and movie versions of Julius Caesar.

Nominated for an Academy Award in the category of Best Actor in a Leading Role in 1954 for his portrayal of Marc Antony, Marlon Brando breathed new life into his character in Shakespeare's timeless masterpiece *Julius Caesar*. Prior to this, Brando had been stereotyped as a mumbling improvisational method actor, but in this film, his forth, he rose to great heights, stealing every scene he appeared in, surrounded by notable stage actors such as James Mason, John Gielgud, Edmond O'Brien, Deborah Kerr, and Greer Garson.

Shakespeare's Marc Antony is a character who is a loyal friend of Caesar. His loyalty and love for Caesar are catalyzed into vengeance for Caesar's assassination. The theme of vengeance is understood in Antony's lines. However, in the film, Antony's motivation for vengeance may have been more than just love and loyalty. Perhaps ambition for power also motivated Antony's actions, and this ambition, although undetected in Shakespeare's play, could be aptly seen through Brando's performance. The film is a close adaptation of the play because the dialogue in the movie is identical to the dialogue in the play, except for a few omissions. A character's film performance can deliver a deeper understanding of motivation

through visual cues and acting skills, especially if the text is difficult to read because of style and language antiquity. Brando's performance delivers a deeper understanding of Antony's motivation through his acting skills, which enhance Shakespeare's dialogue.

The first time Antony is mentioned in the play, Caesar uses his presence to publicly humiliate his wife Calphurnia. Caesar summons Antony to him after Casca silences the crowd, and requests that he touch Calphurnia in the race to cure her barrenness, as the crowd listens:

Caesar. Forget not in your speed, Antonius
To touch Calphurnia for our elder say
The barren, touched in this holy chase,
Shake off their sterile curse.

Antony. When Caesar says
"Do this," it is performed. (1a2.8-13)

In the film, Antony runs to Caesar when summoned, showing his allegiance and willingness to obey, and then as Caesar places his request, Antony looks at Calphurnia, aware of her humiliation, but does not dwell there in order to prolong her agony. Brando shows that Antony is aware that although Caesar is publicly humiliating Calphurnia, she has great influence over Caesar because of their intimate relationship, and Antony doesn't want to further upset her in this display of Caesar's machismo. He shows obedience to Caesar and subtle respect for Calphurnia, a very diplomatic approach for someone who hopes to achieve greatness.

The next time Antony appears in the text is after the races. Caesar confides in him about his wariness of Cassius's loyalties. Antony tells Caesar not to worry, that Cassius is loyal:

Caesar. Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look.
He thinks too much. Such men are dangerous.

Antony. Fear him not, Caesar; he's not dangerous.
He is a noble Roman, and well given.
(1a2.202-207)

Caesar collects himself and describes how Cassius presents a danger to men who envy Caesar's high position and that he is only warning Antony of this danger:

Caesar. Such men as he be never at heart's ease
Whiles they behold a greater than themselves,
And therefore are they very dangerous.
I rather tell thee what is to be feared
Than what I fear; for always I am Caesar.

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Come on my right hand, for this ear is deaf,
And tell me truly what thou think'st of him.
(1s2.218-224)

In the film, Caesar leaves the games leaning on Antony's shoulder for support. He looks up and notices Brutus getting Casca's attention to join him and Cassius. Looking tired and weary, Caesar confides his worries about Cassius's ambition to Antony and asks his opinion of the matter. This shows that Antony is a very close friend and trusted confidante to Caesar, a position he relishes. Caesar looks to Antony for strength, and Antony supplies it, both physically and emotionally. Antony assures Caesar that Cassius is no threat, and his reassurances seem to appease Caesar for the time being. Antony appears to be in a secure position of power with Caesar.

The conspirators are afraid of Antony's power and ability to protect Caesar and are determined to make sure he is out of the way so that they can carry out their plan. In Act 3, Scene 1, Trebonius distracts Marc Antony from going into the Senate. The conspirators take this opportunity to gang up on Caesar. Here, the text only states the roles each conspirator must play in order for the assassination to take place without error. However, the reader gets a glimpse at their opinion of Antony's strength. Once Antony is out of the way, the conspirators set Caesar up for his own condemnation. They request amnesty for Publius Cimber, and Caesar refuses and further incurs their wrath by comparing himself to the gods on Olympus. The angry conspirators slay Caesar and avenge their cause for preservation of the republic. Antony sends a messenger to beg an audience with the conspirators, which is granted, for Brutus convinces the group that Antony could be a powerful ally.

Brando enters the scene ominously, with deliberate focus on austerity and a touch of humility. The text has Antony entering, with nothing more provided. The film has Brando slowly and regally walking down a long hall, observed by the conspirators in silence. He is wearing rich robes and a somber demeanor. As he enters the chamber where Caesar lies, he focuses only on the body of Caesar, and walks past Brutus, ignoring his greeting. The audience sees Antony's authority and indifference to any power that the conspirators may hold over him.

The mis-en-scène contributes to Brando's ambience of power and authority. Watching Brando, we get the feeling of the inner rage Antony feels about the assassination, yet he is in complete control of the situation. He gallantly bids farewell to Caesar, addressing Caesar's dead body. Only then does he make an effort to engage in a conversation with the conspirators. He cleverly wins them over by shaking hands with each one, complimenting each individual assassin. In the film, we see Brando looking at each assassin directly in the eye as he shakes hands. His demeanor is easily observed with the camera's mid-shot, which could not be easily observed in a play. The audience feels his confidence and authority once more, even though he claims that his appearance has placed him in jeopardy. Antony boldly asks the reasons for the assassination and asks to deliver a eulogy over Caesar's body at the funeral. Brutus assures him of the righteous reasons for the assassination and gives permission for Antony's eulogy.

The conspirators leave, and Antony speaks to Caesar's corpse, venting his anger at this murder. His anger is felt by Brando's emotional delivery of this speech. Close-up shots allow the audience to observe his facial and body gestures, which relate a furious disgust and raging need for revenge. He shows his authority and ability to generate vengeance through war in this speech, which he delivers with believability and strength of character. His ambition for power is clear from his forceful delivery of this speech:

Antony. And Caesar's spirit, ranging for revenge,
With Até by his side come hot from hell,
Shall in these confines with a monarch's voice
Cry "Havoc!" and let slip the dogs of war,
That this foul deed shall smell above the earth,

With carrion men, groaning for burial.
(3.1. 296-301)

In the film, Antony carries Caesar's body out himself. In the play, after talking to a servant about the whereabouts of Octavius Caesar, both servant and Antony carry out the body of Caesar. By having Antony alone carry out the body, we see an assumption of power on the part of Antony, as Brando majestically yet gently lays the body of Caesar before the throngs of Roman citizens. Only a dear friend of Caesar would dare touch the

body of this great noble Roman. Antony delivers his eulogy to the crowd, but he needs to get the crowd's attention after Brutus has convinced the Romans of the righteousness of the assassination. The Romans are not ready to feel any regret toward Caesar's death, so he begins his speech by telling them he has come to bury Caesar, not praise him. Antony brings the citizens to tears as he shows them Caesar's wounds, inflicted by the traitors:

Antony. O, now you weep, and I perceive you feel
The dint of pity. These are gracious drops.
O kind souls, what, weep you when you but
 behold
Our Caesar's vestur wounded? Look you here,
Here is himself, marred as you see with traitors.
(3.1.205-209)

Antony is self-deprecating as he twists Brutus' speech to his own purpose:

Antony. I come not, friends, to steal away your hearts .
I am no orator, as Brutus is,
But, as you know me all, a plain blunt man
That love my friend, and that they know full
 well
That gave me public leave to speak of him.
For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,
Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech
To stir men's blood. I only speak right on.
(3.1.229-235)

The text makes the reader aware of Antony's motive to incite the crowd with his rhetoric; however, Brando shows the audience the relish of this manipulation through a close-up camera shot of his face actually smirking at his clever manipulation when he briefly turns away from the crowd. There is no mention of this action in the text, and this reaction would be very difficult to see on a stage. The film audience is treated to the character development of a much richer personality and is further drawn into the story of ambition and betrayal. Here, Antony is betraying the conspirators' trust, as he praises Caesar. The crowd riots when Brando delivers his rousing praise which ends the scene. Antony says, "Here was a Caesar! When comes such another?" (3.1.266). Brando's build up and intense emotion sends shivers up one's spine. The film scene ends here, but the text goes on further to describe Antony's manipulation, which Brando has replaced simply with a smirk.

Brando's performance lets us become part of the Roman audience. We feel the same anger, the same frustration, and the same need for revenge that the Romans feel because of Brando's ability to draw in the audience with his charismatic delivery of lines. When Antony reads Caesar's will, he sets the stage to have the Romans eat out of the palm of his hand. We know this from the text; however, Brando's performance really gives the audience a delightful flavor of Antony's appealing personality.

Antony again shows his ambition for power and that he is not above the actions of the conspirators when he reveals his dislike for Lepidus. In one scene, Octavius and Antony are dividing the power between themselves and preparing for war. Antony wants to use Lepidus for the purpose of raising an army, but not have him share in the glory of victory, as he likens Lepidus to his horse. While trying to persuade Octavius, Caesar's adopted son, to his way of thinking, Brando assumes a standing position to Octavius's seated position, so that Octavius has to look up to him. Brando shows Antony's desire for power at the end of the scene, as he turns a bust of Caesar toward himself, signifying that he is the reflection of Caesar. He then turns away from the bust and swaggers over to an ornate chair—like a throne—and seats himself majestically, turned away from the camera. These actions are not in the text, but are strong indications of Antony's motivation to raise an army and do away with his enemies. He asserts the divine power attributed to a Caesar.

Brando appears in only two more scenes, and each time he asserts a bold authority that comes with ambition. Octavius and Antony discuss the maneuvers of the enemy, and this entire dialogue is omitted from the film. In the film Antony observes the battle from above, which indicates that he is powerful and looking down on those soon to be conquered, which is once again a sign of his ambition. Brando is on a horse in full centurion uniform, smiling as his forces defeat the enemy. After Brutus' death, Antony respectfully addresses Brutus's corpse and influences Octavius that a proper funeral is in order, for Antony believes Brutus' motive for slaying Caesar was pure, with no selfish motives for power. In the film, Brando steals the scene once again.

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The audience feels that although Octavius is the rightful heir to Caesar, Antony will have a major effect on all of his acts because he is able to sway Octavius' opinion.

In the final analysis of Antony's character, it can be said that off screen, Antony is a loyal friend who seeks revenge for the assassination of his dear colleague. Yet Brando's on-screen version takes this character one step further with a brilliant interpretation to show the audience an ambitious, powerful, unrelenting Antony, who is able to take great pleasure in his ability to manipulate. If Caesar had lived, would Antony have his ear in all decisions? Who then is the real power behind the throne? Who had the power all along? Brando gives a raw, emotional, compelling performance in contrast to the other actors who, although excellent in their own renditions of the characters they portray, do not seem to stand out in their performances. Brando has the ability to grab the attention of his audience. The audience zeroes in on all his gestures, hypnotized by his charisma and magnetism.

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Evaluation: *Joel does an excellent job of identifying the nuances of Brando's performance that make Antony come to life.*

The Monomyth in Modern Comics

Myles Kleeman

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Josh Sunderbruch

Assignment:

*Students were to examine a piece of
literature using one of the literary criticism
-techniques discussed in class.*

The monomyth is one of the most culturally important concepts to ever be devised. It affects every person who reads a book, hears a story, or watches the television. It has redefined how people view fiction as a whole and provided a whole new perspective through which humanity can view story-telling. The concept of the monomyth was developed and evolved by Carl Jung and his student Joseph Campbell while studying the principles of the collective unconscious (Campbell 4). The concept behind the monomyth is that there are certain aspects of every story that are similar and that somewhere in our collective unconscious we all have encoded reactions to those recurring elements. This is how a myth from another country that one has never heard before can seem amazingly poignant and relevant to one's own life experiences "What is a Monomyth?" Should one believe in the concept of the collective unconscious and the monomyth, then elements of it can be traced back to nearly every piece of revered literature for the past several millennia.

The collective unconscious and the monomyth apply labels to each role in any given story. These labels are called archetypes. There is an archetype for every role in a story. Over time, the basic concept behind these archetypes has remained the same, but the archetypes have evolved as new writers redefine them. The hero in *Beowulf* is essentially the same as any Shakespearean hero or as Luke Skywalker ("Archetypes"). However, there were obvious differences made aesthetically and in the tone of the stories. The archetypes were still there, resonating with everyone, but Luke was the voice of a new generation; he was altered to appeal more than a possibly outdated heroic model would. Since *Star Wars* and *The Lord of the Rings* before it, there have been many significant works that have used the archetypal model and the monomyth in their favor. One such tale is that of James Robinson's *Starman*. Perhaps it is neglected when it comes to mentioned great archetypal stories because it is featured in a medium that is often overlooked or because it was written during a period where the popularity of comics was waning drastically ("Modern Age of Comic Books"). Regardless of the reason for the lack of popular acclaim directed toward Robinson's epic eighty-issue series, it did adhere to a

majority of the tenets of the monomyth according to Joseph Campbell, and is an archetypal story.

Starman is a unique creature in the comics' world. It is a fantastic superhero story, but it is also self-contained. Normally, an ongoing series would be focused on telling a month-to-month story. But by plotting all 80 issues ahead of time, James Robinson not only created an amazing continuity but allowed himself to explore the depths of each character and truly have them evolve (Hutchison). The reader follows the entire career of Jack Knight and his amazing supporting cast and achieves a sense of closure at the conclusion of the series as Jack Knight completes his journey.

Jack is the archetypal hero in almost every way. He is a young male who has a chance for greatness thrust upon him. According to Shawn Wittmier of the University of Massachusetts, a hero has the following traits: he suffers a great loss, he has a mentor, he confronts several trials, he narrowly escapes death, and in the end, he defeats the villain and there is a happy ending. All of those are debatably true about Jack Knight, and most are certainly true. The death of his brother spurs Jack towards greatness. "I may not have liked my brother, but I loved him!" is what Jack screams as he murders his brother's killer during "Sins of the Father." This demonstrates how much family means to Jack as he quickly swears never to kill again. He has several mentors throughout his story. The comic book medium is one that excels in providing trials, partly due to its episodic nature, and *Starman* is no exception. Narrowly escaping death occurs at least a dozen times throughout all 80 issues of *Starman*. Jack is party to the destruction and foiling of a myriad of rogues during his tale, as well, and when it is all said and done, he retires content, but not without assuring that the *Starman* legacy is in good hands. Ultimately, a hero must be seen as a boon to humanity, and he must perform some great act that saves or restores that society (Troland). Jack saves his beloved Opal City multiple times, most notably when he participates in liberating it from the grasp of Simon Culp, in Volume 9 of the series.

Jack Knight is hardly the only character in the series that lives up to an archetype. Ted Knight is to mentor as Jack is to hero. Ted already shares an emotional bond

with Jack via their familial ties. They may be slightly estranged at the beginning of the story, but that changes drastically over the course of it and is one of the more interesting dynamics. Ted is also a suitable mentor, as he was Starman before Jack. He fits the stereotype of an elder and also has access to supernatural abilities, an aspect commonly associated with the mentor (Campbell 69). Ted Knight offers guidance to Jack, but he also offers something more. Ted bestows upon Jack his Cosmic Rod, and in effect his heroism, in Volume 1. With that, Jack's journey begins. Without Ted, there would be no Starman, there would be no Jack, and there would be no Starman as Jack. He is an integral character in every possible way.

David Knight serves to fit two separate archetypes extremely well. He is the failed hero, and at the same time, he is a mentor. It is his failure as Starman that acts as a catalyst for Jack's transformation. "And in the end I failed [Ted]. I failed myself" is David's admission to Jack upon their first meeting after his death in Volume 1. When David is shot, it sets into motion the chain of events that begins Jack's super-heroic career. While it would be criminal to deny the importance of this, David's mentor role is the more intriguing and important of the two. Several times throughout the series, David contacts Jack from beyond the grave. He prepares him for various events in the coming year and bestows upon him wisdom that Ted cannot. At one point when Jack is struggling to determine what it means to be a hero and to live up to the legacy that his father left, David introduces Jack to several deceased heroes of the past, each of which bestows upon him wisdom for guiding his future as a hero and as a knight. The Atom tells him, "You have nothing to prove," and the original Black Canary warns him not to "rush into passion and peril without a clear head." However, the revelation that affects Jack most is that of the Red Bee, in Volume 5; "[Ted] had a rod drawing power from the stars and I had two trained bees and [Ted] still treated me like an equal." All of this was afforded to him by David. He is another example of Campbell's concept of supernatural aid (69). David may have failed as a hero among the living but not among the dead; there, he provides an essential service.

In a rare interview with *Fanzing*, James Robinson commented on his own style of writing and how he viewed his creative process. Robinson said that by deciding on a preset end date for the series and having the basic ideas for every chapter of the book mapped, it allowed him to really get in touch with the characters. According to Robinson, his own best traits “are good dialogue and believable characters” (Hutchison). It is because Robinson puts so much work into his characters that they can come alive so vibrantly and fulfill the archetypes.

For a truly archetypal story to work, one has to care about the characters. At the base of the monomyth is the fact that these characters and events mean something to you. Comics provide a more visual approach to this. Having the action and events unfold allows readers to experience the same things as the character. It is easier to relate the activities of the characters to ones that the reader may know, and therefore connection with the characters is easier (Lefevre). Comics are also a peculiar art form in how they can express things. By allowing the reader to see the setting and what is going on, they can take things to different levels. In terms of time, a comic can move seamlessly between past, present, and future (Williams).

Robinson uses this technique flawlessly throughout *Starman* to not only establish and display the legacy of the Starman name, but to provide legitimacy to the characters and once again focus on that personal emotional attachment. Robinson takes regular breaks in the series to focus an issue on times past or future. These one-shots explore the Starman legacy and develop the relationships between the characters without direct interaction. In one such issue, Volume 4, Ted relates stories about Jack, and Jack relates stories about Ted. Though the two never even see each other in the issue, through fluid use of captions and flashbacks, their interaction is wholly unnecessary. It is in this issue that the love between Jack and his father truly becomes obvious. “I know he told me he became a hero because he felt it was right,” is the statement that Jack makes about his father, which is followed soon after by the confirmation that he is a true hero. All of this is after Jack recounts an escapade of his father’s. At the same time, Ted confirms

that “he sleeps easier” knowing that his son is protecting the city. One of the reasons such an issue can work is due to the fluid mechanics of time in comics, as was already mentioned, but also due to the narrative style.

Nearly all of the narration in the entirety of *Starman* is done by the characters. Since there are pictures to define the setting and action, third person is rarely used, except in some cases, to elaborate on certain characters’ feelings. This frees up the caption boxes to contain internal monologue from characters. This internal monologue is another way that comics excel in providing archetypal stories. Letting readers know exactly what Jack or The Shade is thinking in nearly every situation makes everything that they do more real. This style of writing creates a unique situation. One really gets a feel for the characters; when they do something, you can predict that is how they are going to react. When Ted Knight sacrifices himself in “Grand Guignol” (Volume 9) it is not out of left field. Robinson spent countless issues displaying his love of heroic flare and dedication to the city. A quote from a 1940s Ted Knight—“Whenever you need me Red, whenever you need me”—solidifies this. The Red in question is Billy O’Dare, a member of Opal City’s finest. It is also in this story, Volume 4, that we see Billy O’Dare risk his own life for Opal City, a trait that becomes important later in the series. When the second generation of O’Dares begins to develop personalities, you see why Robinson went out of his way to breathe life into Billy. In the second volume of *Starman*, we see Mason O’Dare frantically leap into action. When Mason is questioned about his antics in Volume 3, he replies “[Billy O’Dare] was just like that too. I am my father’s son, just like Jack Knight is.”

The characters are developed and presented so perfectly that they really mean something, and one cannot help but care about what they are doing and become involved in the outcomes. Even the characters that are not integral to the plot are portrayed in such a way, so perfectly that everything they say and do makes sense. The reader knows these characters as the writer does. These characters are evolved fully throughout the series. The definitive ending provides the closure needed for the readers to be satisfied, and the fact that Robinson

can make his audience care that much is truly a testament to how well Jack and the other characters resonate, a clear sign of archetypal development (Gafford).

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell discusses, at great length, the adventure of the Hero (Campbell 49-238). The natural first step to the adventure is the call to arms. Campbell uses this term to define the catalyst that begins the adventure, be it by accident or choice (49-50). In *Starman*, the call to arms is the death of David Knight and the subsequent assault on Opal City by The Mist. More directly, the call occurs when Jack is assaulted by the forces of The Mist, in Volume 1.

The refusal of the call is the next step in Campbell's series. According to Campbell, it is rare for the hero to accept his fate right away; instead, it takes something more to push him (59-61). In "Sins of the Father," Jack is ready to leave town and let the Mist think he is dead. It is not until Jack sees his deceased mother's wing of the Opal City museum being destroyed that he realizes what he has to do. This is what drives Jack past his reluctance to accept the Starman mantle, what pushes him past Campbell's refusal (Vol. 1), as Jack says, "The wing. My mother. Her dying bequest to the city. Her memory."

Following the refusal comes supernatural aid (Campbell 69). As previously mentioned, this can be covered in Volume 1 by Ted bestowing onto Jack the cosmic rod or through David's postmortem advice. Campbell refers to the next major step as the crossing of the threshold. Campbell describes crossing the first threshold as the first true test of a hero. Generally, one crosses over by defeating a threshold guardian (77). In the case of *Starman*, The Mist's son and David's killer, Kyle provides the perfect threshold guardian. He poses supernatural powers and poses a real threat to Jack, and at the same time, Jack has an emotional investment in his defeat. Jack wishes to avenge his brother. Of course, Jack does defeat Kyle in Volume 1, but the real threshold that is passed is an emotional one, as Jack thinks, "I lied. My brother. How I feel... felt. About his death. And Him. All those memories and I still don't know. Yet to grieve, to feel much of anything...." Jack has successfully defeated the threshold guardian and proven himself as a hero, and he has also overcome the emotional trauma of losing his brother.

Further down the list of adventurous events is the Road of Trials. "The hero is aided by advice... and secret agents of the supernatural helper" (Campbell 97). Jack clearly gains both of these things when he meets Wesley Dodds. Wesley is the original Sandman, a friend of Ted's. He fits the role of an agent who knows the hero's mentor all too well. When Jack first meets him, in Volume 3, he is awed: "I see a giant. Then in a wave of emotion I can't begin to understand it means everything." Jack's respect for Dodds continues throughout their interactions, and you can see Jack evolve as a character as a result of Wesley's influence. Dodds at one point puts his own life on the line to prove to Jack that life is about quality and not quantity.

Atonement with the Father is the next step in Campbell's odyssey (126). In *Starman*, Robinson has given us a world and cast where this is more a certainty than a possibility. Jack does not even have to resort to a more metaphorical father, as his is a prominent character. There are constant, poignant moments throughout the series where Jack and Ted become a little more aware of each others', feelings and expectations. However, no such scene captures the essence of this idea as permanently as Ted's death, in Volume 9. Ted knows that he is dying and he is going to save Opal City in the process. Jack, instead of questioning his decision or demeaning him, merely lets the old man hold his grandson for the first and final time. Jack knows enough to respect his father's decisions and not to doubt them, and Ted says, "Jack, know that in death, your old man died happy. Content." Ted merely wishes that his son do the Starman name proud and that he raise his grandson right. Any animosity between the two from the beginning of the series has been replaced by total mutual respect.

Campbell's journey concludes with the freedom to live. This occurs when the hero completes all that he has set out to do and takes the time to stop and look back (238). For Jack, this takes place in the tenth, and final, volume. Jack makes the decision that his tenure as Starman is done, and his freedom to live comes from everyone with whom he has worked through the series. Jack makes sure that Opal will be properly defended in

his absence and more importantly that the Starman legacy will be continued. He gives the Cosmic Rod to Courtney Whitmore, the Star-Spangled Kid. As she takes off, Jack can only smile and think "One day... she'll be magnificent." And with all of that taken care of, Jack retires quietly to live out his remaining days with his family.

Robinson adheres to nearly every step of Campbell's version of the hero's journey. He defines each character with such love that you truly understand them. When Jack retires, it is sad to see him go, but at the same time since he is happy, the reader is happy. The characters are known to you; not only do you understand them, you care about them. And that makes this an archetypal work.

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Evaluation: *In the course of writing a literary analysis paper, Myles ended up crafting a sophisticated argument that really explored his subject. He dug deeply into Starman, and he did it with clear enthusiasm and intelligence.*

Peace Between Israel and Palestine Is Unlikely in the Near Future

Svetlana Kushner

Course: English 101 (Composition)

Instructor: Kris Picpenburg

Assignment:

After completing a group research project, each student was to write an argument on some aspect of the topic, defending a claim of policy, value or truth.

The latest of numerous Middle East conflict conferences took place on November 27, 2007, in the city of Annapolis, Md., USA. It was another attempt to restart peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine, which have been unsuccessful throughout the history of the hostilities. This fight over land in Palestine is one of the most tenacious conflicts that has ever existed and can be traced to at least the beginning of the twentieth century, when a massive wave of Jews immigrated to Palestine. Eventually in 1948, with help from the United Nations, the independent Jewish state was created. This has led to a series of wars, fighting, and terrorist attacks that has resulted in economic crisis for Palestine and the continual occupation of the Palestinian land by Israel. The Annapolis conference was hosted by the United States and attended by over 40 nations, including most Arab countries. Its primary goal was to create an outline for Israel and Palestine to resolve their conflicts, ultimately resulting in a two-state solution to the problem by the end of 2008. At the conference, President Bush read from a joint statement signed by both Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert: "We agreed to immediately launch good faith, bilateral negotiations in order to conclude a peace treaty resolving all outstanding issues, including core issues,

without exception," and that, "The final peace settlement will establish Palestine as a homeland for the Palestinian people, just as Israel is the homeland for the Jewish people" ("Annapolis conference" par. 6). However, while the Bush administration and some of the other Annapolis participants might truly believe and speak optimistically of a permanent Middle East peace, I think the realistic chances of peace actually occurring in the near future are very unlikely. Many of the same reasons that have caused peace agreements to fail in the past will continue to make peace impossible in the near future. The main issues that Israel and Palestine can't agree on include the future states' borders, the Israeli settlements in the West Bank, water, security, Jerusalem, and refugees. While some progress might be made on these issues, many of them are largely unresolvable based on the current situation, and a permanent solution is unlikely to occur anytime soon.

At the heart of the dispute of any two-state peace plan is what the new borders will look like. While the recent peace agreements since the 1993 Oslo accord occasionally differ in what the new borders should be, in general, the Palestinian position is that Israel should pull back to the borders they occupied prior to the 1967 Six Day war when they captured the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights. In addition, the Palestinians want Israel to withdraw from the expanding settlements in the West Bank. "In the final status negotiations at Camp David (2000) and Taba (2001), Israel offered to turn over 97% of the land in the West Bank and all of Gaza, as well as Arab sections of Jerusalem. This offer was turned down by the Palestinians" ("In a Nutshell: Israeli Palestinian Conflict" par.2).

Another issue that will not allow peace in the region in the near future is the numerous Jewish settlements in the West Bank area of Palestine. Despite the fact that, "all Jewish settlements, every single one, in territories outside Israel's 1967 boundaries, are a direct violation of the Geneva Conventions," which states that "The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies," Israel continues to ignore the UN and create more and more settlements in the West Bank (Dudley 22). To stimulate settlers, the Israel government promises gen-

erous benefits such as low-rate mortgages and tax breaks. As part of the 1993 Oslo I accord, Israel acquiesced to withdraw from the West Bank. "Meanwhile, since 1993, the number of settlements on the West Bank and in East Jerusalem has risen from 247,000 to 376,000," and in the year of 2002, "42 percent of the land in the West Bank was controlled by the settlements"(Cockburn 110). In August 2005, according to "Israel's unilateral disengagement plan," twenty-one Israeli settlements were moved from the Gaza Strip and four of them dismantled in West Bank. However, in 2007, Israel made the decision to construct 300 more homes in East Jerusalem ("Israeli settlements"par.2). According to the CIA world fact book, by July of 2007, there were about 187,000 Israeli settlers in the West Bank, about 20,000 in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, and fewer than 177,000 in East Jerusalem ("CIA The World Factbook: Israel" par.3). Palestinians regard the Jewish settlements as an illegitimate capture of their land. Very often, the Israelis choose the best land, that might be available for Palestinians. Since the Israeli settlements are scattered throughout the West Bank, it makes free movement difficult for Palestinians, and they are forced to live in disconnected areas of the West Bank. This seriously complicates transportation and trade, thus holding back possible economic growth for Palestinian people. One of the Palestinians' demands in peace negotiations is for Israel to withdraw all settlements from the West Bank. However, it seems the Jewish people are not ready to meet this Palestinian demand because some Israelis regard the settlements as a buffer zone, which keeps Palestinians separated, weak, and disorganized. Based on Israeli actions, it appears they prefer to control their hostile neighbor rather than allow the Palestinians to become stronger and possibly attack Israel.

Another sticking point in peace negotiations is the issue of water. Israel uses the West Bank's water resources for a third of their entire water supply. Since 1967, all water resources in the region have been controlled by Israel. Palestinians have to bore wells, and to do so, they need to have permission from Israeli authorities. It is very often that such permissions are not approved. "Israelis consume five times as much water

per head as Palestinians, many of whom must rely entirely on water trucked in from distant wells during dry summer months" (Cockburn 108). At the same time, in the areas where Israeli settlers use water for irrigation purposes and swimming pools, water consumption by Israelis is even greater. Yehezkel Lein, a water expert for Israeli human rights group B'tselem, states that "Israel has taken advantage of its control of the West Bank in order to appropriate more water sources and to prevent Palestinians from developing new water sources that are under the land" ("Water War leaves Palestinians Thirsty: Unfair" par. 10). While Israel has controlled the supply of water in the West Bank since 1967, the Palestinians who are unconnected to any major water infrastructure have difficulty fulfilling their basic water needs.

One of the very serious obstacles to a successful peace agreement is the issue of security for both countries, but primarily for Israel. The history of the conflict has been a never-ending cycle of violence by both sides. Israelis have been victims of guerilla attacks and suicide bombers who kill innocent civilians. In return, Israel responds with harsh military reprisals against the Palestinians, killing their terrorist leaders. Violence by one side inevitably leads to more violence by the other. The security issue is a key issue to Israel as they have continually accused the Palestinian authorities of allowing terrorists to operate in the West Bank and the Gaza strip. Tired of suicide bomber attacks on civilians, in 2002, Israel began building a concrete wall between Israel and the West Bank to further restrict the movement of Palestinians. If Israel withdrew from the West Bank and thus met the Palestinian demand to become an independent state, as it was suggested at the Annapolis conference, it would place Israel into a very vulnerable position because the West Bank area may serve as a strategically important site to any Arab country intending to attack Israel. Understandably, one of the Israeli demands for peace in the region was that Palestinian authorities completely get rid of the Palestinian terrorist organizations. However, it seems many Palestinian people see one of the strongest political terrorist organizations, Hamas, as courageous freedom fighters for the Palestinian cause. Many of them justify suicide bombing as their only effective method to gain their land back

Peace Between Israel and Palestine Is Unlikely in the Near Future

and create a Palestinian state.—Recent events clearly prove that Hamas is very popular among Palestinians, as it won a sweeping victory in the Gaza Strip elections in 2006. Hamas calls for the destruction of Israel and refuses to recognize it as a country. "Our position is clear: all of Palestine, every inch of Palestine belongs to the Muslims" claimed one Hamas leader in 2003 (qtd. in Rubin par. 12). Despite its popularity, Hamas did not represent the Palestinians in Annapolis. Instead, Hamas leaders held protest marches, calling Abbas, who agreed to peace negotiations, a traitor. They promised to denounce any agreements made at the Annapolis peace conference. The head of Gaza's Hamas government, Ismail Haniyeh, signed a document claiming that "Abbas has no right to make concessions in the name of Palestinians" (Deeb 3).

Another major stumbling block in the peace negotiation is Jerusalem. The ancient city of Jerusalem is an important site for both the Jewish and Arabic religions. Many sacred places in Jerusalem carry colossal religious importance for both Israelis and Palestinians. After the Palestinian area was occupied by Jews since 1948, many mosques were turned into synagogues, which inevitably led to unprecedented hostility toward Jewish people. Jerusalem is subdivided into West and East, which fall in Israel and the West Bank area, respectively. Each nation has sacred religious places of special importance in Jerusalem. For Jewish people, it is the Temple Mount with its western wall, famously known as the Wailing Wall. For Palestinians, it is the Dome of the Rock, which is the site of the important mosque of al-Aqsa, which also belongs to the Temple Mount complex. Palestinians bitterly resented the fact that in 2000, Ariel Sharon (Israeli Likud Party leader) visited the Al-Aqsa mosque along with Israeli police, which set off a violent Palestinian uprising, historically known as the second intifada. Both nations and religions claim Jerusalem as their capital. Since the Six Day War in 1967, when Israel captured East Jerusalem from Jordan, Israel has held control over the entire city. Since then, Israel has continued building new settlements around Jerusalem and restricting the access for Palestinians to the city. Palestinians complain that this Israeli policy does not allow them to visit their holy

places in Jerusalem, even on holy days. Palestinians believe that East Jerusalem must be returned to them, which in the future they intend to make the capital of an independent Palestinian state. However, Israel disregards these claims of the Palestinians and as long as this city has special importance for both nations, the conflict seems unsolvable and agreements very unlikely.

Perhaps the most unsolvable problem in the entire conflict is the Palestinians' insistence of the right of refugees to return to Israel. The refugee problem began as a result of the 1948 Israel war for independence. At that time, approximately 750,000 Palestinians (about 75% of the Arab population at that time) voluntarily left or were forced out of their homes where they headed for the neighboring Arab countries. "Israel views the 1948 refugees as hostile persons sympathetic with a belligerent aggressor, and passed a law forbidding their return, and assigning all their land holdings to a custodian of absentee property" ("The Palestinian Refugees" par. 7). The 1967 Six-Day War resulted in an additional 300,000 Palestinian refugees. Today, there are an estimated 2.5 million refugees living in camps in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria (Miller 29). While progress on some of the other issues may be made, the two sides seem miles apart on the refugee issue. Palestinians claim that the refugees' right to return is guaranteed by the 1948 United Nations resolution 194, which stated that "the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date" (qtd in "The Palestinian Refugees" par. 10). However, the resolution also applied equally to Jewish refugees forced out of Arab countries during the 1948 war, and the resolutions of the UN general assembly are not binding in international law. Most Israelis believe that the Arab countries that declared war on Israel in 1948 are responsible for the refugee problem and therefore should absorb the refugees (Miller 86). However, except for some refugees absorbed by Jordan, for the most part, the Arab countries do not want to take in the Palestinian refugees and grant them citizenship. While the Palestinians usually insist that the right to return of the refugees must be part of any peace settlement, Israel refuses to agree to a return of millions of refugees. "Returning the refugees

to Israel would put an end to Jewish self-determination, as noted by Palestinian as well as Israeli sources. The large numbers of refugees, together with the much higher birth-rate of the Arab population as opposed to Jews, would soon create an Arab majority" ("The Palestinian Refugees" par. 16). In fact, many observers on both sides of the issue consider the refugee right to return issue as "a euphemism for eliminating the Jewish state altogether, in this case through demographic subversion"(Kozodoy 120). At a seminar held by Palestinian Sakher Habash at Al-Najah University, "To us, the refugees issue is the winning card which means the end of the Israeli state" ("The Palestinian Refugees" par. 21). "Palestinian political organizations such as the Fatah, Hamas, PFLP and PLO all insist on the full right of return" ("The Palestinian Refugees" par. 22). In general, while most Palestinians and Arab countries seem to insist on the right of return in any peace settlement, the Israeli position has usually been to refuse any serious discussions that would result in the actual return of such a large number of refugees to Israel.

Considering all these major sticking points leads to the conclusion that any peaceful existence between these two nations is impossible. Despite the fact that Palestine President Abbas and Israel Prime Minister Olmert met on a regular basis before the conference and agreed to continue to do so afterward, peace in the region is very unlikely. Both leaders are very weak in their own countries. Abbas has lost control of the Gaza Strip, with about 1.5 million Palestinians, to Hamas. Both Palestinian parties, Hamas and Fatah, are on the edge of civil war. But, with fragmented leadership in the country, it is impossible to rely on any peace agreement. Israeli Prime Minister Olmert is also unpopular in his country. In Jerusalem, more than 20,000 Israelis got together at the Wailing Wall to protest the conference. Many of them moved to a square near the residence of Olmert for a loud demonstration. I think the optimistic point of view of the Bush administration expressed at the Annapolis conference is unfounded. To reach peace between Israel and Palestine in the present situation after many years of violence and numerous peace negotiation failures is unrealistic. The two sides continue disagreeing on major points such as borders, the Israeli

settlements in the West Bank, water, security, Jerusalem, and refugees. After repeated violations of prior peace accords, neither nation trusts the other to fulfill their agreements. It is unclear what the future holds for these nations, but the present situation seems unresolvable.

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Evaluation: *This very thorough analysis of difficulties in Israeli-Palestinian relations is a convincing argument of the truth, that future peace will depend on solutions to what seem to be impossible problems.*

Unreachable Blue Sky

Muxiang Liu

Courses: ESL 067 (Writing IV)

Instructor: Ilona Sala

Assignment:

*Write an essay that examines
cause or effect of a phenomenon.*

One day, my husband and I went to visit his friend a few days after I came to the U.S. When his friend's wife warmly asked me what I'd like to drink, I was polite to tell her that water was all right. She took a cup from a cupboard, quickly filled a cup of water under a tap in their kitchen, and handed it to me with a big smile. I was so surprised that she gave me tap water instead of boiled water, bottled water, or refrigerator water. Later, when I secretly told my husband my concern, my husband told me it's normal to drink it in the U.S. If you travel to a city in China, you will never be given tap water to drink because tap water is barely drinkable without boiling. Besides water, you may also see some people wearing masks when there is no SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) and wearing sunglasses when it is cloudy. That's because water pollution, air pollution, and desertification have become the most serious environmental problems challenging China and Chinese people's lives today.

Today, China has become a dominant economic country, and people's living standard has progressed greatly, as well. In the cities, almost every family has a TV, computer, and other electronic products. In the villages, almost every place has electricity and TV. But China has become the biggest worldwide factory and the biggest pollution producer at the same time. Most of the industrial wastewater and other waste such as sanitary sewage is poured into rivers, streams, and ponds directly, and then polluted water causes many kinds of problems to people. The polluted river water can't be used to water vegetables and other plants, and it makes many farmers harvest nothing after a year of hardworking. There have been many reports about aquatic products dying because of water pollution. City tap water is normally from the rivers after purification, but it has a strong chemical smell and some other disease-causing organisms even though it is purified and disinfected. Water pollution has made people very tense and nervous in China.

The rapid industrialization in China not only causes water pollution but also brings serious air pollution from sources of pollution such as increasing traffic, chemical fertilizer spread on farms, and sandstorms etc. Hazy weather is a new word used in forecasts in China,

but it has appeared more and more frequently in the last several years. Last year I was living in Shenzhen, which is a coastal city in south China. One morning, I was surprised to discover that the sky was very dark when I was looking out from our apartment on the 23rd floor at 9 o'clock. I couldn't clearly see the opposite bridge, which was only 1 mile away from our apartment. All of the buildings and streets were wearing a gray veil. When I went out, I saw many people wearing masks to keep the dust, smoke, and other harmful materials in the air from their mouths and noses. This kind of weather lasted about one week, and I felt extremely uncomfortable and depressed during it. Another day, we found that the whole building which we were living in was "crying" because it was wet with mist everywhere. All the windows were blurring and all the floors were wet as if washed with water. The air was so humid that it made us feel sick. Acid rain is another result of air pollution in China. In the last 15 years, it has been reported many times on television and in the newspapers as having destroyed many plants and buildings and brought human diseases. Air pollution has pushed China to a very difficult position.

Sandstorms are not only the source of air pollution but also one of the results of desertification. Desertification has been moving from north to south very quickly in the recent years in China. Beijing is one of the northern cities in peril of desertification. I always tell my friends who live in Beijing that they are living in a gray world because of its cement buildings, its sands from the repeated sandstorms, and its dust from construction. Every time I went there, I saw many people were riding bicycles or walking on the streets with sunglasses even though it was cloudy, because people had to use sunglasses to keep sand and dust from their eyes. The desert in North China has covered many residential areas and forced numerous families to abandon their homelands and seek new starts at different places. Desertification is cutting into plains in northern China and causing more and more serious droughts; a lot of animals and plants face dying out, and much farmland has become barren. Desertification has become a nightmare to Chinese people.

When I was a child, I learned that the sky is cerulean blue, a cloud is snow white, water is mirror-like clean, and grass is emerald green. Nowadays, it's hard to see such a scene in the cities in China. Instead, we often see gray or brown skies, colored water, and gray-green grass. We look forward to the blue sky coming back to us some day in the near future.

Evaluation: Muxiang uses detail with great success in this essay. After a long day of reading essays, hers was a pleasure.

Under the Big Top

Cindy Loacker

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Catherine Restovich

Assignment:

*Write a literary research paper incorporating
use of at least seven secondary sources.*

*They laugh at you...and all that you do/What did I
do...to be so black and blue/I'm white...inside...but, that
don't help my case/That's life...can't hide...what is in my
face/My only sin...is in my skin.*

– Louis Armstrong, “Black and Blue”

As a child, I looked forward to, with great anticipation, the annual ritual of going to the circus. I laughed watching the comedic clowns, gaped at with baited breath the airborne trapeze artists, and consumed more cotton candy than any child should be allowed. Above all else, I loved watching the animal performances; I clapped in glee at the prancing dogs clad in tutus, the elephants marching single file with trunks linked to tails, and at the big cats jumping through fire-lit hoops. However, in recent years, my eagerness and glee has turned to horror and repulsion as I view through now un-childlike lenses the humiliating and degrading treatment of the circus animals. In Ralph Ellison’s “Battle Royal,” he utilizes circus imagery, especially the use of circus animals, as an allegory to portray the struggle to overcome racism, oppression and segregation suffered by blacks in the mid 1900s.

Ellison first sets the circus atmosphere through his in-depth description of the story’s intimidating setting. The “main ballroom” (Ellison 17) acts as the big top tent, and “Chairs were arranged in neat rows around three sides of a portable boxing ring” (17): the main floor of the circus. The tuxedo-clad audience is made up of “the town’s big shots” (17): the white men of the community, Southern gentlemen. These elite excitedly await the battle royal: a blindfolded boxing match with young black men headlining as the contestants, or performers. Much like circus performers, they are on display for the sole purpose of entertaining the privileged.

The nameless, first-person narrator in this gruesome story recently delivered an inspiring oration at his school graduation that was considered a “great success” (17). Subsequently, because of the speech’s success, he was invited to present the same dissertation at a “gathering of the town’s leading white citizens” (17). Or so he thought. He has arrived at this battle royal under the flattering guise of being able to deliver his speech, “a triumph for our whole community” (17). Much to his chagrined surprise, he discovers that prior to being allowed to deliver his oration, he is to be one of the boxing contestants in the battle royal. He has “some misgivings over the battle royal” (17), and he indicates that he “suspected that fighting a battle royal might detract from the dignity of [his] speech” (17). After all, isn’t he considered one of

the brightest young men in his black community? He says, "I was praised [after giving his speech] by the most lily-white men of the town. I was considered an example of desirable conduct" (16). He feels honored by the invitation, while at the same time proudly deserving of being asked, to again recite his speech. He is, in fact, unknowingly, the main attraction of the evening, startlingly resembling the star performer at the circus: a buffoon, a jester.

The protagonist continues his narrative in describing the ballroom's atmosphere: the entertainment arena was "foggy with cigar smoke, and ... a clarinet was vibrating sensuously" (18). He then depicts the handling of himself and his compatriots: "We were a small tight group, clustered together, our bare upper bodies touching and shining with anticipatory sweat" (18). Samuels advocates that "The image recalled here is the now familiar one of the African's journey through the 'Middle Passage.' Thrust into the holds of slave ships, the racinated Africans were packed spoon-fashion for their involuntary journey from freedom to slavery" (49). Through utilization of motif in the story's depiction of the maltreatment of the young black fighters, Ellison skillfully presents a metaphor to the brutal handling of young black slaves, which also may be a metaphor for the abusive domestication of previously wild, untamed animals: now shackled, beaten and broken into circus-performing creatures of submission.

Being herded toward the front of the arena with the other fighters, the narrator recalls, "Suddenly, I heard the school superintendent, [the evening's host] who had told me to come, yell 'Bring up the shines, gentlemen! Bring up the little shines'" (Ellison 18). Samuels points out that "The call to bring up the 'shines' echoes the cry of the slave auctioneer, completing the novices' rites of passage" (49) [During this era, the expression "shine" was a derogatory term used to depict a black person, equally as demeaning as "nigger"]. This evening's battle royal will serve as the vessel [slave ship], or "rite of passage" for the unknowing, coerced narrator in the evening forthcoming, much like the transformation process of changing a wild, undomesticated jungle beast into a docile, submissive circus entertainer.

As the story unfolds, the narrator and the nine other black combatants are rushed up to the front of the ballroom, and pushed into place. "A sea of faces, some hostile, some amused, ringed around us, and in the center, facing us, stood a magnificent blond, stark naked" (Ellison 18). The narrator fearfully continues:

There was dead silence... Some of the boys stood with lowered heads, trembling. I felt a wave of irrational guilt and fear. My teeth chattered, my skin turned to goose flesh, my knees knocked. Yet I was strongly attracted and looked in spite of myself. Had the price of looking been blindness, I would have looked (19).

The narrator and the other young black men are torn between their natural, innate desire to gape at the naked white woman, and knowing and acquiescing to *their place* as black men, with eyes always lowered in deference to the white man's woman. As the naked blond begins dancing, the narrator depicts her looking like a "circus kewpie doll" (19). He also describes a man in the audience: "with his arms upheld, his posture clumsy like that of an intoxicated panda... This creature was completely hypnotized" (20). This depiction is yet another excellent example of Ellison's repeated use of circus imagery.

The positioning of the nude white woman dancing between the white men and the black men, is emblematic of the position of white women in the South during a time of great oppression, not only of those born with black skin, but of women. The author expands on this point in the following passage: "I saw the terror and disgust in her eyes, almost like my own terror and that which I saw in some of the other boys" (20). It's as though the naked white woman and the young black men are all being identified and treated in the same manner: with undeserved contempt, humiliation, and scorn. They are not eligible for membership in the good ole white boys club, an association borne from and kindled with ignorance and fear.

The next stage of the fighter's cruelty and disgrace comes with the narrator recounting feeling "a sudden fit of blind terror" (Ellison 21) as he is led in blindfolded

darkness into the performance ring. The blindfold symbolizes the blinders placed on these black youth in their everyday lives, much like the blinders placed on the prancing circus horses, serving to obscure clear perception and discernment. The blind-folded “niggers” (21) are forced to fight each other until only one man remains standing. Like wild animals, they are tamed by the white men, and made to perform. “I had no dignity” (22) says the dumbfounded narrator, and “I stumbled about like a baby or a drunken man” (22). Upon instigation, the punches begin flying, a struggle ensues, and “Blows pounded me from all sides while I struck out as best I could” (22). The narrator describes trying to remove his blindfold so that he could see his opponents, “and when I raised my gloved hands to push the layers of white aside a voice yelled, ‘Oh no you don’t, black bastard! Leave that alone!’” (22). Pushing aside the white layers is yet another image the author offers to illustrate the oppression that was dealt the black race by the white supremacists.

Why do these men – the white elites of the community – possess a need or burning desire to humiliate and disgrace the young black fighters? Shinn suggests that:

...the naked blonde woman emblemizes the psychic and social projections of her white male audience. She stands in for their own cultural fantasies as conquerors, performing their sexual desires symbolically on stage as they possess her in their mind's eye. She towers over them as the ‘white goddess’, though her debasement functions as a means by which they achieve their own sense of male divinity (3).

Shinn further proposes that the fighters:

...are actors along with the naked blonde woman in this carnivalized ritual drama (a psychic and social re-enactment of the stages leading up to the primal scene of lynching), for their own spectacularization and debasement symbolically instantiate for the audience its co-extensive beliefs in male divinity and white superiority (3).

Restated simply, the white men’s reaction to the naked blonde symbolizes their fanatical need to dominate

women, and the “actors” in this circus drama abstractly represent the warped attitude of white men (note; not white men *and* white women) that they are godly, superior persons to their black counterparts – not dissimilar to the circus world’s distinction of the ring-master’s sovereignty over the performing domesticated animals.

The bloody fighting ensues. “Everyone fought hysterically” (Ellison 23). Finally, the narrator is one of the two remaining boxers, and he naïvely continues to acquiesce to the performance expectations of the white select. Eventually he is down for the count: eight, nine, ten... then he is lifted and dragged to a chair, bleeding in throbbing agony. As he sits dazed in pain, he recalls, “My eye pained and swelled with each throb of my pounding heart and I wondered if now I would be allowed to speak” (26). *How* is it feasible that he still wants to recite his speech to this blood-thirsty mob? Absurd! Though he “has tasted blood in his mouth, yet he persists in swallowing his bitterness and injury. Indeed, he is not yet conscious that he has been wronged” (Lee 467). Not yet conscious of his wrong? Apparently, he has not endured sufficient humiliation and abuse.

With their animal-like performance now (supposedly) completed to the audience’s satisfaction, the emcee, or ringmaster, calls out to the boys to come forward and collect their money. “We ran forward to where the [white] men laughed and talked in their chairs, waiting. Everyone seemed friendly now” (Ellison 26), he naïvely thinks to himself. Not so. As if the previously endured horror of the evening weren’t sufficient, gold coins and a few scattered bills are strewn about on a rug, and the young men are told “Boys, it’s all yours... You get all you grab” (26). On hands and knees, the youth unwittingly lunge onto the mat to grab for the coins, only to realize with excruciating agony that the rug is electrified. The narrator recalls, “A hot violent force tore through my body... It was as though I had rolled through a bed of hot coals” (27). He remembers “laughing in fear and embarrassment” (27) while the delighted white spectators “roared above us as we struggled” (27). As the young black performers try to escape the piercing pain of the electrified carpet, the men from the audience begin pushing them back onto the rug. They are not yet satiated.

The narrator describes what ensues: “I saw a boy lifted into the air, glistening with sweat like a circus seal” (27) – akin to a wet circus seal with a ball absurdly balanced on its nose – to the gleeful amusement of the crowd. The boys continue groping about in spite of the pain, trying in vain to seize their much-deserved pay while the white patrons howl in delight. At long last, the emcee (ringmaster) calls out “All right boys, that’s all,” (28) bringing an end to their scurrying, and instructing them to dress as he finally pays them each five dollars for their part in the evening’s circus act.

The narrator, disappointed and despairing at not having been allowed to give his speech, begins exiting the venue, and is suddenly beckoned to return; he will finally be allowed to present his beloved speech! The emcee knocks on a table for quiet, and patronizingly announces: “Gentlemen...we almost forgot an important part of the program. A most serious part...This boy was brought here to deliver a speech....I’m told that he is the smartest boy we’ve got out there... he knows more big words than a pocket-sized dictionary” (29). The “crack about the ‘pocket-sized dictionary’ undermines [his] academic accomplishments” (Lee 466). He is still being disparaged and denigrated by the white sovereignty that possesses a crushing need to tower above him, both intellectually and as a race. “Such an introduction is more befitting a vaudeville performer than an earnest orator” (466). In spite of the condescending introduction, the protagonist narrator still longs to recite his speech to this contemptible bunch. Where is his sense of pride? Is there no limit to his tolerance of personal exploitation? What price for his precious speech?

In front of the blood-thirsty crowd of mocking and laughing white men, he slowly begins his discourse. As he recites his words of hope and inspiration for the young of his black race, the white listeners laugh and talk amongst themselves, either ignoring or jeering him. Even his “long-awaited speech becomes another act in this grotesque minstrel show” (466). His words fall on ignorant, deaf ears. There would be no end to the shame and humiliation under the big top.

At long, long last, there is a slight glimpse of realization, an almost-epiphany by the nameless protagonist. Reflecting back, he tells:

I was looking for myself and asking everyone except myself questions which I, and only I, could answer. It took me a long time and much painful boomeranging of my experiences to achieve a realization everyone else appears to have been born with: That I am nobody but myself (Ellison 15).

One speculation about his epiphany is that he has journeyed “from naïve ignorance to experience and knowledge, from a man defined by the white world to one who... begins to have a sense of self-definition” (“Ralph Ellison”). Another submission is that he “moves from innocence to experience, darkness to light, from blindness to sight” (“Ralph (Waldo) Ellison” 3). Both of these analyses are valid, but perhaps the best supposition is by Ellison himself: he (the narrator) is “a character who possesses both the eloquence and the insight into the inter connections between his own personality and the world about him to make a judgment upon our culture” (Jackson 370). What possible judgment or sentiment could the narrator derive from his ill treatment by a cruel, abusive culture dominated by white men acting out of ignorance and fear? Perhaps the answer is reflected in a circus metaphor presented as the horrific story draws near conclusion.

As the young black combatant (narrator’s) oration draws to a close, the spectators shout “Louder! Louder!” (Ellison 29) as if trying to entice a tiger to roar: a ferocious tiger, once a great, majestic beast, now reduced to a shackled, beaten and trained circus-performing creature. This is the imagery presented by Ellison as an allegory for the young black men of the mid-1900s, who felt demoralized and intimidated by, and powerless against, their white counterparts. The humiliation and mistreatment endured by the previously wild, free and dignified animals of the circus is very similar in mood and feeling to the degraded, horrified and loathed young black men portrayed in Ellison’s “Battle Royal.”

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Evaluation: *Loacker successfully interprets Ellison's use of circus imagery as an indictment of society's views and treatment of African-Americans.*

A New Moral

Luz M. Lopez

Course: English 101 (Composition)

Instructor: Kurt Hemmer

Assignment:

Explain Nietzsche's high regard for art and whether or not you agree with him.

How should we live our lives? How can we get the most out of our existence? For many thinkers, the key to happiness is to live according to the moral values that society, largely influenced by Christianity, has imposed on humankind, preventing us from *suffering* and hurting each other. However, for Friedrich Nietzsche, living like this is something that we can hardly call "living," for it would suffocate our most intimate desires of freedom and passion. Nietzsche, an existentialist, spent most of his life trying to prove that in order to live a meaningful life in this chaotic world of suffering, it is essentially important to find satisfaction from within ourselves rather than from outside. He emphasizes that man has forgotten his irrational nature, his intuitive side, and has repressed himself from living a joyful, passionate life. As he states in his book *The Birth of Tragedy*, "my instinct, an affirmative instinct for life, turned against morality and invented a fundamentally opposite doctrine and valuation of life, purely artistic and *anti-Christian*" (9). Nietzsche supports his doctrine by analyzing the suffering of the Greeks. According to Nietzsche, art, specifically, Greek tragedy, was an excellent way of dealing with the suffering of the world, while music was the soul of the tragic myth, which has the power to access the individual in a direct way since it is a universal language. As Alexander Nehamas in his book, *Nietzsche's Life as Literature*, describes Nietzsche's point of view, "art appears to draw people away from life, to depict utter failure, only to show that life is worth living nonetheless" (120). Nietzsche is right when he affirms that, in order to live a *true* existence, people must dare to frequently experience the Dionysian, which allows them to lose themselves, and thus to grow beyond their suffering instead of being primarily in the Apollonian realm.

In order to understand the dichotomy between Apollo and Dionysus, it is important to distinguish one of the central themes of Nietzsche's philosophy. It is related to the balance that must exist between the Apollonian and Dionysian states in order to live a meaningful life. Nietzsche refers to the art manifested in Greek tragedy since he finds that its music is the embodiment of Dionysus. Through music, people can experience intense, ecstatic happiness while it takes them beyond individual concerns. On the contrary, according

to Nietzsche, people under the influence of Apollo, do not seem to be aware that they are living in a chaotic world full of suffering due to the appearances, “the beautiful illusions” they have managed to fabricate around them. While Apollo represents the state of harmony and restraint embodying the power of critical reason, Dionysus represents the ecstatic and irrational nature displaying creative and intuitive power. Nietzsche believes that the appreciation of art, especially music, leads to a more exuberant, passionate life since it can have a transformative power, turning suffering into pleasurable illusions. According to the book *Nietzsche Within Your Grasp*, Nietzsche argues that the “Continuous development of art is bound up with the Apollonian and Dionysian duality” (qtd. in O’Hara 26). Moreover, Nietzsche goes on to say that these two realms “continually incite each other to new and more powerful births” (qtd. in O’Hara 26).

However, for an individual who is aggressively limited by the Christian strict canon of morality, it seems a little difficult to be able to *lose himself*, to break those heavy chains and superimpose a new set of values according to the new vision that this Apolline and Dionysian duality can offer. Nietzsche reacts to this when in his book *The Birth of Tragedy*, he states, “From the start Christianity was, essentially and fundamentally, the embodiment of disgust and antipathy for life, merely disguised, concealed, got up as the belief in an ‘other or a ‘better’ life” (9). For many, moral Christianity is mostly the reflection of a life full of prohibitions, fear to act, and doubt while in submission, for men sometimes do not know what would be the right thing to do: to live or to pretend living. On the other hand, some people believe that this is the only life they have and they want to make the most of it; they want to live their life *boldly*. This is something that Nietzsche could agree with. According to the book *Friedrich Nietzsche, Modern Critical Views*, he states, “Every human is a one-time miracle....The human who does not want to belong to the mass need only cease to be comfortable with himself: let him follow his conscience, which calls out to him: ‘Be yourself!’” (qtd. in Bloom 169).

It is true that when freedom is limited or denied from exterior sources, or suppressed from within by fear or

anxiety, people may surrender to these forces or otherwise, they might become restless and rebellious. On the contrary, if men allow themselves to release the inner passion, the desires of the spirit, then they are taking the opportunity to turn their existence into a meaningful life. As an existentialist, Nietzsche stresses the importance of the individual and the fulfillment of the individual’s needs in order to be a greater person. In the book *Nietzsche Within Your Grasp*, Nietzsche asks, “‘What does your conscience say?’ and then answers, ‘You must become who it is that you are’”(qtd. in O’Hara 45). Once people dare to liberate themselves from the restrictions imposed from the outside, they are permitting the Dionysian realm to enter their life. At the same time, they are maintaining an internal balance weighing reason, the Apolline essence, against irrational actions.

Accordingly, when a man sees himself as a lonely person living in this world of chaos, he would think he is the only one that is suffering and will not find much meaning in existence, for even when he is in the realm of Apollo’s beautiful appearances and thus able to live a peaceful life despite the disturbances of existence, he still can not take away the pain. However, when the Dionysian essence enters the territory, men can feel as a whole, “as one,” and undivided, joined to the souls of so many others, allowing people to set aside their existential suffering and to experience, at least for a moment, a unity and harmony with life. Nietzsche emphasizes this Apolline and Dionysian duality when he describes it in his book *The Birth of Tragedy*: “on the one hand [this duality can be perceived] as the world of dream images, whose perfection is not at all dependent on the intellectual accomplishments or artistic culture of the individual; on the other as an ecstatic reality, which again pays no heed to the individual, but even seeks to destroy individuality and redeem it with a mystical sense of unity” (18). This experience of unity gives us the hope, the confidence that life is worth living and that loneliness, suffering, and other hostile aches can be transcended. Nietzsche believes that in order to attain this state of oneness or as he calls it, the state of “primordial unity,” a condition that goes beyond any barrier, one must surrender to the Dionysian intoxication. Since according to Nietzsche, music is able to access the force of will that

produces the images of reality, then it is through the spirit of music that a man can experience joy in the individual crisis of life.

For many, following Nietzsche's philosophy might seem extremely difficult since the first step is to start by liberating themselves from centuries of moral repression. However, whether unconscious or consciously, having extreme experiences of oneness is something that people look forward to. Such moments may come, as Nietzsche points out, during a profound encounter with art or specifically with music. Of course, as Muriel and John James state in their book *Passion for Life*, "No one is able to have peak experiences [oneness] on demand or as often as desired, yet people with a passion for life experience more peak moments than those who rein in the powers of their inner urges" (172).

Nietzsche went on to describing a completely different vision of what it means to live and to enjoy living facing a hostile world. Even though his writings appear disturbing to many, Nietzsche, after almost a century from his death, continues to be a big influence on contemporary thought. Still, some people find it difficult to break free from an imposed reality, for passivity can be a lifesaver. However, as Kabir, an Indian religious mystic and poet asks, "If you don't break your ropes while you are alive, do you think ghosts will do it after?" (qtd. in Cassou 136).

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Evaluation: *Luz does a wonderful job of making Nietzsche's difficult text approachable for her readers.*

The Pseudo-Poetry of Bob4

Bob Mackey IV

Course: English 222 (Poetry Writing)

Instructor: Anne Davidovicz

Assignment:

For the midterm take-home exam, students were to analyze aspects of their own poetry.

Over the years, writing has remained a staple of my existence. Even at a young age, both creative and non-fiction writing of all kinds intrigued me, driving me to hone my craft. Many writers experience some difficult upbringing, personal loss, or inner conflict; my life has been no exception. In response, I spent much of my young life in solitude, shunning personal contact with all but a close few. This particularly lonely childhood led to a very distinct inner voice that commands not just my personality, but also my idiosyncratic patterns and specific sciences (mapped out through eons of trial and error). It's hard to restrict myself, therefore, to any one style. Consequently, all my work tends to sound alike, at least in the sense that my poetry closely resembles my prose. As a result, I detect my voice quite clearly in my work; however, my poetry often can lean toward chopped-up prose.

To combat this problem, I frequently take to purposely limiting myself to a pattern. Ultimately, this form is to spur my creative juices and really get myself thinking. This, in turn, creates another common problem of mine: the form begins to cause serious narrative problems when proper words can't be located. A fine exam-

ple of both of these tendencies is the poem "Raspberries Lovingly Transplanted," a piece I've yet to workshop but have been considering. I wrote it during another class essentially because I'd had an idea for a metaphor involving a downtrodden bush that, in return for its rescue, now sits atop the grave of its savior (biting the hand that fed, as it were). After writing the first stanza, however, I had constructed a fairly complicated rhyming scheme; I spent the rest of the class period attempting to maintain the structure I had forged. There are fudges, to be certain, but here is the first stanza as an example:

Mark, then, this lonely knoll –

Not quite a hill, still, softly sloping –

Upon which sits this prickly, moping

Bark, its wood pitch as coal.

The scheme has an ABBA rhyme, but the A (i.e. first and last) lines rhyme both the first and last words (Mark/Bark, knoll/coal); in fact, the first word of each A line rhymes throughout the entire piece (Mark/Bark, Bark/Dark, etc.). In addition, the middle B lines feature an internal rhyme dividing the syllable count ("hill, still," "sits this"). The stanzas have a count of 6-8-8-6 syllables. All of the stanzas follow these rules save the fourth, which was sort of a breakdown in my strategy. I felt the poem needed more overtures toward my metaphor, and I had basically written myself into a corner. Something I pride myself on is my ability to effectively use my vocabulary; since an early age, I have won spelling bees and have demonstrated an expansive grasp of English in general. I dislike repeating words, and my efforts to maintain that prohibition run contrary to the best interests of the poem at times. The appearance of the morning lark in the last stanza ("Lark sings, morning heat ...") is – I feel – an obvious attempt to continue the poem's streak of rhyming the first A words.

Beyond that, the poem accurately portrays my somewhat rambling lyrical method. The metaphor is a tad strained, in my opinion, but my messages are frequently skewed by my obsession with expression. My fascination with language is such that I often find myself saying or writing certain things just because it sounds great to me (and I will go to surprising lengths to fit them into my work). In much of my work, I make use of alliteration and assonance to create a specific sound. This is far more

important to my poetry than keeping a consistent rhythm or syllabic structure. In the third stanza of "Raspberries," the second line is as follows: "She, in Ra's rays, May's rains yet bringing." While I personally prefer to pronounce the Egyptian sun god's name "rah," here I imagine the equally common pronunciation, "ray," to keep the "ay" sound bouncing down the line. I use f's to similar effect in the "breakdown" stanza: "Forcibly feeding fruit from flesh."

This is a common theme in my work, and fittingly, since I speak similarly sensually. Sometimes I fear people may find me pretentious, but it's really more for my own amusement than anything; I so adore words in all forms that I'll use any excuse to play with them. A perfect example of my overwhelming need to manipulate sound in this way is my three-part prompt, which I have included in this midterm (tentatively titled "Degrees," though I'm still thinking about that one). The common thread is a sexual history (though more outline than history). It begins with, appropriately, my first, continues through a string of fairly nonessential girls, and ends with a woman I have always felt quite passionately about. I had a line I wanted to place in this poem where in the (chronologically and structurally) last girl asks me ("him") how many girls have slept in my bedroom at home. The answer is 2, including her, and the other didn't share the bed with me (in fact, I was downstairs on the couch). The idea was to express the emotional connection beyond the previous two sections' physical connection (though, in fairness, I did care about [most] of those other girls – just not as much). As the poem developed, however, that exchange was entirely forgotten; my rather organic writing process (I'm a "go with the flow" sort of guy) led the piece down a more sensual, visceral path – one filled with more repetitive sounds:

Hot room made hotter as
Hearts beat beastly bruises
Into heaving cages.
Sweat glistens on listless
Limbs left bereft of life.

As a concession for myself, I included a play on the girl's middle name (Grace) in the final couplet. Still, my repeating letters are apparent. H, "ee," s, short i, and f sounds all make multiple appearances in this five-line

stanza. I also tried to include some hard, "tongue on palate" consonants in the opening line (d and t). Such construction is actually natural for me, and I typically expend little effort in effecting these expressions.

The entire second section is perhaps my best instance of this to date. It flowed so easily that I wondered whether or not I should keep it. I have a tendency to doubt myself too much, however, and after a few reads, I decided it expressed that particular sentiment quite well in spite of its playful quality (well, I say playful; words are always fun to me). I also feel this poem succeeds on a deeper structural level than my usual auditory pleasure. The first section is more complicated in rhythm (and less linguistically flowing), and it gave me the impression of a stilted, anxious moment. The second part is brief, blunt, and dismissive. Finally, the last section has a pleasing sensual quality the previous two lack (as well as a simple rhythm). In this respect, I believe the piece succeeds not only thematically and tonally, but also exhibits my typical flair.

Since I do try to avoid repeating myself (alliteration and assonance notwithstanding), I will often take to more structurally nebulous work at times. I've included three fine examples of this. Strangely, looking them over now, they all appear to be poems of address. I suppose that my style is address appropriate, then, because when I write in this fashion, my intent is to sound natural. My writing tends to be conversational, even if I lean toward tangents and unnecessary complications. As a direct result of this, the poems lack a solid foundation. Instead, my line breaks appear wherever seems most appropriate for me at the time of writing. This, more often than not, correlates with its visual appearance on the page. If language were dead to me, visuals would be my second wife (after a respectfully long mourning). Sound would still be important, but without the language to create it, I'm certain I would become more concerned with the aesthetics of sight.

"Threats," another I've yet to workshop, is a good bridge between these two worlds of mine because of the brief appearance of alliteration near the middle. "Madness made man – / Crazy clothed in corpus" is the line I refer to here. Mostly, the poem veers away from this favored stylistic touch of mine. I kept a brief hom-

age to a band I enjoy in the poem as well because a specific song of theirs had inspired the work. The “four degrees warmer” is a reference to the song “Four Degrees” by Tool, whose song “Crawl Away” had gotten me thinking about telling someone off. While it seems somewhat out of place to me even now, I almost felt compelled to leave it; its connection to my name via the number four is something I rarely overlook as well (and the number, unsurprisingly, makes numerous cameos in my work – the workshop poem “Sin #4” leaps to mind, though it was a random number assigned at the time). Past my storied obsessive-compulsive fixation on the number four, music is quite important to me, and band references occasionally crop up. In fact, the term “lilting grace” in the three-part poem is lifted from a beloved Led Zeppelin lyric, and “Threats” is not Tool’s first foray into my poetry. Acknowledgment of my influences is important to me – almost obligatory.

I’ve found that, as suggested, Germanic words suit anger quite well, and “Threats” has anger in spades. There is frequent use of single syllable words and hard consonants. More interesting to me is my apparent tendency to curse – or use harsh language – in more casual poems. “Raspberries” and “Degrees” are both, at heart, romantic poems. Romantic poets are something of a favorite of mine (as is Robert Browning, which might explain my love of expression via monologue or conversation). When the romance melts away, my inclination is to bring out the commode mouth (and I do curse excessively in general; I’ve been trying to cut down). It’s not an attempt at adding realism, but it is real, if that makes sense. I lean toward writing my first instinct in such works because it helps keep my voice clear; if I work too hard to fit my message, I risk losing my personality to the concept. The best instance of this in “Threats” is the genitalia near the end:

Prove your sack size,
Your cock girth,
Your manly fucking
Self.

This piece gets a pass on my swearing cutback due to the rage involved. I completely refrained from cursing during “Killing With Kindness is Remorseless Crime,” and indeed, veiling disdain is the name of the game.

Again, the visual layout of this poem is what drove structure (the parenthetical statements representing sarcastic asides or thoughts are a clearcut example). The poem grew out of a situation at my job (I work at a Hilton front desk). My occupation obviously forbids wrathful confrontation with irate customers, since our duty is primarily to customer service. I wanted to express anger and frustration toward a person that likely brings the bitter taste of disgust to my tongue, and in my line of work, you do that by stonewalling the complaint. Obviously, you have to hide your intent to do nothing for a guest who has likely just insulted you, and providing an air of futility is usually the best course of action (the old “my hands are tied” excuse). All in all, I personally think the work is a triumph of thematic and visual elements, but it’s not my strongest work.

Another facet of my writing is my appreciation for dramatic tools such as irony. The poem “Plus, Lungfish Look Like Eels” is an instance where I am purposely misleading at the beginning of the poem. It didn’t begin as such, and the title is a reference to my inner debate about the necessity of such word games. I left it because it happened naturally, and my final argument for it had eventually devolved into finding any connection whatsoever between the lungs and male sexual equipment (including the lungfish’s resemblance to eels, another rather phallic sea dweller). The structure is largely visual once more, but there is a return to the sonic wordplay emblematic of my personal portfolio. Constructions such as “To test limits / Of total tolerance” and “But still you swell on cue” are indications of this. I also played a bit with the words “mark” and “left” nearer the bottom:

Death has missed
The mark
(Though not for lack of trying)
And he left a scar:
A mark to your left

Finally, the piece ends with my usual assonance on “one / Bum / Lung.” When it all comes down to it, my poetry can be readily identified by its structure – whether visual or lingual – and my rambling, tangential speaking style. My friends have long told me that my writing consistently sounds like it came from my head, and I’ve always felt that such a compliment is the best I could ever receive.

Raspberries Lovingly Transplanted

Mark, then, this lonely knoll –
 Not quite a hill, still, softly sloping –
 Upon which sits this prickly, moping
Bark, its wood pitch as coal.
Hark how once it stood there,
 Beneath the shade made cruelly cold
 By stolen light, fright'ning to behold,
Dark below leaves less fair.
Stark, the difference here;
 She, in Ra's rays, May's rains yet bringing
 Vigor and life, ride now with stinging
Shark-teeth, forgets fear.
His arms, so strong and gentle, rest,
 A savior held in rooted mesh,
 Forcibly feeding fruit from flesh;
 She saps on hands she once caressed.

Lark sings, morning heat
 Enticing men, when thus emboldened,
 To taste o'erripeness, her golden
Ark: lies, sickly sweet.

Degrees

I.

Shaking in the nervous darkness,
 He lies uncovered, exposed –
Gulping every breath.
Posterity requires clarity
 Of sense and memory to
Freeze a moment, like meth –
 Crystal
 Excitement
 On tap.
The door swings wide as she bursts in
 Stark nude, a condom in hand.
“Will unlubed Trojan do?”
“You tell me,” came cracked chorus,
 Two voices from one young throat.
“Still so sure you want to?”
 “Yes, ma'am,”
 He said then.
“Just cold.”

II.

Frigid nights and lazy days
Can cause malaise, a hazy
Maze of various gazes
On ceaseless ladies' faces
 All
 Blended
 Together
As one seamless, satisfied
 Siren.

III.

Hot room made hotter as
Hearts beat beastly bruises
Into heaving cages.
Sweat glistens on listless
Limbs left bereft of life.

Searing air bearing smells:
Testosterone Old Spice.
Estrogen Opium.
Languid honey mingles
With his seminal mess.

Lilting grace suddenly springs from sleep:
“I love you more than the willows weep.”

Threats

You'll do what to me face?
Can't say I believe you.
C'mon then, coward –
 Make a move.

Wow, I'm skinny.
 Got me there.
Keep up, if you must,
But know that I just
Will not back down.

At four degrees warmer,
My ass is still cooler than yours.
I'm not the one shaking in anger,
Legs all jelly,

 Madness made man –
 Crazy clothed in corpus.

The Pseudo-Poetry of Bob4

So come on then, big guy.
Call down your thunder
And shake me in my boots.
Prove your sack size,
 Your cock girth
 Your manly fucking
 Self.

I'll be waiting for your call.

Plus, Lungfish Look Like Eels

You are,
Without any doubt,
My best organ.
I don't think I've ever had
 A piece quite like you.
A doctor cuts you up,
But still you swell on cue –
Filling with rich,
 Iron-hard
 Blood.

Stronger yet in the face
 Of adversity,
You snap back ever
Eager to expand,
To test limits
Of total tolerance;
All too willingly,
 I comply.

Put you through paces,
Gunk up your pipes,
Treat you like meat –
 All this I do
 For you.
To keep you young,
Functional,
Spry as the first
– Breath.

Snot-filled,
Tar-stained,
Gouged out,
Thrice-cursed –
 I should dub you Timex.
Death has missed
The mark
(Though not for lack of trying),
And he left a scar:
 A mark to your left,
 Guitar-shaped,
 Dented-in.
You're born to rock,
So don't rock the boat;
Drowning's easy
 With one
 Bum
 Lung.

Evaluation: *This self-analysis takes into account nearly all poetic angles discussed in class. Mackey's discussion of sound is especially impressive.*

Memories of the Church Farm

Hannah McHugh

Course: English 101 (Composition)

Instructor: Greg Herriges

Assignment:

*Write a two and one-half page descriptive essay
about a place, a thing, or a person.*

There are some places that cannot be described in words, some memories that cannot be captured by even the most gifted pen. One of these places was the farm, a large piece of property in southern Wisconsin once owned by my church. The land was blanketed with tall, waving grass in the summer and with glistening snow in the winter. Thinking back on it, the Church Farm wouldn't have been all that wonderful to a stranger – just another wooded, ravine-filled area dotted with an old log cabin, an even older farmhouse, and a red, fenced-in barn which opened up into a chicken coop and crumbling machine shed. To most it would be nothing more than a forgotten farm, rusted from ill-use and old age. But to a few others and me, it was the best place in the world.

Even now, the very mention of Buck Field, Tirc Alley, or Lookout Rock gives me a rush of memories and sends me back to the days when my dad and I were there, facing the elements each November. It was then that our friends gathered at the cabin with bags stuffed full of blaze orange clothing and food enough to last us the weekend: the weekend of deer-hunting season.

I remember our times at the Church Farm when we were together laughing, debating, singing, and fellowshipping under the humble log roof and wind-battered barn, in the cold winter air and in the deer-filled truck. These memories are a part of us. Of all that took place at the Church Farm, I remember how I felt at the dawn of each frosty morning, when I had been awake for hours and was staring out the window, watching the last of the moonlight melt against the first streak of warm sun. On days when the hunt was successful, my cousin Rachel and I would stop playing with the horses and rush out to the field or ravine to help bring the deer in. Our jobs consisted of carrying at least two rifles each, while the hunters scrutinized how best to drag the large animal around the walls of thorn bushes and up the steep hills slick with melting snow and ice. The biting wind would whip against my chapped face as I would stand ankle deep in the snow-covered grass, waiting for the deer to be gutted. Rachel and I would struggle up the hill with the others, our gloved fingers growing colder by the second. Despite the chill, I would see a hot sweat bead up on the glistening faces around me as they grasped for the strength to go on the last stretch.

Memories of the Church Farm

Not until a few hours later would the work be over, the deer hung, and the massive, sliding barn door latched shut to protect the precious meat from the coyotes and farm dogs. The hunting party, tired but satisfied, would then walk in darkness along the gravel driveway to the log cabin, eager to thaw out over a bowl of steaming soup and harrowing tales.

But once, Rachel and I hung back, listening as laughter and footsteps all but disappeared behind the click of a shutting door. And at that moment, we were the only two people alive. Rachel and I walked side by side, the silence only broken by the sounds of our boots crunching in the snow. The still beauty was intensified as we looked above us. The sky was a blaze of light, its white glory making the snow around us coruscate.

Breathing deeply of the fresh air, I wondered if I would ever experience a moment like this again, a moment so perfect and so full of beauty. We walked up three steps and entered the cabin. Before us lay an assortment of muddy, black boots, and beyond that lay piles of discarded orange jackets, set aside for tomorrow's hunt. Excited stories reverberated around the kitchen table as our friends recalled colorful tales of adventure - freezing to their wooden hunting stools - and peril - getting eaten by ticks. They smiled to us as we entered, and I smiled back. Countless memories of the Church Farm filled my head, and I realized that it was not the place itself, but the people in the place, that made it worth remembering.

Evaluation: *Hannah's essay is moving, and the language is crisp, the images vivid. The memory she presents us with does not just sit on the page. It moves, has life, is alive. What I enjoy so much about this piece is how she combines feeling with memory. She relives it so that we may live through it with her all over again.*

Richard III versus Falstaff

Virginia Nye

Course: Literature 210 (Introduction to Shakespeare)

Instructor: Barbara Njus

Assignment:

Students developed a 6- to 8-page research paper to compare and contrast characters from two different plays studied during the course.

Four critical sources were required.

In *The Tragedy of Richard the Third* and *The History of Henry IV [Part One]*, Richard and Falstaff are outrageous characters. The Richard and Falstaff of these two plays use lies and deception to gain what they want. Why is it then that we are left cheering for Falstaff and repulsed by Richard's behavior? I submit there are two main distinctions between their characters that leave us feeling this way. The first essential distinction is Falstaff's capacity for love versus Richard's heartlessness. The other significant distinction is Falstaff's use of humor to deceive himself versus Richard's truthfulness with himself. As we will see, both characters draw us in, but we are left with two different feelings about them at the end of each play. Let's begin with Richard and his commanding personality.

Richard's pursuit of the crown is relentless. He will stop at nothing to get the crown and keep it. Richard lies

and manipulates, and when all else fails, he resorts to murder. Despite all his treachery, we find Richard to be engaging and are entertained by his prowess. In his analysis of *Richard III* Hazlitt describes:

The Richard of Shakespeare is towering and lofty; equally impetuous and commanding; haughty, violent, and subtle; bold and treacherous; confident in his strength as well as in his cunning; raised high by his birth, and higher by his talents and his crimes; a royal usurper, a princely hypocrite, a tyrant and a murderer in the house of Plantagenet.

(Hazlitt, "Richard III" 1)

Richard commands the play, and we are drawn in by his overwhelming personality. This is the way Shakespeare wrote Richard's character. Richard never lies to us; quite the opposite, we are his confidantes. He opens up to us from the very beginning. "It is Shakespeare who makes him [Richard] an engaging, heroic, and honest villain, one who opens his heart to the audience in soliloquies and asides..." (Ornstein 204), and we see this from the opening lines. He has many masks, but he saves his true face for us from his first soliloquy:

...Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous,
By drunken prophecies, libels, and dreams,
To set my brother Clarence and the King
In deadly hate the one against the other;
And if King Edward be as true and just
As I am subtle, false, and treacherous,
This day should Clarence closely be mew'd up
About a prophecy which says that G
Of Edward's heirs the murderer shall be.
Dive, thoughts, down to my soul. Here Clarence
comes. (*R3* 1.1.32-41)

There is no self-deception in his plotting; Richard "...does not lie to himself about his motives or about how he feels or acts" (Ornstein 210). Richard enthusiastically admits this self-awareness to us from the start. Clearly, his lies and manipulation are only for those who stand in his way, because he shares his plots with us from the start. In addition, Richard attempts to be humorous with us in his asides.

Nothing like Falstaff's general lightheartedness, Richard's humor is dark. His humor after he reassures George, Duke of Clarence that he will stop at nothing to

free him, is chilling: "Go tread the path that thou shalt ne'er return. / Simple plain Clarence, I do love thee so / That I will shortly send thy soul to heaven, o." (*R3* 1.1.116-119). He plans for the murder of his brother and finds humor in the fact that Clarence trusts him. This is not funny at all. Richard's humor is in fact a reflection of his dark and selfish character.

Richard is truly selfish, seeing only what he must do to gain the crown and never considering the consequences. Falstaff is also selfish, but it is with the intent of self-preservation, not doing harm to others. At the root of Richard's self-centered and selfish behavior is his heartlessness. How can a man who does not love be concerned about the suffering he inflicts on others and their loved ones? For example, after Hastings tells him of the King's grave condition, his concerns are all self-centered:

He cannot live, I hope, and must not die
Till George be packed with post horse up to
heaven. ...
But yet I run before my horse to market.
Clarence still breathes, Edward still lives and
reigns;
When they are gone, then I must count my
gains." (*R3* 1.1.145-6, 160-2)

Richard shows no feeling regarding his brother's impending death. He only wishes to prolong it long enough for his plot to unfold the way he needs it to.

Richard heartlessly orders Clarence's execution. Clarence is a threat to Richard gaining the crown and therefore must die. He is fully aware of his heartless actions. He arrogantly talks about his manipulations in an aside: "...The secret mischiefs that I set abroad / I lay unto the grievous charge of others" (*R3* 1.3.322-325). He is completely aware that his lies and manipulations are evil, but he believes them necessary for the crown. After Clarence is dead, Richard blames everyone else. First, Richard tells Edward that it is his fault that Clarence is dead, "But he, poor man, by your first order died, ..." (*R3* 2.0089). Then, to keep Buckingham seething, he blames the queen and her kindred for Clarence's demise: "...How that guilty kindred of the Queen / Looked pale when they did hear of Clarence's death? / O, they did urge it still unto the King!" (*R3* 2.2.137-139). In truth, Clarence would be alive if not for Richard. Richard

wants to be sure that Buckingham stays on his side. Richard wants Buckingham around to do his dirty work. The accusations about Clarence are some of Richard's manipulation in action. The usually savvy Buckingham falls for his maneuverings.

Richard is a great manipulator of people and situations. Following the King's death, Prince Edward is heir to the throne. We know Richard can never allow him the crown! Buckingham suggests to Richard that they should be the ones to fetch the boys. Not one to miss an opportunity, Richard sweet-talks Buckingham:

My other self, my counsel's consistency,
My oracle, my prophet, my dear cousin,
I, as a child, will go by thy direction.
Toward Ludlow then, for we'll not stay
behind. (*R3* 2.3.151-153)

Richard knows it is better for Buckingham to be lulled into believing it is his plan. All the while it is really Richard's evil plot unfolding. Richard has Rivers, Grey, and Vaughn imprisoned and will soon put them to death. This leaves Richard free to deal with the princes as he chooses. Along with Buckingham, he convinces the boys that it is safest for them to be kept in the tower. This will keep them tucked away while his plot has time to unfold. Now Richard begins to show the murderous side that we can't abide.

Richard turns his attention to Hastings. This is a defining moment; instead of lying or manipulating the situation, Richard is blatant about this plan. When Buckingham asks what they are to do if Hastings isn't in agreement with them, Richard tells Buckingham, "Chop off his head" (*R3* 3.2.193)! He convinces Buckingham that he will give him "the earldom of Hereford" for his loyalty, once Richard is King (*R3* 3.2.195). At this point, we begin to cringe because we know that anyone who stands in his way is going to have to die. Buckingham, however, is seduced by the promise of his earldom and carries out the plan. According to Ornstein, men like Buckingham are willing to take their rewards although they do not want the blood on their hands:

...Buckingham...would be satisfied with the earldom of Hereford – if he did not have to murder the Princes. Although such men bicker, backbite, and scheme against each other,

they leave the commission of murder, judicial or otherwise, to Richard.... (Ornstein 206)

Richard orders Hastings beheaded because he didn't see things his way. Richard then puts on a show for the mayor using Hastings's head as his prop. Richard dramatically tells the mayor, "So dear I loved the man that I must weep . . . o" (*R3* 3.5.24). Here is Richard using love again as he did when making a joke about Clarence. In truth, Richard has no sense of love, only of manipulation. Afterward, Richard and Buckingham manipulate the mayor and citizens by using fear as their weapon, into begrudgingly agreeing to crown him King.

Now that he is King, all should be well. Richard is never satisfied, though. "... Richard is not a man striving to be great, but to be greater than he is..." (Hazlitt, "Richard III" 1) and will never feel secure even though he wears the crown. It will never be enough for him, and we, as his confidantes, now know this. We realize that the boys will die because they threaten the security of his kingship. In this we do not want to be his accomplices. Richard tells Buckingham, "Shall I be plain? I wish the bastards dead, / And I would have it suddenly performed" (*R3* 4.2.18-19), in an utterly heartless manner. When Buckingham balks, Richard simply commissions someone else to carry out the murders. Richard then treats Buckingham with complete disdain and denies him his reward. Richard has alienated his last ally. We know now that Buckingham, too, must die.

In Act 5, the ghosts tally up all the dead for us. Prince Edward (Henry VI's son), Henry VI, Clarence, Rivers, Grey, Vaughan, Hastings, Young Prince Edward, the Young Duke of York (also a Richard), Anne, and Buckingham are all dead. If we doubted Richard's heartlessness before, the ghosts remind us of the toll. Richard almost reveals a bit of conscience at this point. After the ghosts visit Richard, he is shaken, and we almost think he will break. Richard regains his confidence and composure quickly, though. Ornstein describes this:

Seemingly surefooted in his ascent to the throne, Richard suffers an astonishing vertigo at the pinnacle of his career and regains his equilibrium again only when he touches Ground – when he fights on foot against overwhelming odds at Bosworth. (203)

Richard does falter, but he never breaks. He has shown glimpses of desperation and fear. He reveals an unseen side to us. We wonder, is he going to show remorse and repent his sins? No, he overcomes these temporary bouts at humanness. Still, he goes on to fight and die bravely.

We have been willing accomplices for most of the play. We draw the line when he kills the two innocent boys because there can be no justification. The others, while not necessarily guilty of heinous crimes, are not completely innocent. We wanted to be entertained, but we didn't want blood on our hands. Richard no longer entertains us once he is revealed as a heartless murderer. "Richard falls, among other reasons, because he is not enough like other men and women to know how they think and feel..." (Ornstein 207). His heartless ascent has left much debris in its path. He is unable to fathom the pain he has inflicted because he doesn't feel it. All his manipulating and lying do not give him the ability to feel. He makes grievous errors in judgment because he doesn't feel like other humans.

Falstaff, while not the leading man like Richard, is written in such a way that he too draws us in with his antics. Unlike Richard, Falstaff's humor, lies, and manipulation distract us from the unsavory aspects of his character. He is lighthearted and funny, and we laugh because he is carefree. Maurice Morgann says of Falstaff's endearing qualities, "To me then it appears that the leading quality in Falstaff's character, and that from which all the rest take their colour, is a high degree of wit and humour..." (Morgann 69). Yes, Falstaff is a coward, but he is also witty and funny. His humor is his deception when we are concerned with his actions. We find that "fun and humour account for and cover all" (Morgann 69-70), of Falstaff's behavior. Falstaff distracts us from all the unsavory things he does by making us laugh. We forgive him because he is also distracting himself from his most terrible qualities.

Falstaff's lies lack the malice and aforethought of Richard's (Hazlitt, "Henry IV" 2). Falstaff's lies are too outrageous to be heard, and yet we still listen. Deep down, Falstaff knows his dark side, and so do we. He attempts to deceive himself and everyone around him,

Richard III versus Falstaff

never fully succeeding with either. Hazlitt, in his analysis of Shakespeare's Henry IV plays, says of Falstaff:

... He is represented as a liar... and yet we are not offended but delighted with him; for he is all these as much to amuse others as to gratify himself.... The unrestrained indulgence of his own ease, appetites, and convenience, has neither malice nor hypocrisy in it. (Hazlitt, "Henry IV" 2)

We know Richard is malicious because he tells us so; we also know that Falstaff is not malicious for the same reason. Falstaff's actions show him for exactly what he is. Falstaff manipulates people and situations to save his own skin or to save face. Falstaff is a thief; this he does not deny from the very beginning. He goes to all lengths to avoid honest work. In act one, he tells us he is a thief, even saying it is his "vocation" (*IH4* 1.2.108)! This leads to Falstaff's comedic but cowardly behavior in the robbery scene.

Where with Richard we always saw bravery, Falstaff is never brave. Poins and Hal pull their trick on Falstaff and the others after the robbery. Falstaff is furious, but prepared as always with a story. He lies to Hal about what went awry with the robbery. When relating his story of the robbery to Hal, he changes his story so many times that it is hard to keep track of the lies. He begins by saying "A hundred upon poor four of us" (*IH4* 2.4.161-162), but then the hundred changes to fifty. Falstaff again changes the number to two, four, seven, nine, and finally eleven, all in his telling. Falstaff's "imagination of his own valour increased with his relating it [the story]" to Hal (Hazlitt, "Henry IV," 3), and he grew braver with every exaggeration. Hal admits that it was he and Poins who were the bandits. Of course, Falstaff doesn't come clean; instead, he attempts to manipulate Hal. Falstaff's explanation to Hal is that he knew it was he [Hal]:

By the Lord, I knew ye as well as he that
made ye...
Why, thou knowest I am as valiant as
Hercules,
but beware instinct. The lion will not touch

the true prince. Instinct is a great matter.

I was now
a coward on instinct.
I shall think the better of myself,
and thee, during my life – I for a valiant lion,
and thou for a true prince. (*IH4* 2.4.268-276)

He makes his behavior sound heroic and chivalrous instead of cowardly. Richard's manipulation of Buckingham was not funny, but Buckingham fell for it. Falstaff's lies are so outrageously funny that no one falls for them. We know Falstaff is neither heroic nor chivalrous. This is never clearer than when he speaks to Hal about the potential for battle: "But tell me, Hal, are not thou horrible afeard...oArc not thou horribly afraid? Doth not thy blood thrill at it?" (*IH4* 2.4.366-7, 370-1). When Richard faces battle, he is at his best and bravest. Falstaff is always scared and is always looking for a way to avoid honest labor by dishonest means.

Falstaff uses people to escape work or to save his own skin, but he is never wicked. Richard uses people, too, but he is always wicked in his intent. Falstaff uses the qualified soldiers when he allows them to buy their way out of service to make money: "I have got, in exchange of a hundred and fifty soldiers, three hundred and odd pounds" (*IH4* 4.2.13-14). He is left with poor, ragged men unfit for duty. We know that "their soldiering is a means to Falstaff's usual end, creature comforts..." (Videbaek 107). Falstaff is flippant when he tells Hal, "Tut, tut, good enough to toss, food for powder, food for powder, they'll fill a pit as well as better" (*IH4* 4.2.66-67). This would be an unacceptable statement from Richard, but from Falstaff we are willing to accept it. We would expect Richard to be brave in battle. When there is death surrounding Richard, we know it is usually at his hand. Falstaff's actions are unsavory, but he does it to make money, not simply to kill the men. According to Videbaek, "after Falstaff has confided in the audience how he has made money on the King's press, we cannot believe that any real men will become cannon fodder" (Videbaek 107). We would like to believe Falstaff wants the soldiers to live, but we know he will only make money if they are dead. Once Falstaff has led his pitiful bunch of soldiers to death, we are left shaking our heads, but we still like him. It is the fact that he is distracting himself with his humor, as much as

everyone else, that makes his actions seem harmless, even when they are not. This is exemplified in his soliloquy on honor:

...honor pricks me on. Yea, but how if honor
prick me off when I come on? How then?
Can honor set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No.
Or take away the grief of a wound? No.
Honor hath no skill in surgery then?
No. What is honor? A word. What is in that
word honor? What is that honor? Air – a trim
reckoning! Who hath it? He that died a
Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he
hear it? No. 'Tis sensible then? Yea, to the
dead. But will it not live with the living? No.
Why? Detraction will not suffer it.
Therefore I'll none of it. Honor is a mere
scutcheon—and so ends my catechism.
(*IHA* 5.1.129-141)

When Richard falters at Bosworth, he overcomes this fear and fights Richmond bravely. Falstaff has to convince himself that it is the better path to be a coward. He convinces us with the humorous way he views honor and bravery. When he is afraid of Douglas, we see his cowardice again. Falstaff attempts to convince himself his actions were justified:

... 'Sblood, 'twas time to counterfeit, or that...
Scot had paid me scot and lot too.
Counterfeit? I lie; I am no counterfeit. To
die is to be a counterfeit, for he is but the
counterfeit of a man who hath not the life of
a man; but to counterfeit dying when a man
thereby liveth, is to be no counterfeit, but
the true and perfect image of life indeed.
The better part of valor is discretion, in the
which better part I have saved my life
(*IHA* 5.4.111-120)

Falstaff has saved his own skin by feigning death. Then, he has come upon a way to look brave at the same time. He commits the act of stabbing Hotspur and contrives the lie about him rising up. Falstaff shows the brave, valiant Hotspur's body disrespect, and we cringe but are not repulsed. Even "when he has ceased to amuse us, we find no emotions of disgust" (Morgann 68). Falstaff tells Hal his claim to have killed Hotspur in battle. Falstaff's reply when he's told that Hal killed Hotspur is

classic, "Didst thou? Lord, Lord, how this world is given to lying. I grant you I was down, and out of breath, and so was he; but we rose both at an instant..." (*IHA* 5.4.143-145). Hal knows Falstaff is lying, and so do we. Just like us, though, Hal lets him get away with it again. In Johnson's description of why Hal needs Falstaff, he might as well be describing how we feel about Falstaff:

Yet the man thus corrupt, thus despicable, makes himself necessary to the Prince that despises him, by the most pleasing of all qualities, perpetual gaiety, by an unfailing power of exciting laughter, which is the more freely indulged as his wit is not of the splendid or ambitious kind but consists in easy escapes and sallies of levity, which make sport but raise no envy. (199)

While I don't believe Hal despises Falstaff, I do believe he needs him (Johnson 199). On the same hand, Falstaff loves Hal and needs him as well. Under different circumstances, a person would never get away with Falstaff's behavior.

It is a tribute to Shakespeare's brilliance that we are willing to let it slide. Not only that, but we understand why Hal does the same. We appreciate Hal's statement to Falstaff, "...For my part, if a lie may do thee grace, / I'll gild it with the happiest terms I have" (*IHA* 5.5.655-156), because we feel the same. Falstaff is unsavory, but his actions are not done with malicious intent. Falstaff uses humor to make us laugh at his follies. We root for Falstaff because he is not heartless. Over and over, we have seen him deceive himself as much as others. We cheer for him because Falstaff has a heart and seduces us with laughter.

Richard is a different story. He has carried out his plan with cold-blooded precision. We know the truth about Richard because he made us his confidantes. We are unable to forgive the final blow of killing the boys. We are glad that he is gone, because if Richard had lived, he would have to go on killing to secure his crown. His honesty with himself, as well as us, makes his actions even more morally reprehensible. In the end, unlike with Falstaff, we are repulsed.

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Evaluation: *A source on Shakespearean criticism quotes Coleridge from 1811: "It was in characters of complete moral depravity, but first-rate wit and talents, that Shakespeare delighted; and Coleridge instanced Richard the Third, Falstaff and Iago." Ms. Nye asks the question: while Richard III and Falstaff both act reprehensibly, why do we forgive and excuse Falstaff but not Richard? Quoting the plays and critical sources, she explores the characters' motivations and actions along with our responses to trace how the characters fascinate and draw us in to be vicarious participants in their exploits. She analyzes how Shakespeare tests and challenges our enjoyment, and how, as he shows us these characters, he shows us ourselves.*

Puritan Poetry and Worldly Affections

Peggy Rodriguez

Course: Literature 220

(American Literature Colonial Days to Civil War)

Instructor: Richard Middleton-Kaplan

Assignment:

Use any combination of poems by Anne Bradstreet, Edward Taylor, and Michael Wigglesworth to explore the topic of weaned affections. In the poems you look at, have the authors succeeded in weaning their affections away from the material world? What attachments, if any, remain? How do the authors feel about those remaining attachments and the spiritual need to transcend them?

Puritan poetry is indeed a rich and moving, if complicated form of art. It's complicated because even though the concepts and ideals in Puritan poetry are simple and sincere, too often the language found in this early literature is difficult for today's reader to grasp. It was colloquial for the Puritans; however, we find it archaic and even unrelatable now. This is a major reason the beauty and the message of this poetry are very often lost on the modern reader. These exquisite works can deeply touch us and connect us with our predecessors, if we have the patience to let them. Puritan poetry shows us the deep-rooted struggles of these gifted and passionate writers—the same struggles we are still engaged in now. These works show us the eternal struggle between the spirit and the flesh.

One of the major (if not the major) themes in Puritan poetry is the victory over, or the conquering of, the flesh. Why did our colonial ancestors take such serious issue with victory over the flesh? Why did they work so

diligently to break their affections for worldly things and their dependence on ideas and objects of this world? First, let us look at the term "puritan." The term comes from our predecessors' desire to "purify" the Church of England of everything under the head of "popery." This included hierarchy, ritual, church adornments, "superstitious" customs, reverencing the images of saints, and elaborate clerical vestments (Skipp 2). It is this desire that made them the focus of harsh persecution in England by Charles I. According to Francis Skipp in his book *American Literature*, "Puritans wished to return to more primitive principles, to simplicity, sobriety, religious earnestness, personal self-control, and to a more democratic church organization" (2). So the Puritans' desire to cast off that which was fleshly and of this world permeated their daily lives. They were driven toward purity, toward Godliness and piety. It's the main reason that so many of them risked their lives to cross a vast and unknown frontier of water to come to a New World. They wanted a new life, with a new church body, one of freshness and purity and absolute Godliness. Their hope was for a church that was obedient through heaven-mindedness and immersed in God's sanctification. So it is not a wonder that this quest for piety is seen in the Puritans' written work.

Although the quest for absolute purity in the eyes of God was ever-present in the Puritans, there was also the specter of reality that dogged them, the reality of having to live in the flesh until they are called heavenward. That specter, for the Puritans, hung around their necks like a millstone, and was inescapable. The battle between spirit and flesh was daily, and for the Puritans who could manage a quill, they portrayed it in their writing. Puritan poetry was not simply theology in verse—although that was highly valued—but a passionate expression of the Puritan's desire for a complete focus on God and His will. Poetry was quite popular with Puritans, and many also wrote it. It was seen as an art form. We must remember, though, the toil that the Puritan lived under, and therefore writing was not a primary activity. This toil, hardship, and belief system may explain the theology and sobriety in Puritan poetry. As Kenneth Murdock explains in his book *Literature & Theology in Colonial New England*, "Bred in a stern school, in which the hard work of daily living came first, the settlers of New England

had to relegate poetry to rainy afternoons. Thoroughly taught in Puritan theology, they knew that the study of the Bible and a constant effort to carry out its precepts were more important than even the most 'soule-satisfiing delight' to be had from literature" (142-143).

When we look at the first woman Puritan poet, and one of the most popular, Anne Bradstreet, we are nothing short of amazed. Having a household to run, raising eight children, tending to a husband, and all the toil associated with these endeavors, it is miraculous she was able to put down verse, and moving verse at that. We can only conclude that she was indeed a Proverbs 31 wife, especially after reading her brother-in-law John Woodbridge's preface to her 1650 publication of *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America*. He states, "...it is the work of a woman, honored, and esteemed where she lives, for her gracious demeanor, her eminent parts, her pious conversation, her courteous disposition, her exact diligence in her place, and discreet managing of her family occasions, and more than so, these poems are the fruit but of some few hours, curtailed from her sleep and other refreshments" (qtd. in Cowell 395). This is breath-taking to the modern reader, realizing what back-breaking labor the colonists faced from sun-up to sun-down; even more so for the women with children. It is no wonder that Bradstreet glorified God and turned her face toward Him as a daily exercise in seeking relief from the burdens of this earth. As a gifted and educated woman, she took pen in hand and put to verse her love for God, as well as home and family. As a pious woman—a Godly woman—she knew where her treasure laid, but also carried a passion for home and family, which is an obedient response for a woman of piety. Has she completely weaned her affections from things of this earth? Not completely, because she is a human creation, and trapped in a thing called flesh, with a mind and a heart and a free will. We see her struggle between spirit and flesh in her aptly named poem, "The Flesh and the Spirit." Bradstreet tells us in lines five through eight that there are "two" of her, one of flesh and one of spirit:

One flesh was called, who had her eye
On worldly wealth and vanity;
The other Spirit, who did rear
Her thoughts unto a higher sphere: [...] (403)

She admits right away that there is a struggle within her. Later, in lines forty through forty-four, she speaks of the vicious fight she engages in, trying to stay heaven-minded:

Thee as a foe still to pursue.
And combat with thee will and must,
Until I see thee laid in th' dust.
Sisters we are, yea, twins we be,
Yet deadly feud 'twixt thee and me[...] (404)

She has vowed to fight her sinful and earthly-minded flesh until death. Bradstreet takes this battle of the flesh very seriously, which is the Puritan mindset. She spends the rest of this one hundred and eight line poem illustrating her life and death battle to stay heaven-minded and God-focused. Was she successful in casting off worldly affections and desires? Well, she comes pretty close, as much as a human can.

When we look at her other poems of loss and grief, we see, for the most part, she does pretty well. In her piece, "In Memory of My Dear Grandchild Elizabeth Bradstreet, Who Deceased August, 1665, Being a Year and Half Old," we see her grieving the way through except for the last line, when she reigns herself back in, saying, "Is by His hand alone that guides nature and fate" (408). Again at the death of a grandchild we see her grieve, as in "On My Dear Grandchild Simon Bradstreet, Who Died on 16 November, 1669, being but a Month, and One Day Old." Of course it's tragic, but we also see Bradstreet expressing God's sovereignty and the need to be prostrate in sorrow, as in lines four through nine:

Cropt by th' Almighty's hand; yet is He good.
With dreadful awe before Him let's be mute,
Such was His will, but why, let's not dispute,
With humble hearts and mouths put in the dust,
Let's say He's merciful as well as just.
He will return and make up all our losses, [...] (408)

Given the wording she uses, we see an earnest struggle to convince herself—and perhaps others—of the need to take the high and righteous road in grief. She is using the words "let's" and "our" as a means of instilling fellowship in misery and righteous suffering. As a Puritan poet, this was her intent, no matter how successful she may or may not have been.

When we look at her piece "Upon The Burning of Our House July 10th, 1666,"²² we see her piety again. Of course she struggles with loss, as anyone would, and we

see this throughout this poem. She wrestles with the acceptance of this great loss, as in lines twenty-nine through thirty-four, when she laments the things that will never happen in her home. However, before this, in lines eight and nine, she calls to God in her distress, and in line seventeen, she call her possessions God's, not hers, and the last two lines claim her hope and treasure lie above. Is she talking herself through? You bet she is, just as surely as anyone else in her place would. It's called humanity. The strongest, most pious Puritan was still human.

Even male Puritan poets, such as the very popular Michael Wigglesworth and Edward Taylor, struggled with earthly affections, and these were rugged ministers of Puritan stock. In Wigglesworth's "A Song of Emptiness," he starts in line nine telling us how "things" are empty and untrustworthy, and continues in line twenty-two by telling us how they only ensnare (420). Wigglesworth understands how temporal objects are, and how faith in earthly goods is wasted. He drives his point further by telling us in lines thirty-one and thirty-two that if a man has affection for this world, the more he gets, the more he wants, which he reiterates in line fifty-five (420). This entire piece is wrought with warnings of the consequences of vanity, worldly affections, and greed, as well as admonitions of laying treasures above rather than below. We must notice, however, that Wigglesworth's warnings are focused on pride, vanity, and the gathering of material wealth. Nowhere does he admonish a man not to love his wife or family too much! Being a Puritan, he knows his Bible, which commands men to love their wives and treat them as fellow-heirs (Eph. 5:25, 28, Col.3:19, 1Pet. 3:7).

When we look at the work of Edward Taylor, such as in "Upon Wedlock, & Death of Children," we see similar grief and longings as those in Bradstreet. He starts off in the first line expressing his marital love, ordained by God, and continues it through to line six (Taylor, 480-81). So much for "tough Puritan." The rest of this piece is no less full of love for his family. Even in his grief, Taylor subjects himself to God, as in lines twenty-three, twenty-six, twenty-eight, and thirty-nine. "In pray're to Christ perfum'de it did ascend,...Christ would in Glory have a Flowre, Choice, Prime,...Lord take't. I thanke thee, thou takst ought of mine,...That as I said, I say, take, Lord, they're thine..."(481). Surely,

Taylor is in pain, as anyone would be, Puritan or not. But also, we see his cathartic process of letting go of his children at so young an age. Just because so many children died at that time didn't make it easier to deal with.

In the works of Bradstreet, Wigglesworth, and Taylor, we see the struggles they lived on a daily basis to stay heaven-minded. We see how they used the pen to work out and exercise their desire to relinquish earthly affections, to wean themselves. We see that although they deplored vanity, greed, and things, nowhere do we see them apologize for loving home and family. Whatever attachments these poets still had were to home and family, which to a person of piety, was right and honorable. Nowhere do we see these poets place home and family before or above God and their reverence for Him. They admirably wrestled with the sinful nature, which is what they were called to do (1Cor. 5:5, 1Pet. 2:11, 12).

These works are beautiful and moving, and they are relevant to the modern reader. In these works, we see the toil and struggle our Puritan ancestors endured in order to start a new, pure church in a New World. We would do well to read more extensively of these brave, committed, and passionate people, because these works are a rich piece of early American history.

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Evaluation: *The student humanizes the often distant, cold-seeming Puritans by writing about their emotional struggles with extraordinary compassion, sensitivity, and insight.*

The Real Value of Thirty-Five Dollars

Joanna Singer

Courses: English 102 (Composition)
and Literature 105 (Poetry)

Instructors: Kurt Hemmer and Greg Herriges

Assignment:

Write a four-page analytical essay about one of the prose pieces from our textbook. Be sure to fully introduce the work and include a thesis that is well thought out.

The Winter Dance Party Tour was the infamous setting for one of the most dramatic rock and roll tragedies. Dion DiMucci (of Dion and the Belmonts) recounts his memories of the tour and its tragic event in “The Winter Dance Party,” a chapter of his autobiography, *The Wanderer: Dion’s Story*. Upon the first reading of the story, I took the tale at face value; it was only after reading it again, with new knowledge of the circumstances, that I have broadened my interpretation to include not only the message of friendship and loss, but also the themes of honoring a friend’s memory, and finding oneself in times of desperation.

If the story is read literally, it follows the chain of events that lead up to the tragic climax of the story. The narrator, Dion DiMucci, recounts the long winter nights spent on the cold, ceaselessly broken tour bus when he and Buddy Holly would “climb under a blanket together to keep warm” (DiMucci 87). The story continues in this nostalgic tone, DiMucci remembering details like the event of Holly’s drummer getting frostbitten feet and jam sessions on the bus (DiMucci 88). DiMucci’s memories continue to create the image of the tour and his

growing friendship with Holly until the tour nears the date scheduled in Fargo, North Dakota. Buddy Holly, the Big Bopper, and Richie Valens boarded a small plane with the intention of reaching the destination early to “get a few hours in a real bed” (DiMucci 89); they did not, in fact, reach the destination at all. According to DiMucci, Holly had asked him to join the others on the plane journey, but that he had refused for financial reasons. DiMucci explains, “It sounded good, but it would cost me \$35. That was a month’s rent on the old place, a lot of money, I remember thinking” (DiMucci 89). By the end of the story, DiMucci explains his grief at the loss of his good friend as being “the saddest and scariest thing that had ever happened to me” (DiMucci 90). Through each of these parts of the story, DiMucci illustrates his friendship with his fellow musician Holly. He allows the audience to get to know Holly with him, and because we get to know him, we share in the same sorrow and loss DiMucci felt.

But teaching about Buddy Holly was not the only intention of the short story. Through his recount of the Winter Dance Party Tour and his friendship with Holly, the audience is invited to learn about DiMucci himself. DiMucci discloses a lot of personal information that could, at first, be perceived as having purely tone-setting or descriptive purpose. This information is actually very relevant in discovering the dynamics of DiMucci’s relationship with Holly and his individual personality.

One of these details is the narrator’s mention of the house and Buick he bought his parents (DiMucci 84). This bit of information, which could be taken as a mere example of the amount of money DiMucci had earned, is really a specific example of the pride of his personality. Not only was DiMucci proud to be able to earn money and support his family, but he is consciously compensating for the way he had lived his life so far. He says, “For me, it felt like a new beginning. Like I was replaying my life the way it should have been lived” (DiMucci 84), displaying his bitterness toward his modest upbringing in the Bronx. Another piece of information the narrator shares is his dependency on drugs during the time the story takes place. He considered his use of drugs to be a positive thing, even though he was well aware of the truth of his situation. DiMucci

explains the whispering voice (that happens to sound like his mother) that questioned, "If you've got it so good, why are you a junkie?" (DiMucci 85). This presence of his conscience is important in the process of understanding DiMucci; he may have a conscience acting as his compass, but he is not listening to its advice. However, the narrator's view of this mysterious voice changes as the story unfolds.

The details of DiMucci's upbringing and conscience play a large role in establishing the theme of the story when read beyond the obvious interpretation. As stated earlier, the reason that DiMucci did not take the plane with Holly and the others was solely on the principle that the one plane ride was the monetary equivalent of one month's rent. He saw this as too much of a luxury. This thought process ultimately saved his life; he did not take the plane that crashed, leaving no survivors (DiMucci 89). Because of the crash, DiMucci felt the extreme sorrow described earlier. What is less noticeable, however, is the overwhelming feeling of guilt in his words. DiMucci describes the feeling of as "like being let off the hook on a technicality" (DiMucci 90). He knows that the only reason he is alive is because someone else, one of his friends, went along with Holly instead.

This guilt was not the only effect of the crash on the narrator, though. The crash probably taught him more than anything else he had experienced on the tour. According to DiMucci, the deaths were "like a reminder that no matter how much I thought I was in control, I wasn't. The voice in the back of my brain got a little louder" (DiMucci 90). The deaths obviously had a profound effect on DiMucci; if all of those promising and talented young men could die in a (supposedly) fluke plane crash, he could only have imagined what could happen to a drug addict. The repetition of the voice, or conscience, only strengthens this theory of a possible epiphany or breakthrough in the narrator's personal life.

What is truly interesting about DiMucci's interpretation of the precipitating events leading up to Holly's death is the way in which it differs from other accounts of the circumstances. One of these is Waylon Jennings' version of the story. Many of the details are consistent from one story to the next, such as the conditions of the

bus and the concerts played, but beyond that, the narratives differ greatly. The main difference is that Jennings is Holly's good friend in his own account of The Winter Dance Party; furthermore, Jennings is not even mentioned in DiMucci's version. However, according to Jennings, DiMucci was not even in the running for a seat on that plane, as he recalls "Ritchie Valens and Tommy Allsup were flipping a coin" to try to decide who would take the last seat on the plane (Jennings 67). But despite these discrepancies, the themes of the stories remain true to the events and their consequences; the loss of a friend is difficult, especially when it is as unexpected as a plane accident. But without these losses, self-growth would be impossible.

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Evaluation: *Joanna presents a multi-layered analysis of the personal growth experience of entertainer Dion DiMucci as a result of the loss of his friends and colleagues, and shows how his own survival triggers a maturation process that probably saved his life.*

What The Witch Left: **Modern Fantasy for Every Child**

Megan Stemm-Wade

Course: Literature 219 (Children's Literature)

Instructor: Barbara Butler

Assignment:

Select one work of modern fantasy, and write an essay arguing that all children should read this book.

In 1997, Joanna Rowling published *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and took the world of modern fantasy literature for children by storm. Her enchanted world of witches and wizards and the wonderful school they attend inspired countless children all over the world to enter the realm of magic. But she was not the first author to charm children with stories of witches and magic, and in fact owes a great debt to one author in particular, Ruth Chew. Chew's many books, published from the mid 1960s through the 1980s, conjured a special place where ordinary children found themselves in the most extraordinary adventures. Her 1973 book, *What the Witch Left*, is a standout among her impressive catalog.

The story begins on an average day after school, when Katy and her best friend Louise decide to explore the contents of a locked drawer in Katy's room. All Katy knows about the drawer is that her mother stores some things in it for her Aunt Martha, but as she discovers the secrets behind each item in the drawer, Katy begins to draw her own conclusions about just what Aunt Martha might be. All children should read *What the Witch Left* because it instills a sense of responsibility and of adventurousness, especially for girls, while being whimsically imaginative.

What The Witch Left teaches children about the importance of taking responsibility for one's actions, a key lesson for the age group of the target audience, grades one through four. By taking the key to the drawer from her mother's room, and opening the drawer, Katy goes against her mother's wishes. As she uses the first items, the nylon gloves, she and Louise discover that the gloves allow them to do perfect, identical work in school. They inadvertently cheat in class by using the gloves, and learn that magic and school do not mix. This illustrates to the reader that one should always do his or her own work, and not use any unfair advantage to complete it. Later, when Katy learns that Aunt Martha is coming to reclaim her things, she is terribly afraid of facing her. When Aunt Martha asks, "Did you have fun with them?" Katy looks her in the eye and tells her that she did. Katy demonstrates honesty and responsibility for her actions, and has grown since the beginning of the story, when she opened the drawer and hid her adventures from her mother.

While promoting a sense of personal accountability in children, *What the Witch Left* also gives readers examples of two girls who have a strong streak of adventurousness and independence. They are independent girl characters, who are not reliant on the opinion of boys around them, a great source of self-esteem for female readers who are forming their own self-worth. Katy and Louise try each item in the drawer without fear or second-guessing their actions. They are confident and curious. When they discover that the battered old boots from the drawer are actually magical ones that can transport them seven leagues with every step, Katy and Louise are thrilled to try them. Their resourcefulness in devising a plan whereby they can travel together, using the boots at the same time, gives children reading the book a lovely illustration of self-assurance and intelligence. The journeys the girls take also illustrate a valuable message in cultural acceptance. The boots transport the girls to Mexico, where they meet a girl named Pilar and spend time with her in her village. Both Katy and Louise are completely open to the new experiences they have, sights they see, and people that they meet in Mexico. Reading this at a young age influences a child to explore his or her own sense of adventure and instills a desire to learn about other cultures.

Finally, *What the Witch Left* gives children an opportunity to discover their awareness of whimsy and to use their imagination. From the moment that Katy and Louise open the locked drawer in the chest in Katy's room, the reader is greeted with magical happenings and charmed moments of fun. Katy discovers that the nylon gloves that seem so ordinary disappear on her hands when she puts them on, and allow her to play the piano or sew more beautifully than ever before. This is a wonderfully fun idea for a child that leaves a lasting impression. An old, frayed bathrobe turns the wearer invisible (two decades before Harry Potter's invisibility cloak), which Louise discovers at a most inopportune time. A silver mirror shows the holder whatever they wish to see, and the girls are able to check in on their friend, Pilar, in Mexico. The boots, described above, provide Katy and Louise with their most magical experiences. With just a few hops, they travel from Brooklyn, south through various states and cities, meeting numerous

people and dogs along the way. On their second journey, they pack a picnic lunch, and then spend the day at the open-air market place in Pilar's village. The bright colors of pottery and flowers combine with the bustle of the market to delight the girls and the reader. The things they see are new and exciting, and they learn about how bargaining and selling happen, and help Pilar to weave mats and baskets. Through all of these magic events, the book is infused with a sense of fun and fancy that transports the reader right along with Katy and Louise.

Ruth Chew's *What the Witch Left* is a wonderful work of modern fantasy for children that every child should read for its nourishing gifts of whimsical fun, a message of confidence and curiosity in the outside world, and a lesson in personal responsibility. It is a perfect example of literature for grades one through four that winds its magical plot around a theme of valuing friendships and accepting the consequences of one's actions. The charming story and the very real characters will delight young children.

Evaluation: *Megan transports the reader to the magical realm of Ruth Chew's fantasy and convinces the reader that What the Witch Left is decidedly a book that all children should read.*

Soft Grass, Hard Times

Laura Tietz

Course: English 102 (Composition)
Instructor: Richard Middleton-Kaplan

Assignment:

Write a literary research paper, making use of the primary source and at least seven relevant secondary sources about the author's work.

A mother's hand and then "no man's land": nature, the source of great emotion among men. Because of these two extremes, the earth's consistency offers mental and physical support to those who seek it. *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque, and "Big Two-Hearted River," by Ernest Hemingway, both deal with nature as necessary for human survival. The earth is represented as the indifferent half of a symbiotic relationship in which man is the dependent factor. Without man, nature has proven to flourish, while on the other hand, man existing without nature is preposterous. Nature, in both the novel and short story, parallels the soldiers' mental transformations and shows how they derive comfort through the pathetic fallacy; however, each progression differs. In Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, nature is a constant physical companion that takes on many personalities; in Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River," nature is a constant comfort, stimulating mental rehabilitation and protection. In both cases, nature lends hope for the soldiers' survival.

Throughout *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the soldiers' transformations, as described by the protagonist,

Paul Baumer, parallel the changing role of nature within their symbiotic relationship. It is hard to tell which change occurs first: the physical environment, or the soldiers' perceptions of it. Nature was first described by Paul as "...his only friend, his brother, his mother" (Remarque 55). From there, it regresses to an apathetic stranger, and finally, Paul recognizes it as a clockwork decomposer that unifies the man with the land. Because nature is composed of an apathetic cycle of cause and effect, every affliction it bears has an equal consequence. Man, being the dependent variable in this symbiotic relationship, is directly affected by any destruction imposed on his independent partner.

With still a trace of innocence left, the soldiers plunge into their enlistment with dignity, and during their commencement, they still felt connected to the earth. Paul explains, "To no man does the earth mean so much as to the soldier" (Remarque 55). The familiar land supplies refuge like a home would, and in return the soldiers nestle in her constant protection and support. The fresh soldier continues in his praise of the earth: "He stifles his terror and his cries in her silence and her security; she shelters him and releases him for ten seconds to live" (Remarque 55). Because nature is, as previously stated, indifferent to humans, the soldiers associate it with human-like characteristics through the pathetic fallacy. The pathetic fallacy is "A term coined by John Ruskin to criticize the use of personification, in which human emotions are attributed to nature" (Morner and Rausch 163). According to Roger Rosenblatt, "Here comes the old irony of the pathetic fallacy: Nature does not care if we suffer in wars." However, in this stage, the land is still a symbol of life, a key to survival; because of this, it is a source of great comfort to the soldiers. Nonetheless, as the lives of the soldiers become more and more devastating, the available comfort from the land is ignored, and a new mentality arises.

Similar to Paul, the protagonist in "Big Two-Hearted River," Nick, experiences comfort from his encounters with nature. However, with Nick, the landscape offers a mental support system, rather than physical protection. The living river in the "burned-over country" provides hope for Nick's mental rehabilitation, while giving him direction, a wholesome distraction. As he works to

rebuild his mind after the war, he focuses on simple actions from which he gains satisfaction. In the words of Howard L. Hannum, "Nick seeks refuge in a safe, adolescent activity that does not involve the threatening emotions of the recent trauma" (4). His meticulous interactions with the surroundings serve as an anchor to reality. Through this he can rise above the dark pool of memories, rather than wallowing in it. "The fishing trip requires no choices or reflections, it poses no threat to the now-fragile balance of his mind" (Hannum 4). The mental comfort Nick derives from the landscape is implicit. Unlike Remarque, Hemingway never compares the environment to a loving mother; instead, he presents nature the way it is. As the text explains, "The earth felt good against his back. He looked up at the sky, through the branches, and then shut his eyes" (Hemingway 213). Nick's mental state results less from the pathetic fallacy, and more as a result of the era. With the Industrial Revolution in full bloom, it is no wonder that "an inchoate longing for a more 'natural' environment" (Marx 5) develops. During this time of technological development, the fulfillment of a simple life becomes smothered, and is forced to weed its way through the merging complexities of advancement. To a young man like Nick, such a world is extremely overwhelming, and far too advanced for him to contribute to after the traumas of war. Because returning home is already a foreign affair for the soldiers, Nick needs an unstructured lifestyle to reorganize his fragmented mind. According to Leo Marx, "This[...] gives rise to a symbolic motion away from centers of civilization toward their opposite, nature, away from sophistication toward simplicity" (9). Nature is a way for Nick to return to what he was pre-war, and to experience life before the urban flood. The peaceful cleansing found in the wilderness provides the recovering soldier with a sanctuary appropriate for his mental healing amidst a world that would let him drown.

According to Nick's situation, nature alters a man not only physically, but mentally too; in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the same concept surfaces. Paul mainly praises nature for its refuge and protection, not its beauty. According to *Novels for Students*, "For Paul Baumer, the trenches represent the antithesis of the fragile, gentle,

and ever-present beauty of nature" ("All Quiet" 8). Therefore, under the conditions of raging battlegrounds, the land is altered, but never surrenders the protection of its physical characteristics. Therefore, the change resides within the soldiers who surrender their associations of security for hopelessness and the fear of death. Due to the symbiotic relationship between man and the land, the destruction imposed on the earth directly affects the soldier both mentally and physically. When considering the mental effects of a cold, rainy day, and then comparing it to the condition of trench warfare, it is obvious why it would be difficult to uphold positive associations with the environment. Although the land is still physically there, Paul admits an attitude shift within his altered description of the earth as "the background of this restless, gloomy world of automatons" (Remarque 116). At this point, the earth did not remove its loving companionship – rather the soldiers remove themselves from hope. Now without a motherly personality, the earth becomes indifferent, inanimate. As explained by Paul, "...when the shells exploded the frozen clods of earth were just as dangerous as the fragments" (Remarque 271), thus leaving them perilous to the world around them. The daily devastation of war clings to their bones and weighs on their souls; in turn, the soldiers' mentalities parallel the condition of the faltering land.

On the other hand, Nick aspires to parallel his condition to that of his surroundings. The burned landscape from which he flees symbolizes the deteriorated mind of a soldier, and the river he seeks represents freedom and renewal. Nick begins to liken the landscape unto himself through his observation of the burnt grasshoppers. According to Hannum, "If the hopper can regain its former coloration, Nick may regain his pre-war health of mind" (6). Through these grasshoppers, Nick begins to relate to his environment. His hope in recovering from such a "burned-over" mentality is also derived from the earth's natural cycle of replenishment; it can be assumed, through common knowledge, that over time nature will recover on its own. Through this, nature presents an optimistic implication towards Nick's healing. As expected, his progress is gradual, and Hemingway hints at this wavering path to recovery with: "The road ran on, dipping occasionally, but always climbing" (Hemingway

21b). Through the positive companionship of the landscape, Nick is able to sustain the progress he makes along the way. The mental comfort Nick achieves is partly a product of the pathetic fallacy and faith in his own recovery. However, the pathetic fallacy cannot take full responsibility for such comfort. The world of industrialization that Nick returns to is a world of complexities, and there is no doubt that a young soldier would find comfort in the simplicity of nature (Marx 9). Nonetheless, the wilderness is ultimately indifferent to him in that it exists with or without his presence, and once again, nature is the independent partner in a symbiotic relationship.

Despite the obvious differences, a time comes when the land and man unite. As spring approaches in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, rumors of the war's end swarm the air; Paul is temporarily filled with hope. The spring season is a symbol of rebirth and rejuvenation, but ironically, the German troops do not undergo such a positive transformation. Paul explains, "Now if we go back we will be weary, broken, burnt out, rootless, and without hope" (Remarque 294). As it goes, the dead soldiers surrender themselves to the will of the land, and those left living find themselves without an advantage. Exhausted alike, the soldiers and the earth bond together as described by Paul: "Everything is fluid and dissolved, the earth one dripping, soaked, oily mass in which lie yellow pools with red spiral streams of blood and into which the dead, wounded, and survivors slowly sink down" (Remarque 286). The liquid from the land and the human body unite, as do the dead, living, and dirt. The earth continues her cycle despite the condition of the land; it, being the ultimate role model in recovery, does not mourn for its losses. The once loving hand of nature cannot return because the soldiers can no longer sustain such a mentality. "Through the setting, [...] Remarque demonstrates the ways in which the First World War profoundly changed the lives of a whole generation" (Henningfeld 2). As a result, the men consummate their symbiotic connection to the land with the submission of their bodies.

On the contrary, Nick tries to avoid thoughts of death. He does not want to endanger his life, and therefore, abstains from nearing the river's swamp. Nick encoun-

ters a side of nature that is not nurturing, but a warning. "He felt a reaction against deep wading with the water deepening up under his armpits, to hook big trout in places impossible to land them" (Hemingway 23d). Any rising fears may be detrimental to his mental progression; it is too much to tackle, too soon. In the words of Mark Spilka, "The fishing is tragic here because it involves the risk of death. Nick is not yet ready for that challenge" (197). Once he allows himself to sink into fear and his war memories, he may never surface. Hemingway uses the swamp as a warning on multiple levels. Not only is it a dangerous zone in the familiar river, but it can also be related to drowning in his own homeland. While Nick was away at war, America continued its industrial progression. Because of these technological advancements and changes in lifestyle, it would be more challenging for a soldier to find his place in a world already unfit for his psyche. Through abstaining from the swamp and the cities, Nick has a better chance of acquiring full emotional recovery to then ease himself into the new world. Because he is still healing, he is not ready to risk his life. Nick is not yet whole, and the war is not far gone from him. However, the swamp is not the complete opposite of the comforting scenic companion Nick is acquainted with because it provided a warning which may have saved his life.

Nature is the source of life for all living things. Because of the symbiotic relationship shared between the earth and man, its condition, consequently, has an affect on the human condition. In *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Erich Maria Remarque depicts the soldiers' mental transformations within the changing face of nature through the pathetic fallacy. The loving hand of a mother gradually surrenders to the apathetic cycle of life, death, and rebirth, as the men lose faith in survival. In "Big Two-Hearted River," Ernest Hemingway's character, Nick, turns to nature instead of the cities, as a mental regenerator. Its influences soothe the damaged soldier while providing subtle protection from further regression. Because nature is indifferent to humans, in both the novel and short story, comfort spawns from attributing human-like characteristics to inanimate objects through the pathetic fallacy. During this time of urbanization, nature provides for the mind what no invention ever

could. When considering all the destruction that human hands impose on the earth during the time of World War I and the Industrial Revolution, it is a wonder that it still has strength to give. If all humans share the same respect for the land as the soldiers do, we would find the world a more humble place. Again with the words of Paul Baumer, "To no man does the earth mean so much as to the soldier" (Remarque 55), for the earth plays the ultimate hand in returning home.

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Evaluation: *This essay is eloquently written and does not waste a word. Its secondary sources are woven into the fabric of the whole, and it avoids repetition by revealing one fresh insight after another.*

“Two Years of Shells and Bombs”: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Erich Maria Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* and Ernest Hemingway’s “Soldier’s Home”

Iya Tolpekina

Course: English 102 (Composition)
Instructor: Richard Middleton-Kaplan

Assignment:

Write a seven-to-ten page literary research paper using at least seven secondary sources.

As we all know, World War I was very damaging in many aspects, especially in human losses. Eight million people lost their lives during the war (Henningfeld 13). However, there was another kind of damage which was less obvious and which statistics do not always reflect: psychological and mental damage. Erich Maria Remarque’s novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* and Ernest Hemingway’s short story “Soldier’s Home” are both about the impact of World War I on its soldiers. Although *All Quiet on the Western Front* and “Soldier’s Home” have different settings, circumstances, and environments, Hemingway’s and Remarque’s ideas about the destructive power of war on the human psyche, their presentation of signs of posttraumatic stress disorder, and their view on the role of society in soldiers’ postwar adaptation are very similar.

Posttraumatic stress disorder, which was known as “shell shock” or “battle fatigue” at that time and was barely recognized as a real problem, is a psychiatric disorder that develops in response to a traumatic event such as threat of injury or death to the person or someone else. This term replaced “shell shock” after the Vietnam War, when the veterans’ problem of adjustment received proper attention. The first in the list of traumatic events is military combat (“What is PTSD?”). Among the symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder are feelings of detachment from family and society, alienation from culture, change in values, lack of interest in normal activities, melancholy, ‘emotional ‘numbing,’ or feeling as though they don’t care about anything,” and a sense of having no future (“PTSD”). All these symptoms, along with others, are descriptively illustrated in both *All Quiet on the Western Front* and “Soldier’s Home.”

While Ernest Hemingway focuses on the consequences of military combat, Remarque shows how soldiers gradually are being changed as they become more experienced in war. Remarque, whose setting is most often the trenches and battlefield, helps readers to understand what events and environment cause posttraumatic stress disorder. A series of traumatic events that leave scars on human spirit are reflected in the pages of *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The army trains soldiers to be “suspicious, pitiless, vicious, tough”

(Remarque 26). Soldiers have to adjust themselves to everything the battlefield requires in order to stay alive and not to go mad. "Continual watch against the menace of death," witnessing deaths, and killing deeply affects their psyche (273). Hunger, exhaustion, constant feelings of insecurity, and diseases are on the list of stressors too. Soldiers become "insensible, dead men, who [...] are still able to run and to kill" (273). Inevitable deep trauma makes it impossible to stay "normal" after the hell on the earth which the war is. Thus, soldiers are "men who returned home from the war utterly changed and unable to resume their roles in society" (Henningfeld 12).

At the same time, it would be unfair to say that Hemingway ignores what soldiers go through during the war. Using his "iceberg" literary theory, he implies much beneath the actual consequences of the war in Krebs' life. Hemingway explains his philosophy on writing: "If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them" ("E.H.: H. Quotes"). In this case, Hemingway shows the changes in Krebs and his problems in postwar adaptation, which suggest what he went through while being a soldier.

"The senselessness and brutality of war" as pictured in *All Quiet on the Western Front* leads to understanding the irony in the story of Harold Krebs (Henningfeld 15). He returns from the war alive and even unwounded. His homecoming looks like a happy ending of a war nightmare. But he is far from being cheerful. He has become way different from who he was before he left to the front. His internal world has changed. And, therefore, his hometown, family, and his previous life are foreign to him now. He does not have the same attachment to these things as before he left. As Henningfeld points out, there is "something much worse than death, and that is survival" (15). Unlike Krebs, Paul Baumer is not that "lucky" because death catches him when World War I is almost over. However, he has a chance to go home for a couple of weeks where he experiences the same difficulties as Krebs in dealing with the family, society, and himself.

The first sign of difficulties in dealing with people in Krebs' story is when he does not want to talk about the war. And that is partially a fault of society. He has a need to talk, but he does not want to tell just what others want to hear. Because he has returned two years later than other soldiers did, people have already satisfied their interest in war stories and now get bored with them. When he tries to impress listeners and forces himself to lie, "even his lies were not sensational at the pool room" (Hemingway 146). As the crack between him and indifferent society grows wider, he becomes more isolated from others.

Remarque shows a similar sense of avoidance of human interactions happening with Paul when he comes home. He "cannot get on with the people" because it is hard for a soldier to talk about war. It is too dangerous for him "to put these things into words" (Remarque 165). While it is not quite clear for a soldier what has happened on the battlefield, he has control over himself. The director and founder of the Emergency Services Trauma Specialists states that it is "difficult [for soldiers] to use meaningful words. Any statement to describe in words what has taken place is impossible. Finding the courage to discuss the matter is now beyond comprehension, no words are making sense to the Survivor, yet alone the listener" (Bennet).

Remarkably, both Erich Maria Remarque and Ernest Hemingway point out how different war looks for soldiers and for outsiders. The German schoolmaster, who never was in the army, does not respect Paul's view of war because it seems to him that his ex-student sees only "details," his "little sector." He talks about what "relates to the whole," what Paul is "not able to judge" (Remarque 167). Krebs, too, has a different understanding of war than others or, at least, historians. He is "really learning about the war" from the books on World War I he has found. Ironically, he has to read books to understand the war he was in. Obviously, it is impossible for soldiers to think about ideologies and strategies in the severe environment of the battlefield. They know only the practical, internal side of the war. While reading, Krebs thinks about his personal contribution to its outcome: "He had been a good soldier. That made a difference" (148). Soldiers want to believe in their importance,

and that they did not suffer in vain. Otherwise, people’s ignorance and indifference to a soldier’s sacrifices make the trauma even worse.

War also affects relations within the family. Both Krebs and Paul experience the isolation from their families, which is another common sign of posttraumatic stress disorder. They need emotional help and support from people who are the closest to them: their families. Unfortunately, soldiers’ closeness and poor ability to be in emotional contact with others is multiplied with the misunderstanding of their parents and siblings. Therefore, they become more introverted and detached.

The relationship between Krebs and his family is not healthy. His egotistical sister is busy with her life. She looks at her brother as a guy whom she would want to be her beau. Her baseball game is on top of her list of priorities. She tells Krebs, “If you loved me, you’d want to come over and watch me play indoor” (Hemingway 150). Krebs is apathetic to her. His mother, although she worries about her son, does not understand him. To be accurate, she never really tries. Her attention wanders when Krebs tells her about war. It’s more important for her to please her husband than her son as we can see in the scene with the newspaper at breakfast (149). She tries to convince Krebs that he has to settle down and has to be “a credit to the community” (151). “Mrs. Krebs is a sentimental woman who shows an indisposition to face reality and is unable to understand what has happened to her boy in the war” (Baker 181). She explains to him “how matters stand” (151). Krebs’ mother is doing her best to comfort and support her son, but she does not succeed, simply because of her foolishness and narrow mind. Krebs does not love her anymore, nor is he in touch with his father. “I don’t love anybody,” he states (152). “He is [...] attempting to defend himself against his depressed insecurity by erecting an intellectual barrier of serene detachment” (Allen 155).

Feelings of detachment and emotional numbness are present in Paul’s relationship with his parents as well. “There is a distance, a veil between us,” Paul realizes (Remarque 160). When his mother reveals her poor knowledge about the war, which is her son’s biggest tragedy and pain, she is “merely anxious” for Paul

(160). His father demonstrates no tact or understanding at all: “He wants me to tell him about the front; he is curious in a way that I find stupid and distressing; I no longer have any real contact with him” (165). Home causes “a sense of strangeness” in Paul’s mind (161). He feels nothing.

Veterans who suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder often feel alienation from their culture and its values. Paul and his comrades have learned in the army that “what matters is not the mind but the boot brush, not intelligence but the system, not freedom but drill” (Remarque 22). Therefore, values of an average person such as education, money, occupations, and reputation, are beyond the soldier’s comprehension now. In Remarque’s novel, during soldiers’ discussion of their potential future, Kropp, Paul’s comrade, says, “How can a man take all that stuff seriously when he’s once been out here?” (86). Relationships are based on intrigue, politics, and lies. According to Clinton S. Burhans, Krebs’ disappointment in society is evident: “Krebs is disillusioned less by the war than by the normal peacetime world which the war has made him see too clearly to accept” (190).

Also, faith, as one of the main values of society, sometimes loses its meaning for a soldier. There is no God for Krebs. “I’m not in His Kingdom,” he says (Hemingway 151). For some people, religion is a support and relief during hard times in their lives. As we see, this is not the way for Krebs and Paul. When Paul lies to Kemmerich’s mother, he asks himself, “Good God, what is there that is sacred to me? – such things change pretty quickly with us” (181).

Lack of interest in normal activities, reduced expression of moods, and melancholy are present in Krebs’ life. Days, free of events or emotions, smoothly pass one after another. His mind and soul are empty. He has no desires, no passions, and no plans. He does not have strength and energy to take any actions to rebuild his life. “What do you ever get up for?” Krebs’ sister asked him one day (Hemingway 149). The more simple life is for him – the better. He likes the girls of his hometown, but does not have courage to break into their complicated world. “He didn’t want any consequences ever again” (147). Calmness, rest, good food, and a bit of comfort

are all that soldiers want during restless years of trench warfare. And that leaves a mark on a soldier's lifestyle. Paul admits that quietness is unattainable in the front. Consequently, when he comes home, he prefers to "sit quietly somewhere" and alone, "so that nobody troubles" him (Remarque 168).

Krebs, Paul and his comrades cannot imagine their future, which is another sign of posttraumatic stress disorder. They are young and, therefore, have no life experience other than the military one (Remarque 86). After a long time of being a soldier, Paul admits that he "know[s] nothing of life but despair, death, fear, and fatuous superficiality cast over an abyss of sorrow" (263). Kropp, another soldier in *All Quiet*, says about the long lasting impact of the war: "Two years of shells and bombs – a man won't peel that off as easy as a sock." That is why Paul and his comrades find themselves confused and hopeless about their future (87). Also, a shift in values and priorities, attraction to the simple life, and lack of experience are the reasons why Paul and Krebs do not fit in the traditional scenario of the future of young men which Krebs' mother proposes to him. As Remarque said, "The war [...] had shattered the possibility of pursuing what society would consider a normal existence" (qtd. in Eksteins 337). Krebs simply does not desire the future other than a smooth quietness. At the end of the story, he finally begins to do what his family is expecting from him, but at the same time he feels as if he loses something precious that he just has achieved. And that is peace (Hemingway 153).

Erich Maria Remarque and Ernest Hemingway show that "the terror of the front sinks deep down" in soldiers' minds and dramatically affects their future (Remarque 140). Paul and Krebs, victims of warfare's devastating power, experience the same symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder such as isolation from society and family, alienation from culture and its values, avoidance of stressors, and attraction to quietness and peace. And, as readers see, society and family can make a soldier's postwar adjustment easier through understanding, patience, and appreciation of his contribution in history.

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Evaluation: *This essay brings together two important literary works about World War I along with an impressive variety of literary, historical, social, and medical secondary sources.*

Status Stole Her Soul

Andrew Tomenbang

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Barbara Butler

Assignment:

Write an original analysis of a short story.

Society is composed of institutions that often act like societies themselves. If the workplace is a microcosm for adults, then the elementary school is a world for children. Both environments, owing to their societal natures, can set arbitrarily determined codes of conduct and pass them off as common sense. A male employee must never walk into the women's washroom, and a female employee must never go inside the men's washroom. A sixth-grade girl describes a similar kind of behavior: "But at our school there were the two sides, the Boys' Side and the Girls' Side, and it was believed that if you so much stepped on the side that was not your own you might easily get the strap." This is the third sentence in the third paragraph of Alice Munro's short story "Day of the Butterfly," and the narrator's name is Helen. It is one isolated statement that illustrates a vast, transcendent message: people must adapt themselves to the whims of their surroundings. Such a notion is reinforced and validated by the sincere, as opposed to precocious, portrayals of the protagonist and antagonist of "Day of the Butterfly," both children. The result is a short story whose theme has been deemed its most salient aspect and whose acutely sketched characters also warrant attention. Considered separately or together, the literary components of theme and character as they apply to this story suggest that if there were one unifying, pervasive force to be found throughout "Day of the Butterfly," it would be conformity.

Although it only surfaces in its most concrete form during the second half of the story, the theme of "Day of the Butterfly" is succinctly and effectively conveyed. Myra, Helen's classmate, acquires leukemia, misheard as "akemia, or something" by another classmate, Gladys (238). She drops out of school and moves to a hospital in the hopes of finding solace. It is not to be, as she must endure a surprise celebration supposedly done in good will:

And we said, "Happy birthday, Myra! Hello, Myra, happy birthday!" Myra said, "My birthday is in July."

Her voice was lighter than ever, drifting, expressionless.

"Never mind when it is, really," said Miss Darling. "Pretend it's now! How old are you, Myra?" "Eleven," Myra said. "In July."
(239)

Miss Darling is the teacher of Helen, Myra, and Gladys, and the above excerpt exemplifies her bias for the majority over the minority. Miss Darling considers the collective happiness of the cheering pupils more important than the individual wishes of the displeased patient. Even when taken out of context, she comes across as nonchalant at best and callous at worst. A cynic would go further and assert that she is less a teacher and more a ringmaster, with Myra as her circus freak and the other students as her spectators. It could thus be inferred that Miss Darling does not mind being insensitive if it will guarantee her the limelight, and such is the theme of "Day of the Butterfly," that one gains popularity at the expense of morals. Miss Darling is not the true obstacle to Myra's protagonist, however.

The actual antagonist is narrator Helen, whose true intentions do not become clear until the last section of the story. This portion involves only her and Myra, but what it sacrifices in quantity of characters it compensates in quality of characterization:

[Myra] picked up a leatherette case with a mirror in it, a comb and a nailfile and a natural lipstick and a small handkerchief edged with gold thread. I had noticed it before. "You take that," she said. (240)

I didn't want to take the case now but I could not think how to get out of it, what lie to tell. I'll give it away, I thought, I won't ever play with it. I would let my little brother tear it apart. (241)

Instead of accepting Myra's offer and strengthening their relationship, Helen chooses to reject both the gift and the giver. Whatever positive feelings that they may have had toward one another on a personal level do not matter. If the other classmates found out that Helen was treating Myra as a friend instead of as a display, then not only would they continue ostracizing the latter, but they would also shun the former. "Attitude in public supersedes private emotions" is the unspoken motto followed by this society of schoolchildren, and it serves as Helen's motivation for betraying Myra. The story ends as Helen leaves the hospital and envisions Myra

"prepared to be set apart for legendary uses, as she was even in the back porch at school" (246). Despite the tone of remorse in these final clauses, Helen knows that she must suppress her guilt to keep her reputation.

"Day of the Butterfly" is a short story with an enigmatic, magical title dispelled by a dreary, naturalist atmosphere. Most of the characters are children, yet the ways in which they interact with one another are anything but wholesome. Here is an environment rife with hierarchy, histrionics, and humiliation, all under the guise of a functional elementary school. It is a juvenile society with most of adulthood's vices and few of its virtues. A woman and a girl show disrespect toward an ailing pupil whom the other students regard as a novelty rather than as a person. In doing so, Miss Darling and Helen preserve their reputations at the cost of their morality. Thus did status steal her soul, since both are female. It remains to be seen whether either can retrieve it.

Evaluation: Andrew writes a compelling interpretation of Alice Munro's "Day of the Butterfly." His insightful analysis of theme and character is enhanced by his sophisticated style.

Prufrock Is in the Closet: Why Aristotle Is Concerned

Michael Webb

Courses: English 102 (Composition)
and Philosophy 115 (Ethics)

Instructors: Andrew Wilson and John Garcia

-- Assignment:

*Write an essay that somehow
blends together the two courses.*

Great literature, art, and media allow for multiple interpretations; people will have their differing perceptions, whether valid or not, and whether reasonable or wildly irrational. A very apt example of this would be the popularity of the book *The Da Vinci Code*, by Dan Brown. While it is, for some, a simple yet fun piece of historical fiction, many others have perceived the work as a means to undermine the foundation of religious belief: that is not the "wrong" way to read Brown's book, but obviously it represents a strict opinion shared not by all readers but, rather, by a sub-section of readers who might carry an agenda. Again, reading X or interpreting Y through a particular, personal lens is not necessarily a flawed or even unhealthy way to perceive the world, so long as we remain aware of and open about our prejudices.

T. S. Eliot's poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," is certainly a work that can, when held up to

the light, be viewed in numerous ways, and I hope to uncover a not-so-popular way of understanding the poem's central character, Prufrock himself, who struggles (ultimately without success) to rise above his own insecurities and actually make a change in his life. The reader who looks just beyond the surface level can see that Eliot's remarkable poem contains *more*: more than just a quiet man's failure to speak his mind and chart a new course. Specifically, the central character struggles with his sexuality, his (potential) homosexuality. Here, I wish to offer my reader an interpretation of the poem's likely portrait of a man's alternative sexuality, and I wish to use Aristotle to understand why Prufrock is unhappy and unable to fulfill his desires.

In the opening lines of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," the main figure, Prufrock, seems altogether ambitious and hopeful, almost as if the world is his, as he says, "Let us go then, you and I, / When the evening is spread out against the sky" (1-2). The work begins with hope and optimism, yet reading only the third line, the reader understands that this optimism ends in something like sarcasm: "Like a patient etherized upon the table" (3). Eliot could have used another simile, any other adjectives, any other means to portray hope and ability, but instead he pairs the image of hope with something that is mechanical and almost dehumanizing. And while it may be a common notion that hope can overcome all, Eliot uses the contrast in the poem's first three lines to show a sense of irony and the invalidity of this idea.

Throughout the poem, Prufrock contemplates his actions toward the universe and whether or not he can rise above his own self. Thus, this makes him the central protagonist *and* the central antagonist in the poem. Prufrock is his own worst enemy and projects what he dislikes about himself unto other people, this disdain of inaction and twiddling away the days: "Time for you and time for me, / And time yet for a hundred indecisions, / And for a hundred visions and revisions, / Before the taking of a toast and tea" (30-34). He uses that phrase in context with his dislike of the women that surround him and the art they talk about. That passage encompasses not only his own distaste for other people acting superficial and shallow but also his proficient

ability to day-dream goals that have absolutely no action behind them; Prufrock views accomplishment as getting rid of this shallow, vain existence of art and tea. In a sense, just because a person is high in society, this does not mean that his life is somehow elevated or altogether happy. As will be seen later, Prufrock uses this vain existence as a means to escape his innermost desire of having to express his sexuality safely and soundly.

Prufrock keeps wondering: “‘Do I dare?’ and ‘Do I dare?’” (38). “Prufrock’s repetitions reveal his anxieties: ‘Do I dare?’; ‘how should I presume?’; ‘I have known them all’” (Ellis n.p.a.). With this anxiety and questioning, it is almost as if he becomes more and more afraid of the possible answer. This leads him towards regression and fear. The whole notion of “‘Do I dare?’” could be interpreted as contemplating whether or not he should make new friends, find a new social setting, or actually express an alternative sexuality. First, he contemplates the universe in general, but seeing that this is too much to grasp, he then lowers his goal to thinking about asking out a woman. This again seems to scare him to the point to where he finally resorts to wondering whether or not he should eat a peach. There is a vast difference in significance between changing the world itself and believing that eating a peach will somehow have the same effect.

There is almost a sense that Prufrock wants someone to cheer him on, as to say, “Go on . . . eat that peach. Eat that peach with all the vigor and passion of the greatest rulers. Eat that peach and fear not its juice or ability to stain your white clothes. Eat that peach not daintily but rather upon the ocean, where the fierceness of nature collides with your rebellion against proper snacking habits!” Yet Prufrock is not able even to do that; it is as if the entire world and his life will head toward the better if that peach is eaten, and even that is too far of a stretch. While Prufrock debates fiercely within himself, the fear and insecurity prevails. He cannot find the strength to overcome his greatest enemy, himself, and through this, he perpetuates his vain and shallow life. And midway through the poem, there is this sense of futility and confusion. Prufrock knows he has desire, and knows that he needs to do something about it, but yet is perplexed as to how to go about doing it. “When

I am pinned and wriggling against the wall, / Then how should I begin / To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways? / And *how* should I presume?” (58-61).

With Prufrock pinned against a wall, unable to move and evolve as he should, Aristotle’s philosophy comes into play as a good means to understand why Prufrock is unhappy. Essentially, Aristotle believes that happiness is derived from fulfilling our human function and performing it well. “Men’s conception of the good or of happiness may be read in the lives they lead” (Aristotle 80). Aristotle makes this connection through the fact that a person leading a good or happy life actively cultivates his or her virtues. Thus, leading a life that cultivates virtue creates the ability to fulfill the human function well, and through this, to be happy. For example, the happy person could easily show integrity, courage, compassion, and charity. These qualities in turn can make the person a more productive member of society and allow him or her the joys of companionship. The latter stated traits are all qualities that someone is not inherently born with. The individual actively develops those virtues as a means to fulfill his/her function as a human. As a result of being a better human for developing those traits, this individual is able to help other people gain strong companionship, be content with him or herself, and thus to be happy. Our human function then becomes using reason as a means to direct how we think and thus act (Garcia). And Prufrock *does* do this to a certain degree. He understands that he needs to change, that the current life he is living is not the best one he could be having. His reasoning then sparks the ember of action; he has thoughts of actually changing, but he does not do this well. This is the most important part of what Aristotle states: that it is not only important to fulfill our human function, but to do it well. And if it is not done well, the life will not be one filled with happiness.

Thus, performing our human function well entails the need to develop our virtues, virtues not in the moral sense but in the sense of being an “excellent” person (Garcia). And gaining that virtue, gaining that kind of excellence, requires that an individual act or think in ways that then are perceived as being virtuous. If a person wants the virtue of honor, he or she should then act in ways that are honorable. If a person would like the

Prufrock Is in the Closet: Why Aristotle Is Concerned

virtue of compassion, then that person should act in a way that is compassionate. And through being a virtuous person, one is able to perform his or her human function and perform it well. Performing human function well, this person is then able to be happy.

Thus Prufrock is unable to be happy because although he does have reason, he does not perform any kind of virtue well. “[He] epitomizes a frustrated man hopelessly alienated from his imagination and yet desperate for imaginative salvation” (Johnson n.p.a.). Prufrock understands the virtue of motivation, the imagination it takes to see beyond what is immediately around him and the need to work hard toward a goal. However, he does not have virtue because he does not act upon those thoughts. Prufrock understands the importance of companionship and friendship. However, he does not cultivate friendships with those that are around him; instead, he complains about the people he socializes with. This lack of action to gain the latter stated virtues further compounds upon Prufrock’s inability to be happy.

Throughout the entire poem, with no resolution, there is a sense of self-criticism, a harshness that Prufrock expresses toward himself. This self-criticism is never ending and is what Aristotle would view as a single extreme that in turn causes unhappiness. Aristotle states that: “So much then is plain, that the mean is everywhere praiseworthy, but that we ought to aim at one time towards an excess and at another towards a deficiency; for thus we shall most easily hit the mean, or in other words reach excellence” (91). Prufrock has yet to reach any sort of opposite of the life he is currently leading. His entire life has been the “deficiency” of action and the failure to stand up for his own emotional needs. He has never taken action that would change his life or cease the harsh criticism toward himself. Thus, Prufrock has never had the second “component” needed to establish any sort of mean. Of course that prevents him from being happy, because the only life he has known is the only life that he is currently living. If he were actually to stop for a second and let himself accept who he is, this in turn would allow for him to be both comfortable in his own skin and relieve the sense of inferiority he has been expressing throughout the poem. That new “freedom,” in turn,

would allow for self-confidence, leading to the proper motivation to *act* toward what he wants.

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle claims that “If we start from the point of view of self-sufficiency, we reach the same conclusion; for we assume that the final good is self-sufficient” (82). However, what Aristotle continues to say is that a person should *not* seek happiness only through the cultivation of virtue, particularly if this process occurs in relative solitude; that, for Aristotle, would not be sufficient for life and happiness. Rather, he argues that a person should have intimacy with offspring, companionship, and camaraderie within society. Aristotle’s theory is that that would continue to make a person happy. With happiness, there lacks the desire for anything else, and thus happiness becomes “the final good.” And while Prufrock may engage socially with other people, these interactions are not healthy, meaningful relationships; instead, they are means to torture the emotions of Prufrock even more. However, if the latter steps were actually acted upon, Prufrock could form stronger bonds with those who are around him and readily have the means to create his own happiness, and success, in Aristotle’s view.

As downtrodden and pitiful as Eliot makes Prufrock out to be, there still remains another significant interpretation of this poem. This interpretation deals with the sexuality of Prufrock himself. Although nowhere is this specifically underscored, if one reads the poem “between the lines,” this interpretation can be made. In fact, the contemporary poet David Citino reminds us that according to Eliot himself, “the ‘you’ of the poem . . . [is] an unidentified male companion” (n.p.a.). In other words, there may be a strain of homoeroticism laced within the poem.

To understand the validity of that interpretation, first, the time period needs to be taken into account. The early 1900’s was not a very accepting time. Women were not allowed to vote, there was institutional racism and discrimination at home (in the United States) and abroad, and homosexual acts were prosecuted. With Eliot living in this time, he could not mention anything of an alternative lifestyle without receiving harsh criticism and the possibility of his professional life being hindered. Thus, he writes a character and puts in metaphors that at face

value seem to suggest one perspective, while various other factors suggest another.

Throughout the poem, Prufrock contemplates disturbing the universe. Nowhere is it mentioned that he would like to change the universe literally or impact society – just disturb it. And while any rational person can understand that a single human is not often able to disturb the entire universe, a person *can* disturb his or her own. A person's universe is made of his or her friends, his or her family, his or her social group and environment. Those are easily impacted. And nothing would change Prufrock's universe and the universe of others around him more than if he came out and made mention that he is homosexual, or if he at least openly embraced some sort of alternative sexuality.

Midway through the poem, the narrator asks, "Disturb the universe? / In a minute there is time / For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse" (46-48). That excerpt implies that Prufrock has a plan in mind, that he knows what he has to do, while at the same time he is torn as to whether or not actually to act. The line does not stand on its own, but rather it requires an in-depth look at the actual character of Prufrock. And after doing so, one can assume that Prufrock wonders whether or not he should either tell someone he's gay or engage in some homosexual activity.

Prufrock is not a "manly" man and does not have a physically dominating presence. He fears that the people around him will mock his feeble looks, the skinny arms and legs. "[They will say: 'But how his arms and legs are thin!']" (44). Moreover, except for a few lines, there is no mention of any other men or masculine influences in Prufrock's life. He mainly interacts with women and is more aware of their mannerisms than anything else. It is then reasonable to assume that Prufrock could be a somewhat effeminate man, furthering the notion that he could be homosexual.

Also, Prufrock makes little mention of the physical aspects of the women that surround him, possibly showing he has little sexual interest in them. Instead, he mocks and criticizes how they act and present themselves in public. While his criticism may not be completely unjust, the fact remains that many people dislike in others what they dislike in themselves. Thus it is not

unreasonable to think that Prufrock does not like (but cannot help) the fact that he enjoys tea, art, and twiddling away the hours, "womanly" things, things men should not enjoy in a world that features restrictive gender role expectations. He projects that dislike through his perception of the people around him, mainly women. They encompass everything he hates about himself.

And then there are lines excerpted just below. They are interjected into the poem in a rather weird spot and are signaled to stand out through the usage of the ellipses that separate them from the rest of the poem.

.....

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out
the windows? ... (70 - 72)

.....

That makes the only mention of other men in this poem. And when Eliot does so, he describes men in isolation and hidden from society. Their sexuality is what they have in common, and it is their sexuality that forces them to congregate in the dark, narrow confines of society.

It is also twofold as to why Eliot describes those gentlemen as being lonely. First, they represent the exact same situation that Prufrock is in. Prufrock by no means is the only one in this situation. Yet with this knowledge, one wonders why Prufrock then doesn't engage with these gentlemen. It is almost as if they are there to tempt him and allow him fulfillment of desire -- while at the same time, as with most anything in his life, he never takes any action to obtain it. The men are lonely and would more than welcome the company of Prufrock. It's not so much the environment that is hindering Prufrock in this situation so much as Prufrock himself.

Society also uses clothes as a means to constrain people, and a modern example of this is the ramped usage of high heels worn by women. It would be assumed that Prufrock, even in the nicest, warmest of weather, would have to be wearing an uncomfortable suit; his female counterparts would probably be wearing some heavy, over-done dress. Such kinds of clothes restrict Prufrock literally and metaphorically because he is not allowed to be comfortable in his own skin. Furthermore, he has to dress as something he is not. Thus, the men in the windows tempt him with their abil-

ity to be comfortable and calm. Although they are in the dark corners, they dress in a manner that represents who they are. These men are comfortable physically as well as comfortable with who they are.

And there is the aforementioned struggle of Prufrock questioning whether or not he should eat a peach. Therefore it becomes something that is rather irrational: that a person can go from wanting to disturb the universe to believing that the simple act of eating a peach is a risk, and it can be assumed that eating a peach becomes some kind of metaphor. Essentially, this could be a metaphor for the sexual interaction between a man and a woman, more specifically the male giving the female oral sex. A woman's virginity is often referred to as a fruit, and correlations could be drawn between the shape and indentures of a peach and that of the vagina. Moreover, there is the correlation of the juices, inherent in the nature of eating a peach and that of a male giving a female oral sex. And if Prufrock were to do such a thing, this would increase his "masculinity," and it is for this exact reason that there is such a conflict and, eventually, his failure to do the latter.

If that understanding of Eliot's peach is too much, it's certainly true that the peach, on a more general level, is indicative of something that is desired, something with the potential to give pleasure, even intense pleasure. Prufrock's life, through his confusion of sexuality and inability to achieve that which he desires, has become dull and dreary. Thus, eating this peach becomes a greater symbol of receiving some kind of satisfaction and stimulation, that somehow he is eating the "fruit" of his reward. Clearly, he wants to eat this peach, he ponders very hard about it, and the peach is something that gives him pleasure and enjoyment. The peach then takes on a greater significance because Prufrock has rarely experienced any kind of pleasure before, even sexually, although it is all around him, tempting him. Thus, since he's rarely (never?) experienced pleasure or reward, he is afraid, finally, to eat the peach, the forbidden fruit.

Aristotle states brilliantly that: "Men's conception of the good or of happiness may be read in the lives they lead" (80), but Prufrock's acts show that he believes happiness is found through shallow gratification, *not* the cultivation of virtue. This also contributes to his failure

to obtain happiness, because he does not actually know what it is. And with him wasting away the days with company that does not seem to suit him, his happiness then becomes nonexistent. Aristotle then continues: "Ordinary or vulgar people conceive it to be a pleasure, and accordingly choose a life of enjoyment" (80). Prufrock, amidst his desire to rise above himself and the position he is currently at, carries with him the undertones to do this out of pleasure. He mistakenly believes that the shallow pleasures of art and tea are actually happiness(es). Although he finds his life and surroundings trite and conceited, although he wants to make a greater impact upon society, his first intention is to gain pleasure and enjoyment. And according to Aristotle, this is evidence that Prufrock is "ordinary"; he is not actually, *genuinely* dull, but he has arranged things so that nothing great, or even sort of great, will come out of his life. Rather than have Prufrock focus on improving his own life, and through this striving for excellence in what he does, which would allow him access to happiness, he instead strives for the stimulation of his senses and the pleasure that ensues. Like the people he engages with socially, this desire has left him with a shallow existence and eventually an incurable unhappiness.

More specifically, the life he leads is one that lacks virtue, and this harkens directly back to his sexuality. He lacks the courage and interpersonal strength actually to be who he is. Granted, the society at the time would not be most hospitable to a person of alternative sexuality. Yet in Aristotle's mind, that shouldn't matter. Being who you are and expressing just that, given the environment, actually makes a person more virtuous because of the amount of extra courage and commitment it would take to live as such. Prufrock, again, has reason. He understands the need, albeit intrinsically, to have courage. This is seen through his questioning of whether or not he should ask out a woman, regressing all the way to contemplating his own eating of the peach.

Yet, the final failure of his inability to cultivate his virtue of courage comes when he mentions the lonely men in the windows. This is the only time he makes reference to men in the poem, and it could very well be that their sexuality is what they share. Although probably not in the most ideal of environments, Prufrock is

almost handed the ability to express who he is — in a somewhat private location that might be more accepting than the more general social sphere. To do this takes even less courage than being forthright with his peers, but he *still* does not take the opportunity to do so. Instead, he chooses to throw a stone at a glass house, referring to the lonely men in an almost mocking tone. (“Shall *I* say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets” [70])

Prufrock lives his entire life on one side of the extreme, failing ever to find balance. And while it may be asking too much of him to be openly gay in a time when it was (much) less accepted, the fact nevertheless remains that he fails to cultivate the virtues of friendship and companionship. His disdain for himself is so great that the only way he is able to cope with it is to project it onto the peers around him. To a certain degree his observations could be accurate, but even so, Prufrock should have within himself the will to try and act through example, an example that might change the way people act around him. Doing so allows for the development of integrity, honor, and self-responsibility. All those virtues would directly improve the life of Prufrock, and they would secure his happiness, too.

While times have changed drastically since this poem was first written, it still remains a valid indicator as to the struggles people face today. Many people have the ability and the potential to do great things with their lives and “disturb” the universe, whether for good or bad. Yet for one reason or another, they do not, and what remains is a sense of self-loathing for not being able or willing to make a fundamental change. In addition, there is still rampant homophobia and discrimination against not only those who are homosexual, but also those who are bisexual as well. Many times, people who feel that they have to hide their sexuality from the world are forced into dark corners of society. Being forced into the dark corners of society, a homosexual person might experience self-loathing not only for failing to accomplish that which he/she desires but also simply for *being* — for being who he or she is, a person of sexual difference. Therefore, regarding both the expression of his sexuality and the accomplishment of his goals, Prufrock fails at both. And by the end of the

poem, one finds a mood that there is no hope left, that this is what his life, and the lives of those who share the same afflictions, are destined to have. “In the end...the doubting self convinces the other [self] of the hopelessness of connecting with a woman, so he leaves the party to walk alone on the beach — for Prufrock, too, the mermaids' singing is impossible” (Blythe n.p.a.). The mermaids tempt him with the pleasures of life Prufrock will never be able to experience. Thus, the ocean becomes an abyss in which not only Prufrock but also everyone will drown in the hopelessness and failed ambitions of our lives: “We have lingered in the chambers of the sea / By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown / Till human voices wake us, and we drown” (129-131).

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Evaluation: *This is a good example of a paper that takes an original position, and Mike very faithfully pursues his thesis throughout this essay. This is a unique and convincing reading of Eliot's famed poem, and we like the way he uses Aristotle here, too.*

The Men of Alpha Company

Tim Whalen

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Barbara Butler

Assignment:

*Write an analytical research paper about a novel.
Incorporate eight or more secondary sources into
your original interpretation.*

Burdens from war are not only with soldiers on the battlefield, but they can also follow a soldier home. Soldiers cannot erase memories willingly, nor can they try to brush them off or successfully try to avoid them. In truth, their memories haunt them, and with these memories, soldiers are left with the decision either to talk about their memories or not to talk about their memories. In *The Things They Carried*, Tim O'Brien, a veteran of the Vietnam War, decided to talk about his memories, both good and bad. In this book, he writes about the men of Alpha Company and shows a distinct association between the main characters and the symbolism they portray, and he also brilliantly illustrates the many themes throughout his numerous war stories.

Throughout this novel, there are ample examples of symbolism. First, there is symbolism in the title of the book, and there is also symbolism portrayed through the two main characters. The title suggests that soldiers carry "something" or perhaps many things. The initial reaction is to think that the soldiers are carrying physical objects because they are in combat: that is, guns, bulletproof vests, canteens, etc. However, while reading the book, one realizes that these soldiers do not just carry physical objects that weigh them down, they also carry psychological burdens that weigh them down just as much, if not more: "They all carried ghosts... Often, they carried each other, the wounded and the weak. They carried infections... They carried all the emotional baggage of men who might die" (10). Critic Harold Bloom suggests that for "all the ambiguities of Vietnam, all the mysteries and unknowns, there was at least the single abiding certainty that they would never be at a loss for things to carry" (24). The symbolism here lies within the psychological aspect of the things soldiers have to carry. They had to carry all the emotional anxiety that comes from being in a war. This quote speaks so truly; that, out of all the hysteria and insanity going on around a soldier in Vietnam, the only thing that was for certain was that there was always going to be something that a soldier had to carry, be it physical or psychological. That is both an amazing and horrifying statement altogether.

Tim O'Brien told interviewer Twister Marquiss that the problem with the Vietnam war was that "these men [soldiers] were not fearless, mythic cowboys America had come to embrace; they were real men, fighting for causes they could never fully comprehend, and the fear of death haunted them" (qtd in Smith 98). This statement complements the symbolic nature of the title of the book, in conveying the idea that these were ordinary human beings, they were shoved into combat and the "fear of death haunted them." A soldier goes through physical burdens when in combat, and a soldier also goes through psychological burdens when in combat. Unfortunately, soldiers don't and can't forget these memories. From the beginning of the book, starting with the title, one sees the symbolism already at work.

There is also symbolism portrayed through the main characters, Tim O'Brien and Jimmy Cross. Tim O'Brien, the main character, is both the protagonist and narrator of the book, and is symbolically portrayed. It is important to understand that this book is fictional, and although Tim O'Brien is the author and main character of the book, they are not to be confused as being the same person. Mats Tegmark states that "the author of the book and main character have the same name, giving the story a sense that it is an autobiography, but clearly is not due to the fact that this book is fictional" (206). Tim O'Brien, the character, symbolizes Tim O'Brien, the author, through the fictional stories that the author, Tim O'Brien, writes in this novel. That is to say, the character Tim O'Brien and the horrors he went through in the book are a symbol of what the author, Tim O'Brien, an actual Vietnam veteran, went through in reality.

Perhaps the character that is most symbolically portrayed in the book is Lieutenant Jimmy Cross. Harold Bloom states "Lt. Jimmy Cross is the reluctant and conflicted leader of the eighteen-man squad humping along the Song Tra Bong River. He is barely in his twenties, barely more together than his men" (16). So Jimmy Cross is really young, especially for being a leader and commander of a squad, and he is barely more equipped psychologically for this war than his fellow men. More important, he plays an overwhelming symbolic character in this novel. Jimmy Cross is symbolically portrayed as Jesus Christ, or in more generic terms, he is portrayed as the savior of his squadron. Jesus Christ, of course, is the savior to mankind and died on a cross for the sins of man, and he defeated death and sin by rising again three days later. Patrick A. Smith states "Jimmy Cross embodies a Christ motif through his initials, his last name, and the cross that he bears for Martha, his love" (103). First, Jimmy Cross's initials are J.C., which are the same initials of Jesus Christ. That is clear symbolism and doesn't need any light to be shed upon. Second, Jimmy's last name is Cross, which symbolizes the cross that Jesus Christ died on to save humanity from their depravity. His last name also symbolizes the cross that he has to bear for his platoon. He is their leader in good times and in bad times. And for leading people into bat-

tle at such a young age, he had quite a cross to bear. Harold Bloom states that "when Ted Lavender is killed, Cross feels responsible, soon after Curt Lemon is killed by a landmine, and further aggravates Cross's guilt... Kiowa is later killed, and Jimmy feels the brunt of meaninglessness, despair, and guilt..." (16). Throughout the book, Jimmy Cross takes the blame for his men's deaths because he feels that their deaths could have been prevented and their lives could have been saved. He takes the blame because he is their leader and should be protecting them, but he also takes the blame because at the time of all of their deaths, he is preoccupied with thinking about his love, Martha, and the life that they could be living together if he were back at home. Accordingly, Jimmy Cross bears a cross for his love Martha, who is back at home. He bears a cross that he needs to survive to go back home to Martha, and he also bears a cross for Martha because, as stated before, he was daydreaming about her when his men died, and he feels utterly guilty because of that. Critic Thomas Trevenen states, "Because he feels this pain, he sacrifices the memory of Martha and burns the letters and pictures" (1). Jimmy Cross had to carry the guilt of his men's deaths on his shoulders. He felt completely guilty because he was thinking of Martha, so after their deaths he went back to camp and burned the letters and pictures that Martha had sent him. Thomas Trevenen also states that there is a key similarity between Jimmy Cross and Jesus Christ because Jesus Christ had a very close friend named Martha, as did Jimmy Cross in this novel (1).

There are also a couple of other examples in which Jimmy Cross is symbolically portrayed as Jesus Christ. Thomas Trevenen states "Jimmy Cross is there when Lee Strunk rises from the dead. Okay, Strunk did not literally rise from the dead, but that is the way the narrator describes it and that is even the way that the other characters (created by the author) tell it" (1). "A few moments later Lee Strunk crawled out of the tunnel. He came up grinning, filthy but alive. Lieutenant Cross nodded and closed his eyes while the others clapped Strunk on the back and made jokes about rising from the dead" (O'Brien 13). Here, Jimmy Cross is there when Lee Strunk came out of the tunnel (which was a very dangerous mission, hence the "rising from the dead"

metaphor). Obviously, Jimmy Cross didn't have anything to do with Lee Strunk staying alive, but if one sees it symbolically, when Strunk came out of the ground, the book says Jimmy Cross nodded and closed his eyes. It almost seems that he expected Lee Strunk to come out of the tunnel. He was not surprised and wasn't even filled with any emotion at that time. That may lead one to believe he might have known that he was going to make it out alive. Through all of these many examples, it is clear that Jimmy Cross is portrayed as Jesus Christ. He portrays Jesus Christ through his initials, last name, and because he bears the cross of leadership and of guilt for his whole platoon. He is their leader, he is their friend, and he is their savior.

Tim O'Brien also incorporates many different important themes throughout *The Things They Carried*. The first theme that is apparent in this book is the idea that a person can either confront a challenging situation or escape from a challenging situation. Critic Tobey C. Herzog states that "Out of the overarching subject of the quest for order and control in one's life found in all of O'Brien's works emerges the attendant theme of an individual's decision to flee or confront a difficult situation" (45). A couple of chapters into the book, one learns that Tim O'Brien received a draft number for the Vietnam war and drove up to the border of Canada, where he planned on fleeing before being sent off. He went as far as renting a boat on the border, and he was going to jump overboard and escape into the promised land, Canada. O'Brien states that he "gripped the edge of the boat and leaned forward and thought, *Now*. I did try. It just wasn't possible." Instead, he later states that he was a coward and went to war (63). This is an ironic statement because when people think of a soldier, they don't think they are cowardly; in fact, they think the opposite. People think soldiers are heroic, and, of course, they are. What O'Brien is suggesting is what the next theme happens to be. The theme is the clash between society and self. This theme is about the relationship between what society thinks about a situation, and how a person really feels about a situation. The reason Tim O'Brien said he was a coward because he went to war was because he didn't do what his conscience told him to do. He went to war against his will because

the society around him told him that was the right thing to do. The reason he didn't jump overboard was that society looked down upon that kind of a decision. O'Brien states in the book, "All those eyes on me—the town, the whole universe—and I couldn't risk the embarrassment. It was as if there were an audience to my life, that swirl of faces along the river, and in my head I could hear people screaming at me. Traitor! They yelled" (61). This was the clash that he experienced between society and himself.

The next prominent theme in this book is the question of morality in war. It seems that whatever morals and standards one has before going to war are abandoned when it comes to saving one's life. Ryan Kopperud quotes Tim O'Brien, saying that this book deals with "moral struggles" (1). Critic Ken Lopez states that to a soldier, this war was a "morally ambiguous quagmire and a physically horrific experience" (1). When normal people are shoved into the position of being soldiers and their lives are in danger, moral standards begin to shift. When killing someone is now the right thing to do, whereas before, at home, it is a criminal offense – or even sinful – the idea of right and wrong begins to blur. Finally, the last noticeable theme in *The Things They Carried* is the idea that youths must grow up into men when going to war:

A major theme that this story explores is the initiation of young men in wartime, when youths must become men. Pranksters must become killers, dreamers must become realists – or someone dies... The world of the intellect is of little relevance here; neither is romance or idealism. Courage becomes a concept without meaning (McCarthy 1).

In other words, if someone is a young, immature, frightened soldier, then that soldier needs to grow up and grow up fast, otherwise people die. It is a complete jump from adolescence to adulthood in a matter of a few hours from being on the battleground.

Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* is a book that tells a story about soldiers. It tells the story of a group of men that went to war not knowing why they were even there. It tells the story of men with questions of morality, left to make judgments of their own. This

book tells the story of men that carry burdens on their backs, but also in their minds. It tells of their heroic tales, harks at their victories, and hushes at their deaths and defeats. It tells of the symbolic nature that the main characters represent, and it also tells of the prominent themes presented in this book. It tells of how soldiers are "never more alive than when they're almost dead" (O'Brien 81). This book tells of the many journeys and many paths these men have taken – paths marked by monuments and memorials. These men are timeless heroes. These men are the men of Alpha Company.

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Evaluation: *Tim presents an insightful analysis of O'Brien's work, effectively elucidating the symbolism and themes dealing with the complexities of war.*

Death of a Salesman: What Marx Would Have to Say

Marguerita Whitby

Courses: English 102 (Composition)
and Philosophy 115 (Ethics)

Instructors: Andrew Wilson and John Garcia

Assignment:

Students were required to submit a paper combining the research paper requirements of English 102 with an analysis of a philosopher covered in the course.

In *Death of a Salesman*, Arthur Miller clearly shows how the American dream is virtually unattainable by a large portion of our society, and he seems to argue, however subtly, that this is due to the effects of capitalism. Capitalism was intended to reward those who work hard, thereby creating incentive for everyone to literally pull his own weight and not assume anyone else is responsible for taking care of him. Perhaps on the original small scale it worked well; farmers planted more crops than they needed to so they could not only feed their families but also maybe get a few extras to make life a little nicer. Each family could decide how much they were willing to work and how to divide the resources they had. Every man was in charge of his own future, assured that the field he worked so hard on would be passed down to his children, largely free from governmental interference.

Fast forward three hundred plus years, however, and we have a much different picture. Much of what America produces today is not as directly necessary as food and clothing. Even those staples have turned into convenience and gourmet foods and trendy brand name clothing. Now, in order to make money, we must convince people to buy things they don't truly need and make them first and foremost consumers. Today's society has also changed in that to a large extent, how hard you work has less and less to do with how much money you make. In fact, now that much of what we produce is largely assisted by new technologies and machinery, it seems that those who make the most money are the least likely to get their hands dirty. As the expanding wealth gap illustrates, one of the most important factors in how much money you make may indeed be how much your parents made (and presumably shared with you while alive and left you when they died).

While capitalism may legally be fair, since it definitely makes it possible for those born without wealth or status to rise to the top, it also provides no safety net for those unable to provide for themselves and therefore is inherently inequitable. In the United States, we do not have pure capitalism; in relatively small ways we do transfer wealth through taxes, but this minor adjustment often leaves the poorest of families not only behind, but also with greatly diminished chances of substantially changing their position in the future. This reality contributes to a sense of hopelessness that is not only unpleasant to feel, but also can reduce much needed motivation and incentive to work hard, further exacerbating the problem.

Aware of these and other bitter truths of capitalist reality, Miller introduces us to Willy Loman, a man through whom the inherent negative effects of capitalism and consumerism are clearly portrayed. Despite his conviction that the American dream is within his grasp, and his years of long hours and hard work, Willy still fails to realize his dream of wealth, power, and fame. The same economic system that betrays Willy also rewards Willy's brother Ben, a man who isn't even good with a compass, with wealth beyond his dreams. Ben can rest easy in knowing that his seven sons, like Willy's boss Howard's sons, will inherit money without

working a single day. While Willy must work longer than others just to scrape by, Howard takes it for granted that everyone has a maid and can afford the latest technology just as a hobby. Even Howard's son refers to a watch's brand name, indicating that he is already enjoying the money that has been passed down through his family.

Karl Marx routinely expresses his contempt for such a society. While he agrees that land and resources should be owned by the public, he rejects the idea that they should be owned by private individuals, which consolidates power in the hands of the few. This is perpetuated generation after generation as the powerful use their power to remain in power. Owners, like Howard and Charley, can grow "richer in their sleep" while hard-working laborers toil almost endlessly to provide them a profit (Miller 191). This basic unfairness is especially difficult for Marx to justify, since "Nature does not produce on the one side owners...and on the other men possessing nothing but their own labour-power (Marx 131). The difference between the two classes is overwhelmingly determined before birth, and has almost no relation to merit or hard work, as capitalism would like us to believe.

Marx points out that this arrangement causes owners and workers to be in constant struggle with one another rather than in a harmonious relationship. It is an obvious consequence that a motivated capitalist, in a drive to make a profit, will not only have little concern for the health of his workers but actually be motivated to increase the "misery of the workers" (Fisher 119). Once the owner realizes he can make more money if his workers work harder and longer, he is well motivated to see that they do just that. Even the worker will find himself tempted to have his wife and children work alongside him to increase the family's income. Ironically, this increase in the number of available workers creates enough competition for employment that owners are able to keep wages low and production high. Miller proves this point through his references to the long hours of selling and driving that Willy must do, even without a guaranteed salary. Howard, who inherited his business from his father, holds all the cards in determining Willy's fate by deciding his position, pay, and even-

tually his employment status itself. While Howard does not seem to enjoy firing Willy, he does comfort himself that what he is doing isn't so bad because "business is business" (Miller 80). The fundamentals of capitalism have allowed us to not only ignore, but justify, our blatant disregard for another man's well-being.

Marx's claim that capitalism causes us to alienate from each other can easily be seen in *Death of a Salesman* through the consistent urge to fight against one another, seek fame, become obsessed with our outward appearance, and callously use others to achieve our goals. With few resources divided among an increasing amount of people, our survival may indeed be linked with our ability to fight against our fellow man and take from him what we would like to be ours. Marx makes it clear that not only must we fight, but that the fight is unfair before it even begins.

When you are not born into money and status, your choices are to accept your position or fight to the top. Hence, Miller places many references to fighting throughout the play. Ben proudly declares that he had to fight for his fortune, although it seems he literally stumbled upon it. He also encourages Biff to punch him and then quickly gets the drop on him and wants to make sure he understands to "never fight fair with a stranger," although technically he is family (Miller 49). Happy proudly asserts that he can outbox his boss and is clearly frustrated that physical ability isn't how things are decided in our capitalistic society. Willy's first instinct is to settle things with his fists when Charley insults him or when he believes another salesman calls him a walrus. Perhaps the saddest comment on the need to fight and struggle, a need capitalism creates, is Willy's remark that "the competition is maddening" and there are just too many people all fighting for too few spots at the top (Miller 17). The only gift from Willy to the boys mentioned in the play is a punching bag to help prepare them physically. The concept of needing to fight to get what you want is so linked with our American society that Konstantin Kostov, a recent immigrant to the United States, knew on the first day here that he would need to "build and fight for my new future" (60).

Since capitalism equates money with power, it is no surprise that the quest for power and fame is also a

major theme of this play. Miller himself acknowledges that Willy wants to “excel...win out over anonymity and meaninglessness...and above all to *count*” (qtd in Bloom 63). Willy is obviously very concerned about popularity for both him and the boys and wants to make sure that each of them achieves, but perhaps more importantly, that each is known for his accomplishments. Willy loves it when he perceives others as welcoming, respecting, and deferring to him as someone of importance and status. He loves to hear that Biff is captain and that the girls follow him and the boys take direction from him. Willy even uses his children’s successes to bolster his own fame in the neighborhood and the people he works with, and Willy is extremely disappointed when an older Biff hasn’t made a name for himself in business and brought both of them fame, despite Biff’s apparent lack of interest and aptitude for all things corporate. Happy is content to stay in a job he hates just to show others he can make it and looks forward to when the employees part like water for him. Happy is still determined to follow in his father’s footsteps and try to be “number one” right through to the end of the play (Miller 139). Knowing the powerful effects of fame, Happy uses false fame, like Biff being a professional football player and him going to West Point, to impress Miss Forsythe and Letta. Happy is impressed to hear that Miss Forsythe has been on the cover of some magazines, yet she is rather vague about which magazines she has been on.

Our culture of consumerism also extends the “bigger, better, richer” goal to physical appearances as well. Willy also expresses some concern about his appearance, style of dress, and weight. He is, however, grateful that the boys are “built like Adonises,” since this will put them “five times ahead...” of others who are not as physically attractive (33). Willy is clearly more concerned with Biff’s athletic abilities than his intellectual development, and Happy clearly has received the message that how you look is important to his father by not only exercising specifically to lose weight but by pointing it out repeatedly to Willy. Happy also seems much more concerned with women’s appearances than the other men. He mentions how his first was rather large

and comments almost endlessly on how beautiful all the other women have been.

Since capitalism definitely encourages us to get more and get all we can before the other guy does, it comes as no surprise that people can treat each other as disposable prizes to be won, used, and discarded. Happy is especially guilty of lying to women for the purpose of impressing them enough to get them into bed. He enjoys the hunt so much that he can’t wait to use his “radar” to help Biff find a date as well (100). Even though he knows it’s an unappealing characteristic, he still attempts to inflate his esteem through these conquests. In true capitalistic style, Happy consistently takes an “every man for himself” attitude when it comes to “ruining” the three fiancés of his superiors without much regard for the ladies’ well being or even his own (25). Happy seems to feel both the need to confess and be judged by Biff for these actions while at the same time bragging about them. These women also seem to be only looking out for themselves, since they are well aware they are engaged and are unconcerned about their future husbands’ expectations. The woman in Boston seemed to know Willy was married since she was quite comfortable talking to his son. Yet she clearly wasn’t thinking of Linda or the boys when she began a relationship with Willy. Since a capitalistic society emphasizes that you must completely provide for yourself for your survival, it is no wonder that we begin to see others not as ends, but rather as means to achieving our own goals.

Perhaps even sadder than the alienation of man from each other is the alienation of man from his work. With so much of our waking hours spent in this pursuit, it is truly sad that our society places more value on how much we make rather than how much our work reflects who we are. Miller’s purposeful absence of exactly what Willy attempts to sell each day reminds us that no matter what it is, it is not really a product of Willy’s labor, nor an expression of who Willy really is. Capitalism has taught Willy that even though he is happiest when working with his hands, to truly succeed requires him to do something completely foreign to his nature. Willy himself acknowledges that what he really sells is his appearance and personality; however, what

Willy ultimately sells is his happiness and literally himself as in his suicide he “tries to complete his biggest sale” (Bloom 63). This alienation between a worker and his work has an overwhelmingly negative effect. Marx points out that work is now external to ourselves and therefore “is not a part of his nature, [and]...consequently he does not fulfill himself in his work but denies himself...” (Marx 169). This is seen every day as we look forward to quitting time and avoid work “like the plague” whenever possible (Marx 170). Work is no longer the “satisfaction of a need, but only a *means* for satisfying other [survival] need,” leaving us in a situation that is far removed from our natural inclinations (Marx 169).

Although American capitalism indeed fails to guarantee hard work will always pay off financially, I believe there are other factors and attitudes that contribute to the demise of Willy Loman that have nothing to do with capitalism. The first – and perhaps the most important, at least in my mind – is the value system of the individual. There can be little doubt that our families of origin play a huge role in the development of our value system. While many adults decide to reject all or parts of what their parents taught them, I would venture that most adults retain a large portion of these lessons and are still unconsciously using them to guide their actions today. While we have absolutely no information about Linda’s family, Willy Loman’s family apparently provided him little guidance in how to act, parent, or relate to the world in a realistic and healthy way. It seems his father also found himself either unable or unwilling to cope with the demands of parenting, as well, since the play indicates that he left the family when Willy was very young. Willy clearly still feels the need for a father figure and looks to Ben to reassure him that he is doing a good job raising the boys. Willy’s comment that he is plagued by a sense of impermanence (“I still feel – kind of temporary about myself” [Miller 51]) also indicates that this loss has not only hindered his ability to be a father, since he had no role model, but that this loss has affected him in very personal and profound ways. While we don’t know anything about his mother, it is probably safe to assume that they suffered financially, like most single-parent families still do today, even though there are more career oppor-

tunities for women now than there were back then. This may account for Willy’s focus on attaining money and his apparent lack of inherited wealth. It has been my experience that those born into poverty rarely feel financially secure even after they become wealthy. Like most parents, Willy tries to instill in his children his view of life, and it seems that Happy is content to leave these values unchallenged, while Biff is fortunate enough to eventually see beyond this early and begin to choose another path. This is even more impressive when we consider that to do so may feel like, or be seen as, a rejection of our parents themselves, and that any change from how we have always done things is exceedingly hard, even when we are highly motivated.

While traditional capitalism usually involves a notion of “work hard to get ahead” and consumerism pushes the concept of “have more money, have more stuff, have a better life,” it can be neither capitalism nor consumerism’s fault that Willy and his boys seem to have decided to just take what they want from whomever they can. Biff is especially guilty of this, as throughout the play he helps himself to a football, a carton of basketballs, answers to math tests, a suit, and finally a pen. Both boys are eager to steal lumber, and Happy seems to feel it’s actually better to steal from family, presumably because they’ll never turn you in, as he discusses the register leak with Stanley in Act II, in the play’s very painful restaurant scene. While Willy never steals directly, he both actively encourages his boys to do so by praising their “initiative” and their “fearless character” and directs their energy to things he wants, like porch supplies (50). He is even proud to show this behavior to his respected brother as proof that he is doing well raising his boys. In my opinion this attitude on a parent’s part is far more egregious than the actual stealing itself. This blatant determination that the laws don’t apply to us when they aren’t convenient avenues to our advantage is a ridiculous concept for a parent to instill in his children. Besides the obvious legal ramifications, someday, your rule may be the one they feel they don’t have to follow. Between the parental encouragement and the ability largely to dodge the consequences of their behavior, it is no surprise the boys feel so comfortable with stealing. It appears the only time anyone is caught and punished for

his crime in any serious way is when Biff spends three months in jail for stealing a suit. I'm not even sure what a ranch hand needs with a suit, but perhaps he was considering giving the corporate world another try. Ironically, the conviction may make it harder to get such a job in the future.

Perhaps some of the stealing is a reflection of a much larger problem with authority. Willy enjoys "punishing" the apartment builders by stealing lumber, although all they did was build on land that Willy used to enjoy for free. Biff resists the coach's authority by running when he is supposed to pass the ball, and Willy can't wait to tell his associates in Boston, completely ignoring the fact that his son plans to "crash through that line!" without his helmet which, needless to say, is extremely dangerous (32). Biff also denies Birnbaum's authority by cheating on tests and mocking him to the class, about which Willy is mostly amused because the other teenagers responded favorably. He steals from his employer twice, chooses to swim when he should be working, and denies the government's authority by driving without a license. Happy admits he hates taking orders and enjoys silently getting back at his superiors by sleeping with their fiancés. It appears that each of these men resent anyone with the power they crave and admire.

This resistance to authority can also be seen in their overdeveloped sense of entitlement. Willy praises his son's stealing of the football, yet clearly he enjoys knowing that if anyone else did it, there would be consequences. He also brags about how he can park anywhere in New England and receive special treatment and excuses his affair because he feels lonely. Despite his unwillingness to follow the law, Willy still feels the law should protect him from those that attempt to rip him off, further showing how he feels he is special and should be treated as such.

Although our government rarely enforces any laws regarding lies, it certainly does not encourage dishonesty, especially to the extent it is used in this play. While Biff mostly uses lies to appease his father, and Happy primarily uses lies to get women into bed, Willy seems to almost unceasingly lie time and time again to falsely inflate his status, to avoid consequences, and to acquire what he wants. He repeatedly lies to Linda about how

much he sells, where he gets the borrowed money, and almost certainly tells lies about his affair, even if they are only lies of omission. Willy appears to be very comfortable weaving a whole series of lies about the woman in Boston to Biff, and he actually convinces his son that he has a more important job than he really does. Although Biff exclaims "Dad, I don't know who said it first..." it is clear that Willy is still hanging on to the idea that Biff was a salesman and not a shipping clerk (Miller 106). Willy lies to his whole family about the suicidal tube, and perhaps worst of all, he encourages Biff to lie about his work history, and then goes so far as to help create a lie for Biff about using the pen for a crossword puzzle. He lies so often that he even confuses himself and begins to lose touch with reality.---

Finally, we come to what I consider the root cause, of which lying and stealing are perhaps merely symptoms: a lack of personal responsibility. Although the influences of our society and our families can encourage us to look upon our problems as though they come from things or people beyond our control, and indeed, sometimes they do, it is still much more likely that the outcome will be in our favor if we accept our responsibility in the situation. Willy in particular consistently refuses to see that much of his downfall is of his own doing. Biff and Willy spend quite a bit of time in this play basically saying "don't blame me," which is both defensive and accusatory at the same time. Life has not been particularly kind to this family; however, it is easy to see that some of their problems have been of their own doing. Biff had a job with Oliver with some level of responsibility and a boss who took an interest in him, but he quit to avoid being caught for his stealing. Happy and Biff both sabotage their careers by sneaking out in the middle of the day to go swimming. Happy consistently runs the risk of being fired for his adultery, and there can be little doubt that a letter of recommendation will not be attached to his pink slip. Willy really catches a break when Charley offers him a job that pays enough, even though Charley has no particular love for him. But for reasons not revealed to the reader, Willy refuses to accept the job, yet still seems comfortable taking the regular loan. Even Miller himself admits that "the most decent man in *Salesman* is a capitalist (Charley) whose aims are not different from

Willy's..." (qtd in Marino 80). This reminds us that capitalism alone does not always create the problems the Loman family encounters throughout the play.

Linda places no responsibility on herself as a mother when Biff doesn't "succeed" as she and Willy define it, but rather squarely puts the blame on Biff for his father's future suicide, despite the fact Willy has attached the tube and Linda has found the tube. Linda doesn't even charge Willy with the responsibility to preserve his own life and would rather not "insult him" (60). Linda spends a lot of time blaming a variety of things like glasses, steering, and coffee for Willy's apparent inability to drive. While I can certainly appreciate that she wants to save Willy from thinking he can't do that much driving anymore, because without it they will have no means of financial support, the reality is that he has already crashed many times before, and by trying to explain things away, she is endangering his life.

Willy and Linda apparently take little responsibility for Biff's education, unless you want to consider that Willy takes the time to discuss with Bernard how he will give Biff the answers and tutor him without pay, appreciation, or even cooperation from Biff and Willy. The clearest example of a lack of personal responsibility in my mind would definitely be the attitude that Biff's failing math is Birnbaum's fault. Their language says it all, "they wouldn't give you four points?" and "they're gonna flunk him?" (118, 33; emphasis mine). Biff, however, gradually seems aware that this is of his own doing, as he admits he didn't go to class, and he mocked the teacher. While Biff does blame Willy for blowing him "so full of hot air..." he also appears to have the best chance of breaking the cycle of avoiding responsibility and blaming external factors for unwelcome events (131). A major turning point in the play is Biff's awareness that being "important" or "well-liked" is not equal with success the way his father thinks it is. Miller shows us that while capitalism takes its toll on each of us, if we refuse to buy into its traps, we can break free, like Biff, and find an even better satisfaction than our society promises we can achieve with money, power, or fame.

The dual effects of capitalism and a skewed value system have given this family little chance to succeed, especially since they equate success with fame and

money. Biff may have the best hope of restructuring his life, since it seems he is willing to place an importance on what he enjoys, although he still feels he is nothing since he is not successful in a way his father acknowledges. Happy also sums up the true experience of capitalism and consumerism with his reference to the merchandise manager who built a large estate, yet is still unsatisfied and is now "building another one" (23). Capitalism depends on us to never be satisfied with what we have, no matter how much it is. While capitalism alone cannot account for the Lomans' failure to accept responsibility for their situation, it does by nature force us to concern ourselves with acquiring survival needs that can only be achieved by external means. This leaves little time for our characters to look within themselves for solutions to the problems they face. Even if we achieve these goals, we often find them hollow and empty, especially considering the basic humanity we exchange for them.

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Evaluation: *The paper does an exceptional job blending a discussion of a work of literature (Death of a Salesman) with Karl Marx's critique of capitalism.*

The Significance of the American Dream in *A Raisin in the Sun*

Pilar Wiener

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Julie Balazs

Assignment:

Write a literary research paper, using one of your term essays as the basis for your argument.

“What happens to a dream deferred?” asks Langston Hughes in his poem “Harlem” (Hansberry 1541). Lorraine Hansberry not only takes the name of her first play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, from this poem, but she also uses its significance as a major theme. She covers skillfully all the options the poem contemplates as a means to present her own perception of the American Dream, which goes beyond the attainment of material wealth in life and is more closely related to human values such as love, self-worth, a sense of identity, and pride. Hansberry conveys an idea of the American Dream that is capable of defeating stereotypes and prejudice.

Recalling the fact that this is a personal perception of the American Dream, it is important to understand that although this is not a strictly autobiographical play, there is a strong connection between *A Raisin in the Sun* and Hansberry’s life: what she witnessed, what she was, and most importantly, what she wanted to be. After its premiere on Broadway, *A Raisin in the Sun* received

very good reviews from critics such as Kenneth Tynan, who praised her work in *The New Yorker* with the words, “The supreme virtue of *A Raisin in the Sun* is its proud, joyous proximity to its source, which is life as the dramatist has lived it” (Tynan 197). Along the same lines, dramatist Amiri Baraka stated, “Her statement cannot be separated from the characters she creates to embody in their totality, the life she observes: it becomes, in short, the living material of the work, part of its breathing body, integral and alive” (Baraka 967). However, on the other side, some critics accused her of being a middle-class intellectual incapable of understanding the needs of poor blacks, as is mentioned in the book *Young, Black, and Determined*, by Patricia and Fredrick McKissack. Her response to those accusations was inarguable:

I come from an extremely comfortable background materially speaking. And yet, we live in a ghetto... which automatically means intimacy with all classes and all kinds of experiences. It’s not any more difficult for me to know the people I wrote about than it is for me to know members of my family. This is one of the things that the American experience has meant to Negroes. We are one people. (qtd in McKissack 83)

The stage directions in *A Raisin in the Sun* support the idea of dreams deferred among the members of this black working-class family. The use of symbolism throughout the play is perceptible from its beginning and embraces not only the generalized background in which Hansberry set the events – “Chicago’s Southside, sometime between World War II and the present” – but also the credible environment in which the family members coexist that eventually influences the characters and their actions (Hansberry 1541). Hansberry’s depiction of the tenement in which the Younger family lives is indeed insightful:

The Younger living room would be a comfortable and well-ordered room if it were not for a number of indestructible contradictions to this state of being. Its furnishings are typical and undistinguished and their primary feature now is that they have clearly had to accommodate the living of too many people for too many

years, and they are tired. Still, we can see that at some time, a time probably no longer remembered by the family (except perhaps for Mama), the furnishings of this room were actually selected with care and love and even hope, and brought to this apartment and arranged with taste and pride... The single window that has been provided for these two rooms is located in this kitchen area. The sole natural light the family may enjoy in the course of a day is only that which fights its way through this little window. (1542)

The poor light that comes from the small window is a symbol that transmits the same sensation of oppression that black people experienced at that time. The McKissacks explain how the Depression affected people's lives in the Black Belt (the south side of Chicago), when many black people from all points South filled with hopes for a better life for themselves and their children moved there, increasing its population to more than 250,000 (McKissack 7, 22). On this matter, Lorraine Hansberry makes an excellent comparison between schools and housing segregation in the 1930s when she says:

...ghetto schools, a school for black children and therefore, one in which as many things as possible might be safety thought of as "expendable." That, after all, was why it existed: not to give education, but to withhold as much as possible, just as the ghetto itself exists not to give people homes, but to cheat them out of as much decent housing as possible. (qtd in McKissack 14)

In Hansberry's play, there is a strong connection between black oppression and the types of housing offered to black people, which denote their unfair quality of life. Thus, it is ironic that her parents' money came from buying and dividing apartments into "kitchenettes" that somehow contribute to the overcrowding in the black belt by providing black families with housing that perhaps Hansberry's parents would not have accepted for themselves. According to Patricia and Fredrick McKissack, after Hansberry's parents moved to Chicago, they "built a thriving real estate business,

buying apartment buildings and dividing them into "kitchenettes," one large room and a kitchen..." (McKissack 6).

Another important symbol in the play is Lena's plant, which represents her "deferred dreams," those she has never achieved but still desires. The persistent care she provides to her plant not only transmits her struggles to cope with the onslaughts of life, but it is also connected with the care she provides to her own kids. "They spirited all right, my children. Got to admit they got spirit, Bennie and Walter. Like this little old plant that ain't never had enough sunshine or nothing, and look at it..." (Hansberry 1557).

The meaningful use of musical pieces during the play creates an appropriate mood that supports its thematic structure. To set some examples, one can mention the Nigerian music Beneatha listens to, which is an affirmation of her pride in her heritage and her strong reaction against race stereotyping. Another example is the slave song "Heaven" that Walter jubilantly sings as a preamble of his yearning and, after all, unreachable dreams. "I got wings! You got wings! All God's children got wings! When I get to heaven gonna put on my wings, gonna fly all over God's heaven..." (1594). The song's message is ironic because it is invalidated by the lack of opportunities Walter Lee has had in life. Finally, the gospel hymn "No Ways Tired" that Ruth sings while she is packing reveals a rebirth of hope in her marriage and gloomy life:

I don't feel no ways tired...

I've come too far from where I started from...

Nobody told me that the road would be easy...

But I don't believe He brought me this far just to leave me. (1586)

Kathy Bernard explains that the song gives courage to all Christians who hear it, particularly to those facing obstacles of pain, hurt, or sorrow but are firm believers in Almighty God (Bernard). This belief is connected with Hansberry's perception of black people's endurance in the face of difficulties. In his excerpt about the writer, Steven R. Carter points out that Hansberry was convinced that black people were too strong to be

kept down forever, and all generations of blacks in America had demonstrated an incredible measure of endurance and heroism as well as an intense drive toward change (Carter 126).

If there is something admirable in *A Raisin in the Sun*, it is the realism used by Hansberry in the creation of her characters and dialogue as resources to reveal her personal vision of the pursuit of happiness under harsh conditions. The McKissacks depict Lorraine Hansberry as a happy infant whose ancestors provided her with “splendid examples of how to overcome adversity through courage, discipline, persistence, and commitment” (McKissack 7). These values shaped her personality as she grew up, and are present to varying extents in all the main characters of her play. Almost all the family members, even those who have brief or no physical participation in the play, are depicted as real people, even similar to Hansberry herself, with different dreams and concepts of success, and according to that perception, they react, make mistakes, and somehow have the opportunity to redeem themselves.

Beneatha and Travis, the youngest members of the family, hold different perceptions of happiness from each other, and because of that, their dreams differ as well. The aspirations of Travis, a nice kid, who always finds a way to get what he wants, are more related to his age and therefore are not as complicated as those of the other Youngers. However, it is very interesting how Hansberry portrays the duality of Travis' personality. She depicts him as a child who finds contentment in getting fifty cents for school, or perhaps, by avoiding a good spanking for disobeying his mother. On the other hand, she also portrays Travis as a mature and independent child aware of his family's economic situation, as evidenced when he asks Ruth if he can work in the supermarket after school or chooses his own gift for his grandmother. The respect Hansberry shows for Travis reveals what she felt for all those independent children she saw during her childhood and whom she tries to emulate. In her autobiography, *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*, she explains the admiration she felt for those “ghetto kids” who deal with after school chores, wear their own door keys around their neck, know grown-up secrets, and especially fight back when it is necessary.

She describes herself as:

A serious odd-talking kid who could neither jump double dutch nor understand their games, but who – classically – envied them. And their costumes. And the things that, somehow, gave them joy: quarters, fights, and their fascination to come into the carpeted quiet of our apartment. They, understandably, never understood (or believed) my envy– and they never will. (Hansberry 66)

Perhaps it is not necessary to have a great intuition to relate Beneatha's character with the playwright. The numerous similarities between them are irrefutable: “She is me eight years ago. I had a ball poking fun at myself through her” (Abramson 961). Possibly, one can say that Beneatha cannot call herself an independent woman since she lives at the expense of her family. However, her independence is shown in the way she tries to live her life and achieve her dreams. The way she rebels against the stereotypes and the role models she has at home is praiseworthy. Her almost immediate defensive reaction to any alleged aggression by male figures such as her brother or her suitors, Joseph Asagai and George Murchinson, suggests her feminist position. Her strong sense of pride and her intuition are evident when she senses Mr. Lindner's real intentions right after he appears, and sarcastically compares his “generous offer” with the thirty coins Judas accepted for betraying Jesus Christ (Hansberry 1591). Beneatha's dreams are not only the concern for her education, but also her desire to be treated equally as a woman and black, and to find her identity. The privileges she has had in her life make her look like a self-centered and spoiled young woman who takes for granted that she has more opportunities than anyone else does in her family. Although Beneatha seems to be a self-centered person, her reasons for being a doctor reveal her lesser-known desire of helping people: “That that was what one person could do for another, fix him up, sew up the problem, make him all right again. That was the most marvelous thing in the world... I wanted to do that.” (1598) Nevertheless, as the story goes on, Beneatha learns more from her difficulties than from her achievements. She learns how ephemeral dreams can be and how deeply they are related with

a person's self-worth. Although she is aware of the impact of her family's financial difficulties in her career, she discovers something more important: the value of family pride. When she sees her brother rising proudly after his painful experiences, she supports him in her personal way:

Lindner: I take it, then, that you have decided to occupy...

Beneatha: That's what the man said. (1606)

Walter Lee and his wife Ruth, the second generation of Youngers, share the same goal: to provide a better life for their family. However, their personalities are so different that it seems that they do not share the same idea of how to provide that life, nor do they share the same idea of happiness. While Ruth's personality is realistic and she always is thinking about the consequences of her actions, Walter is a complete dreamer who seems to act under the premise of "the end justifies the means." Ruth loves her family more than anything in life, and she keeps calm even when faced with conflicts she has come through: her pregnancy, the possibility of an abortion, and her unstable marriage. However, her opportunity to pursue happiness comes after Lena lets her know that she bought a house. Hansberry highlights the importance of this event in Ruth's life with an amazing passage:

She laughs joyously, having practically destroyed the apartment, and flings her arms up and lets them come down happily, slowly, reflectively, over her abdomen, aware for the first time perhaps that the life therein pulses with happiness and not despair. (1578)

The passage itself has an important connotation with Hansberry's birth, which was described by the McKissacks as follows:

By the time Lorraine was born, Carl Hansberry was one of the largest landlords on the South Side, prosperous and influential. Lorraine's birth – even at the onset of the Depression – placed no financial burden on her family, the way it might have on some of their neighbors. The new baby was a welcome addition to the large and comfortable Hansberry home at 5330 Calumet Avenue. (McKissack 6)

On the other hand, Walter's chauvinistic acts lead him to mistreat his wife and his sister, whom he considers inferior to himself. His perception of money as the only proof of success in life (which means to live as white people do) makes him so desperate that he invests the money his mother entrusts to him, even the amount that was supposed to be used for his sister's education, in order to achieve his own dreams. There are two important paradoxes related to this character. The first is that his erroneous sense of superiority is defeated by his own ignorance about success. His dreamy description of how his life will be when he becomes a "business man," without considering that he has no background or education that support his thoughts, proves how far from being superior to anyone he is. (Hansberry 1586) The second and more important paradox in the play is his immature idea of manhood, which is clearly perceptible when he says, "Somebody tell me, tell me, who decides which women is suppose to wear pearls in this world. I tell you I am a *man*, and I think my wife should wear some pearls in this world!" (1604) Walter finds the opportunity of becoming a man only after giving up his dreams of becoming the kind of man he was so eager to be. For the first time, he measures the consequences of his acts and realizes that by selling the house back to Mr. Lindner, he is selling out himself as well. When he tells Mr. Lindner he is going to occupy the house in Clybourne Park, he dignifies himself, his dead father, and his family, and by doing so, he helps other family members achieve their own dreams, as Ruth celebrates, "Well, for God's sake, if the moving men are here, LET'S GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE!" (1607)

Finally, for Lena and Big Walter, a proud couple who had to deal with race discrimination during their whole life, their dreams started long ago, when they moved to that place. When Ruth calls it with scorn a "rat trap," Lena replies:

Rat trap, yes, that's all it is. (Smiling) I remember just as well the day me and Big Walter moved in here. Hadn't been married but two weeks and wasn't planning on living here no more than a year. (She shakes her head at the dissolved dream.) We was going to set away, little by little, don't you know, and

buy a little place out in Morgan Park. We had even picked out the house. (Chuckling a little.) Looks right dumpy today. But Lord, child, you should know all the dreams I had 'bout buying that house and fixing it up and making me a little garden in the back. (She waits and stops smiling.) And didn't none of it happen. (Hansberry 1553)

It is impossible not to compare Big Walter and Carl Hansberry, Lorraine Hansberry's father, or not to relate Hansberry's feelings about what happened to her father with the events that involve Big Walter's death. In his essay about the playwright's life, Michael Adams says:

In an effort to do something about housing discrimination in his city, Carl Hansberry bought a home in an all-white neighborhood in 1938, and in order to stay there, he had to fight a civil-rights case on restricted covenants, which went all the way to the Supreme Court. Disappointed that his legal victory brought about little change, Hansberry was planning to move his family to Mexico when he died in 1945. Lorraine Hansberry said that he died "of a cerebral hemorrhage, supposedly, but American racism helped kill him." (Adams 247)

The connection between Carl Hansberry and Big Walter's deaths is that the former died apparently because of disease, but also because he could not overcome the discrimination against his race. At the same time, Big Walter died allegedly because he could not surmount his child's death, but also because his dreams, as his child, were taken away from him. "I guess that's how come that man finally worked hisself to death like he done. Like he was fighting his own war with this here world that took his baby from him" (Hansberry 1553). Although Hansberry does not provide information about the baby's cause of death, it could be possible that it was related with the poor conditions in which black people were forced to live at that time. According to the article "Housing in Chicago 1940-1960,"

These conditions of ramshackle and dangerous housing, neglect and indifference from city officials and poor sanitation resulted in

infestation by rats. This is illustrated in *A Raisin in the Sun* when Travis Younger and his friends kill a rat as "big as a cat." Rats reportedly attacked sleeping children, sometimes maiming and even killing them. Tuberculosis and other diseases spread; the infant mortality and overall death rates were higher in the Black Belt than in the rest of Chicago." ("Lorraine Hansberry"...)

After Big Walter died, Lena seems to occupy her place as a matriarch, taking care of her "harvest," as she calls her son and daughter (Hansberry 1604). She went through harsh situations, not only because she lost a child and husband, but also because at some point she had to deal with his infidelity: "God knows there was plenty wrong with Walter Younger, hard-headed, mean, kind of wild with women, plenty wrong with him. But he sure loved his children. Always wanted them to have something, something" (1553). Even being an uneducated person, Lena is full of wisdom that she tries to pass to her kids. It is possible that she gets her strength from her religious convictions, which she imposes categorically on the members of her family. When Beneatha states that God does not exist, Lena slaps her face and compels her daughter to repeat, "In my mother's house there is still God" (1556). Lena has many reasons to want that house. It is not a simple desire of having a house with a backyard where she can plant some flowers: "Well, I always wanted me a garden like I used to see sometimes at the back of the houses down home. This plant is close as I ever got to having one..." (1557). It also means she can pay tribute to the man she loved the most, provide her grandson a better environment for him to grow up, and give Walter a reason to be proud of himself: "Walter Lee, it makes a difference in a man when he can walk on floors that belong to him" (1577). At the end of the play, she seems to achieve her dreams, as she states, "He finally come into his manhood today, didn't he? Kind of like a rainbow after the rain" (1607).

A Raisin in the Sun is a wonderful play in which many relevant themes point to one main idea: the real significance of the American Dream, which cannot be separated from one's family values and can overcome the hardest situations. Perhaps one can say that at the

end, some dreams keep deferred; Walter does not succeed as a businessperson and from Beneatha, her hopes of becoming a doctor are unpredictable. However, the playwright's intention goes further than the idea of material or personal ambitions. Through a remarkable stage direction enforced by powerful dialogue and characterizations, Lorraine Hansberry proves that dreams, even those so yearned for, cannot be achieved if the dreamer leaves behind his self-respect, denying oneself. After Walter defeats the concealed racism of Mr. Lindner, the Youngers become one, and this fact makes them more capable of confronting new challenges in their life, as Hansberry's family did once (McKissack 23-25). Despite Hansberry's insistence that her play was a "Negro Play," (83) it is clear that *A Raisin in the Sun* reveals the triumph of human dignity that embraces not only African-Americans but also humankind.

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Evaluation: *Pilar's paper is excellent. She addresses several aspects of the American Dream and how it is depicted in the play A Raisin in the Sun, carefully tying all of her discussions back to her main point. It is well organized, and she uses language exquisitely.*

The Tragedy of Blanche DuBois

Jessica Wolfe

Course: Literature 112 (Literature and Film)

Instructor: Kurt Hemmer

Assignment:

Write a comparison/contrast essay examining a character, a scene, or a theme from the drama and movie versions of A Streetcar Named Desire.

The adaptation of a play for film is a difficult job, because making changes risks altering the play's original meaning. Any change to the setting or dialogue of a scene changes the scene's meaning, if only slightly. This was the challenge for the screenwriters of the film version of Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Many parts of the play were changed: some just slightly and some more drastically. Scene six, for example, in which Blanche DuBois and Harold "Mitch" Mitchell conclude their date, is a somewhat loose adaptation of the original play. Both the setting and the characters' lines were changed. The changes to this scene were made for various reasons: some to comply with censorship rules and others to modify or enhance the meaning of the scene. But though significant changes were made in the film version, the original meaning of the scene is still clearly conveyed to the audience.

For several reasons, the screenwriters for the film found it necessary to change the dialogue of the scene. The most significant changes have to do with censorship of the homosexuality that is mentioned in the play. In the play version, when Blanche describes the loss of

her husband, she reveals that she had discovered him in bed with another man. Because of the censorship codes in the 1950s, this was not included in the film version. Blanche's last words to Allan, "I saw! I know! You disgust me..." (96), also were not included. Leaving out this part of the story is significant because for some viewers, the true cause of Blanche's pain and regret may not be entirely clear, and it is this pain that is the cause of her struggles and frames the whole story. To explain his death in the film, Blanche says she told Allan she had lost all respect for him. This is clever because although it is ambiguous enough to satisfy censorship rules, it stays true to the real reason Blanche is upset with Allan, so that those who have read the play will understand the true meaning of her words.

When reading a play, the dialogue is the most important tool to convey a message. In film, on the other hand, the setting plays a large role as well. In the play, Blanche and Mitch have spent the evening at an amusement park and have now returned to Stanley and Stella's flat, where their conversation takes place. Mitch holds a plaster statuette of Mae West—a prize won in a carnival game. This is meaningful because an amusement park is a somewhat childish location for a date, and the fact that Mitch is holding the toy contrasts his simple, coarse nature with Blanche's sophistication. As Blanche and Mitch converse, the carnival prize Mitch holds serves as a reminder of his naiveté in contrast with Blanche, who demonstrates her worldliness by speaking French and citing poetry.

The meaning gained from the amusement park is lost in the film, because Blanche and Mitch have instead gone to a dance hall for their date. It is on a pier outside the dance hall that the scene takes place. This location is significant to the story because Blanche and her husband Allan were out dancing the night he killed himself, and because it is in this scene that Blanche tells Mitch about the tragedy of Allan's death. Blanche's memory of that night is even more heartbreaking because of the fact that she will never go dancing again with the man she loves (Allan) and is instead here with Mitch, who seems to be the complete opposite of Allan, who was gentle and effeminate. In Blanche's eyes, Mitch will never live up to Allan. The location draws a parallel between Allan

and Mitch that leads the audience to compare them and to understand that in a way Blanche is trying to replace Allan with Mitch. It also shows the audience that this can never happen because Mitch and Blanche are just too different.

Despite these differences, the overall meaning of the scene remains the same. In both settings, the scene is shadowed in Blanche's "neurasthenic personality" (85) and in both her and Mitch's unhappiness. In Stanley and Stella's flat, Mitch's naiveté is emphasized by the carnival prize he is holding. Blanche struggles to respond politely to his much less educated conversation as he tells her of his embarrassment over how much he perspires, discusses his weight, and shows his complete ignorance in wooing women by asking her how much she weighs and how old she is.

At the dance hall, Mitch's naiveté is still apparent, just as evident in his mannerisms on the pier as it would be if he were clutching a carnival prize in an apartment. The dark, foggy atmosphere emphasizes Blanche's heartache and her painful memories of the night Allan died. Her instability is evident in the flighty way she talks to Mitch, pretending to snap out of her depression to fix a drink and to create "joie de vivre" (88). The uncomfortable feeling is conveyed just as well on an ill-lit foggy pier as it would be in Stanley and Stella's dark flat.

This uncomfortable atmosphere was imperative to the scene, and though it is achieved in a different way, the film accurately portrays the nature of Blanche and Mitch's relationship as it is portrayed in the play. In both the play and the film, he is confused and intimidated by her; he does not understand her strange behavior but accepts it because he is excited by her sophistication and worldliness. She basks in his compliments but harbors secret insecurities; the questions he asks, particularly the one about her age, directly address the biggest reason for Blanche's lack of self-confidence: she fears she is too old to be desired by men and that her looks are quickly deteriorating. Her attempts to convince him of her "old fashioned ideals" (93) seem almost as immature as his request that she punch him in the stomach to see how firm his stomach is.

A dance hall is an entirely different setting than a small, dark apartment, but by having Blanche and Mitch's conversation take place on a foggy, dark pier with dancing and music in the distance, the same melancholy effect is achieved. The scene demonstrates the nature of the relationship between Blanche and Mitch, revealing their insecurities and desires, which are expanded upon later in the play and eventually lead to another tragedy for Blanche in the destruction of their relationship. Despite the changes that were made, the film still conveys the slow, tragic unraveling of Blanche DuBois.

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Evaluation: *Jessica's focus on a single scene shows how a small element in a play can have a big effect on an audience.*

GraceLand: Are People Important?

Joanna Yau

Course: Literature 208 (non-Western Literature)

Instructor: Kris Piepenburg

Assignment:

Write an essay about a major theme running through Chris Abani's novel GraceLand, for an audience unfamiliar with the novel.

The world has arguably become a whole lot smaller in the past decades. With the advent of cheaper airfare (along with online wheeling and dealing), the Internet, freer press in previously closed societies, and writers coming from places about which people have only heard cursory bits of information, the world – especially the United States – has had their eyes opened to the previously unknown and/or misunderstood cultures and countries around them. One writer who has opened my eyes is Chris Abani, with his novel, *GraceLand*, published in 2004. He has made the world that much more accessible by presenting to his readers a world that is incredibly different than what many in the “middle class” are used to. Abani paints an incredibly vivid picture of life in Nigeria during the 1980s, when chaos filled every street corner, and liquor from the local bukas was the medicine to temporarily soothe the rampant anxiety, anger, disillusionment, and fear. The reason for the chaos was largely due to the government upheavals at the time. The nation had gone through a civil war that had crushed lives and spirits, and was left precariously in the unpredictable, temperamental hands of a military rule that seemed intent on nothing but gaining power and money by whatever means necessary.

Elvis, the teenager who is the main character in *GraceLand*, along with his contemporaries, are living in this frightening world in a ghetto. The author shows how, in such a hard life, people will come up with whatever they need to do in order to survive physically and psychologically. Elvis, however, seems to want to survive beyond this basal belief system. He has somehow been left with his sense of sympathy/empathy intact. Elvis, throughout the story, tries to navigate the mucky waters of existence in this setting. He interacts with and questions the actions and motives of shady characters, questionable friends, and misled leaders. His father is a distant, angry alcoholic who can offer him no guidance in how to interpret his dangerous world. Throughout all of this, Elvis tries to do his best to help those that he perceives of as having an even harder time than him. Ultimately, Elvis finds his redemption by being handed the chance to escape to America, which the reader can hope will offer Elvis the opportunity to become the person he already is; who he is simply does not allow him

to successfully survive in his own home country. Through Elvis's character, Abani shows how sometimes one simply cannot adapt in a country where the value of a human being is reduced to less than that of an animal. Elvis cannot adapt to the fact that people, in general, are simply not important. The individual person becomes dehumanized and expendable, as the author shows through the setting of the novel, the characters, daily life, and the major events in the plot of *GraceLand*.

From the very beginning, the setting creates a mood of detached hopelessness and despair. Elvis is living in squalor, where every day he is walking precariously over slats of wood in the "streets" to keep from slipping and sinking into the mushy ground on which the whole area is built. The bathroom where he lives has slimy walls, and there is a used tampon on the floor. Elvis being able to get to sleep one night while his room floods shows how sad his situation is: "His room was leaking...a steady stream of water that filled the bucket placed in the middle of the floor in a few minutes" (Abani 32). It's difficult to imagine going to sleep knowing that a bucket is slowly filling up, tempting the would-be sleeper to get up and dump it quickly before it overflowed onto the floor. Not only was the water keeping Elvis awake, but "rats [were] swimming in the flooded room. One clambered...onto his foot...[he sent it flying against the wall with his foot]...There was a dull plop as its lifeless body fell into the water that had overflowed from the bucket and coated the floor in a pool" (32). There is a profound feeling of insecurity, fear, and depression that overwhelms the reader in the description of this night in his room and of the ghetto in which he lives. A society in which the individual is cared for and valued would not allow such intolerable conditions to continue. Elvis being able to sleep through this situation shows how entrenched this way of life has become for many people in Nigeria. People have resigned themselves to this way of living; I'd venture to say it is a life worse than that to which dogs here in the United States are accustomed.

The dogs, in fact, had it quite bad as well. In one scene, Elvis sees a boy in the "black filth under one of the houses, rooting like a pig." In his line of sight was a man squatting "on a plank walkway outside his house,

defecating into the swamp below, where a dog lapped up the feces before they hit the ground" (48). Another boy was fishing in this same spot. There was a white bungalow above them – a beautiful, white, clean house, with lovely flowers planted all around. Here, the author sets up a stark contrast between the lives of the "haves" and the "have-nots." The two images are juxtaposed very effectively by Abani, further highlighting the unbearable living situation of many Nigerians. Having a man defecate into waters where a boy is fishing and a dog is thus finding his "food" is utterly dehumanizing.

Along with vividly horrible depictions of the setting of the novel, the events in the daily lives of people in the ghetto communicate the devaluing of human life. One day, Elvis sees a man outside one of the bukás, where many have gathered to have some food and drink. This particular man was even poorer than the rest, and could not afford anything to eat. At one point, a waitress drops a plate of rice, and as people watch him, he "pounc[es] on it, triumphantly scraping rice and dirt into his mouth" (47). This action is not unlike what the dog in the previous setting description would have done in the same situation. While everyone else just looks on with supposed indifference, Elvis feels a "tugging," and he helps the man by buying him food. The man is very thankful. "Tell me if you need anything," he responds. Elvis cares about this one individual man (who is reduced to acting like an animal) where the masses simply have lost their vision to see the need to help a hungry neighbor.

Apparently complicit in this inability to care for people are others who live halfway around the world. Another part of daily life in the Nigerian ghetto is attending movies where "the films were shown courtesy of an American tobacco company" (146). This company passed out free cigarettes to kids as well as adults, according to Elvis. Presumably this is done to get the children and adults hooked on their product. The company has no concern for the peoples' welfare, physically or economically. While cigarettes are marketed here in the United States, the tobacco companies have had to settle large lawsuits due to promoting smoking to youths. This doesn't apply in Nigeria in the eighties, where there are no laws protecting the young from such

dangers. This then leaves those who care equally less in another country to push cancer onto youngsters in a far-away, vulnerable, and fragmented society. Money is the bottom line, not the health of the people.

Elvis clearly has a problem with all of this. In an early scene, Elvis is talking to a man about the people who choose to walk across the street and risk their lives instead of using the bridges that run above the street. Elvis is amazed that people don't consider their own lives important enough to use the bridges in order to avoid the daily fatal collisions with the cars on the street. The man with whom he is speaking finds Elvis's naivete amusing, and Elvis responds, "How can you find that funny? That is the trouble with this country. Everything is accepted" (58). Elvis cannot make sense out of the way people take their lives as a whim. "Why do we gamble with our lives?" Elvis presses. The man's reply reflects the attitude that Abani seems to believe is undermining the Nigerians: "My friend, life in Lagos is a gamble, crossing or no crossing" (57). Lives are reduced to a throwing of the dice, one in which the thrower could actually have control over which numbers would come up.

The results of the deaths on the streets present another example that demonstrates the extreme devaluing of human life. Elvis sees the dead bodies of those who have been killed all over the street. "At least take away the bodies," he says to himself (57). Elvis, with this common-sense comment, opens up an additional level of depravity, as a man near him replies, "Dey cannot...Dis stupid government place a fine on dying by crossing road illegally. So de relatives can only take de body when dey pay de fine" (57). The man goes on to explain how the Sanitation department cannot do the job, either, because they are either on strike or are letting their ambulances be used as hearses by the government workers for their own private businesses. I didn't think Abani could go any further in showing how corrupt and heartless a government could go in repressing their citizens' humanity and devaluing their existence than this exchange between a man who has "learned the ways of Lagos" and a young man who refuses to understand them.

My assumption that Abani had hit the bottom of the barrel in terms of depicting Nigerian life was wrong. There were two incidents that occurred later in the novel that left me reeling with disbelief; the first is when the ghetto is bulldozed. This is where Sunday, Elvis's father, lives. As Sunday explains, "Instead of dem to address de unemployment and real cause of poverty and crime, dey want to cover it all under one pile of rubbish" (248). The government wants the land for commercial use so it can make more money. The people of Maroko build barricades that temporarily keep out the army. After one of the unsuccessful attacks by the soldiers, Abani describes part of the scene that is left: "Behind [Elvis], children were playing a new dare game: who could jump over the still-burning barricade" (272). This description is incredibly upsetting: The children are literally playing with fire. They have nothing else with which to entertain themselves in this ghetto, so they are relegated to finding amusement in risking their lives – lives which don't seem too valuable to loses– by playing on burning tires. It is this destruction of the ghetto that eventually takes the life of Elvis's father when the soldiers come back to "finish the job." Here we see the death of Elvis's father – and countless others – to make room for profit.

The ultimate incident that Abani uses to show the dehumanization of the people in Nigeria is when Elvis and Redemption find out they are transporting body parts (including six heads in a freezer) and live people as part of the organ trafficking that is taking place. The government is painted as complicit in this "enterprise." When Elvis and Redemption were in the car to do a job for the Colonel, they find out that they are delivering "spare parts" for illegal donor transactions. More than this, they are bringing children and innocent people somewhere so they can be taken to be killed so that their organs can be better harvested. Americans turn out to be partially responsible for the demand for illegal organs. Redemption says that Americans don't know and don't care to know where the organs come from; all they care about is getting that organ to save their family member. Again, Elvis cannot accept the ways of his culture in Nigeria. He cannot believe this is happening; yet

Redemption seems to have justified it in his mind so that he can actually go through with this work. Redemption just wants money to survive, and is not concerned for others. Elvis simply cannot – and will not – live this way.

Redemption finally is the one who offers Elvis his way out: he gives him his ticket to America. He recognizes that Elvis simply will not be able to adjust to the dehumanizing conditions in Nigeria, and needs to get out. Since Redemption has found his own way to survive in Nigeria and won't be leaving for America, he offers Elvis something his country could not: hope. By Elvis leaving for America at the end of the novel, we see that perhaps Elvis will be able to follow his dream of being a dancer. Or just doing whatever it is that he was meant to do: that thing that will allow him to live out his potential as a human being with value and dignity. Nigeria, during the eighties, simply acted as a prison in these regards. We can assume that "Elvis" is not the only "person" who experienced Nigeria in such a way; there are countless others who could have used that same ticket out of the corruption, dehumanization, and hopelessness that was so rampant at this point in Nigeria's history. As Redemption explains: "Dis world operate different way for different people" (242). Elvis's ultimate refusal to live by this dictum emphasizes Abani's point that people are indeed valuable.

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Evaluation: *Joanna very lucidly explains a key idea running through this relatively recently published novel, through analysis and discussion of many well-chosen examples. This novel is an eye-opener, and so is Joanna's paper about it.*

Metamorphosis in the Samsa Household

Mary Yoakim

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Andrew Wilson

Assignment:

Students were to choose one of numerous topic options related to the stories we'd read for class.

In Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis," an important theme that plays out throughout the story is that of change. In the story, although the whole family changes their lifestyle dramatically, one character experiences a colossal change; in fact, she experiences a true metamorphosis. This character is Grete. Throughout the story, she transforms mentally, emotionally, and physically from a dependent, idealistic, child to an adult of society. This is in contrast to her brother Gregor's "metamorphosis" of being transformed into vermin. Although Gregor is physically transformed into vermin, it is just the physical embodiment of what he has already been to his family and society. In the end, it is Grete who has undergone a true metamorphosis.

From the very beginning, Gregor is in essence vermin. His character is extremely flat as well as predictable. Gregor is the faithful son who is happy to slave away his life as a drone just to make his family live quite comfortably. After his father's business collapsed, Gregor took it upon himself to not only pay off all of his father's debt, but to provide a salary for the family to

live on. The family quite happily accepts this from Gregor and soon comes to expect it. Even more troubling is the fact that although Gregor does not like or enjoy his job, he allows it to completely consume his life. Each day after waking up at four o'clock in the morning for work, he sets off to travel as a salesman. As he recounts his daily schedule he says, "when I come back to the hotel of a morning to write up the orders I've got, these others are only sitting down to breakfast" (Kafka 786). Portia Weiskel remarks that, "Gregor in his human form was an undistinguished, homebound, lonely traveling salesman living a tedious existence... (70). Gregor not only accepts his role as the sacrificial provider within his family but in society as well. He accepts everything that comes his way and puts everyone else's interests before his own, even if it is harmful to himself to do so. After seeing how other salesmen are able to require humane treatment within their job, one might think that Gregor might decide to do so. However, this is way out of character for him. His set mentality is that good, comfortable, and even decent lives are for other people, not for him.

When Gregor "awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect" (785). He is not startled at all at this "metamorphosis" because he has been living the life of an insect for most of his life and is thus used to it. Richard Lawson says, "Gregor, as a loathsome insect, has become that which he was made to feel by his family..." (29). He is not living the life of a human with freedom, rights, and needs. Instead, he is living a life comparable to that of a male insect. He serves his colony (his family) by doing miserable work all day, until he obtains some sustenance (money) for them. In the end, when he cannot serve his colony anymore, he is eliminated (dies). Thus, Gregor dies as a result of a conflict of aims. There is a man versus man conflict, or more like man versus men, the man being Gregor and the men being Gregor's family. From the surface of the story, it seems as if both Gregor and his family's aims were comparable. The family's goal was to live comfortably, and this goes along with Gregor's servitude. Gregor's goal was to provide for his family and pay off his father's debt. Unfortunately, there is no balance

struck between these two aims, causing Gregor to become consumed by his work, while his parents fail to care that this will eventually drain him of his life. According to Sheila Dickson, "He has not matured emotionally, nor sexually beyond adolescence and has not developed an independent personality, but he is expected to carry the heavy burden of his family's welfare..." (178). This inevitability leads to his demise as such an imbalance cannot exist. Thus, had Gregor remained a human for the remainder of the story, he still would've had the same end because his living conditions have never been fit for a human.

Gregor is basically treated how a slave would be treated. He is not given the treatment that is expected for a family member. For example, Gregor's father, Mr. Samsa, hides or keeps secret from Gregor the money that is left over from his failed business of years prior. In fact, it is a lie through omission since Gregor holds the belief that the collapse of his father's business has left the family penniless, and his father does nothing to correct that belief. With this money, Gregor might "have paid off some more of his father's debts to the chief with this extra money, and so brought much nearer the day on which he could quit his job..."(800). Gregor does not even truly gain any benefit proportional to the money he is bringing home. Although he has been the breadwinner of the family and paying off a debt that is not even his, he is not let in on the financial status of the family. It becomes surprising that he even knows how many more years he must work in order to pay off the supposed amount of debt his parents have. At this point, it is quite obvious that Mr. Samsa does not care for his son's happiness or even his well being. Gregor is just a slave to his father and thus the family. To Mr. Samsa, Gregor is little more than a source of money, which leads to the question of what kind of father would let his *son* slave away his life just so that he can be comfortable? Is capitalistic society leading to the total break down of the value of family? Or what is it that can lead a family to indifferently destroy the life of one of their members just for their own comfort? This slave versus son treatment is a total rejection of Gregor's humanity, further proving his unchanged life form and status after being transformed into an insect.

So the title of the story does not primarily refer to Gregor's transformation, which remains physical and therefore literally skin deep. Instead, it refers to Gregor's sister Grete. To start out, Grete is definitely not a flat character. In the beginning, Grete is "a child of seventeen and whose life hitherto had been so pleasant, consisting as it did in dressing herself nicely, sleeping long...and above all playing the violin" (800). She is pretty much an air-headed leech who helps destroy Gregor's life while doing nothing useful for society. Her previous lifestyle of massive consumption while contributing nothing obviously could not have lasted very long, and it does not. However, as the story progresses, Grete begins her transformation. As soon as Gregor becomes physically transformed, there is no income for the family. Little by little, Grete begins to realize that in the end, life is a journey that she must be able to make all by herself. So the first step is that she must find a way to support herself as well as the family a bit. Grete obtains and holds down a job, showing the first step of her maturation into an independent adult.

It is also one of the first signs of the development of her decision-making skills. Grete was used to being treated as a child for whom almost all important decisions were made by others, and especially Gregor. However, as soon as Gregor is transformed, she takes it upon herself to take care of him. She is the only one in her family who thinks to or wants to provide him with food. She first good intentionally provides Gregor with milk and white bread, which was his favorite food when he was human. After seeing that he does not eat it, she correctly concludes that this type of food no longer appeals to him and decides to give him a variety of food, and from this she can conclude which he prefers. This precise loving care, however, doesn't last for long. According to Johannes Pfeiffer, "her genuine desire to help... becomes more and more of a pose which satisfies her secret wish for recognition or even her will to dominate" (56). She now realizes that she can control her own life and becomes busy doing so. Grete eventually becomes desensitized to Gregor's needs, including how clean his room is, because she is becoming absorbed with living her own life. She gradually adopts an ethnocentric view of Gregor and how he should be

cared for. She believes that anything that she thinks is good for Gregor *must* be good for him. For example, “she got the idea in her head of giving him as wide a field as possible to crawl in and removing the pieces of furniture that hindered him, above all the chest of drawers and the writing desk” (802). She does not want to remove the furniture to hurt Gregor; instead, she believes it will make it easier for him to crawl around, which seems to be his form of entertainment. This is not what Gregor ultimately wants, but “Unfortunately his sister was of the contrary opinion; she had grown accustomed, and not without reason, to consider herself an expert in Gregor’s affairs...” (803). Grete is now a primary decision maker not only in her life but that of the family members’ lives as well.

By now, Grete is most definitely on her way toward a true transformation. Another important aspect that must be considered is her emotional development. Whereas Grete used to be a simple girl who used to cry whenever things didn’t go her way, she is transforming into a tough woman. Whenever things are not going the way she planned for them to, she instead pushes full steam ahead to rigidly enforce them. The ultimate example of this is when Grete decides that her brother cannot remain with the family anymore. This same brother who worked away his life so that she could have a lazy life and perhaps go on to the Conservatorium to play her violin must now be cut loose. The way she presents her decision to her parents is unsympathetic as well. “‘My dear parents,’ said his sister, slapping her hand on the table by way of introduction, ‘things can’t go on like this...we must try to get rid of him...’” (813). She states her resolve to her parents as if it is her decision alone what would happen to Gregor. She now has no sympathy or care for Gregor. She has shifted her beliefs about Gregor from him being a loving brother to a selfish nasty insect that is ruining her life. As James Rolleston notes, “Grete is developing a personality whose urge for an identity is fundamentally antagonistic to Gregor’s own” (62). She is becoming an independent person who is first and foremost looking out for number one, and if there is time left and not too much effort required, she helps the family a bit. This is obvi-

ously the antithesis of Gregor’s life. It is also quite hopeful seeing that she is not on the same ruinous path that Gregor was on. Grete understands much more than Gregor did that she must first help herself first before any others, including her family.

Although turning against one’s own family is an extreme act of toughness, perhaps Grete needs to go this far in order to fortify herself against the cruelty and harshness of society. Yes, this seems like a negative and even possibly a ruthless transformation. However, although turning against one’s own family is an unfortunate turn in events, it is the brutal reality of what must happen sometimes when one is living in a society in which only the fittest will survive or have any chance of advancing themselves. For example, look at what happens to Gregor when he is late for work the first time in 5 years. The chief clerk himself shows up at his home’s door and begins drilling him with questions. Also, the chief clerk begins to accuse him of being an unfaithful worker, saying, “I thought you were a quiet, dependable person....The chief did hint to me... a possible reason for your disappearance—with reference to the cash payments that were entrusted to you...”(791). Not only does Gregor’s boss show up at Gregor’s personal residence for being late for work once, but he begins questioning his employee’s character, as well accusing him of being a thief as well as lazy. Gregor’s health is of no importance, either. Even if Gregor were to say he was sick once, “The chief himself would be sure to come with the sick-insurance doctor, would reproach his parents with their son’s laziness, and would cut all excuses short...” (787). Is it any surprise that Grete must become desensitized to humanity in order to become a successful person? This type of cruel conduct exists within the family as well. As mentioned earlier, what kind of father would allow his own son, his flesh and blood, to fritter away his life with such an uncomfortable existence just so that he does not have to lift a finger in work? Also, when the chief clerk comes to the home, instead of defending his son from the unfair accusations, the father joins the chief clerk and begins to critique Gregor negatively as well. In this society, a degree of callousness toward everyone’s humanity is the only way to better oneself.

The last phase of Grete's metamorphosis occurs after Gregor has died. The family is on its way to the open country for a day of relaxation. As the three family members discuss their plans for the future, both the Samsa parents suddenly realize that Grete has physically matured. Thus after "glances of complete agreement. . . [they came] to the conclusion that it would soon be time to find a good husband for her" (817). The way Grete's parents realize she is becoming an adult is a bit disconcerting. They have just lost one of their children to their desire of an easy life. Instead of mourning Gregor or having a change of heart, they are relieved and on vacation. This makes one wonder what they have in store for Grete. Are they perhaps trying to figure out how they can get her to provide them with the life Gregor provided them with? Could they possibly hope to marry off Grete to a Gregor-like son-in-law? Maybe they are, but at this point in her life, Grete is smarter, stronger emotionally, and more physically mature than at any other time of her life yet. This gives hope that she is strong enough to be defiant if her parents try to leech off of her as they did with Gregor. Grete is like a new person; really, she has grown up and understands what life is about. This is all symbolized when she "sprang to her feet first and stretched her young body" (817). It is as if she is a brand new butterfly breaking out of a cocoon, ready to soar out into her life on her newfound wings. She now has a better understanding of how *she* wants to live her life.

There are two changes in the Samsa family that transform their way of life. The first of these is Gregor's physical transformation into the insect he is living as. Gregor had, however, already been turned into a lifeless shell by his demanding family (especially his father), so really he does not undergo a true psychological metamorphosis. On the other hand, his sister Grete does undergo a massive metamorphosis in which she develops into a more mentally, emotionally, and physically developed adult. She goes from being a dependent child who is really worthless, besides being a consumer, to an independent, realistic adult who understands how life is in the end a solitary journey she must make on her own.

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Evaluation: *This essay is incredibly solid and readable. It's also an economical little essay: not excessively (or needlessly) long. Also, the students did not have to do any outside research for this particular round of essays, but Mary used secondary sources to further develop her analysis.*

Afterword: I Have Made My Life By Writing

Dennis Weeks

Dean of the Harper College Liberal Arts Division

I have made my life by writing. I come from a writing family. My father was an editor for a series of newspapers in the Midwest, and one of my cousins wrote children's books, and her father won the Caldecott prize for illustration. I took my BA, MA, and PhD in English and have spent over twenty years teaching writing. In my spare time, I wrote or edited five books, all of them academic, which means that they are on obscure topics and not best sellers by a long shot. I think that I know a little bit about writing as a result. But, about the time that I think I have writing all figured out, it seems to change.

Of course I understand the rules of good writing that are out there. I can conjugate verbs, coordinate sentences – cumulative and otherwise – with the best of them. Parallel structure is my middle name and wrestling down the participial phrase is like mother's milk to me. But, I cannot write a creative work to save my life. I have tried writing poetry, but it has the lilt of a badly done Hallmark card. I have tried to write a short story but the characters were so flat and lifeless, I might have been better off writing, not in ink, but in dust. I just cannot figure out creative writing and admire those people who can write a story that makes you want to read it or a poem that has something to say.

What I have written here is called an afterword. A preface tells you what to look for and an afterword tells you what you have seen. It is much like authors telling you that they are going to tell you and then telling you that they told you. But, what I was told to do was to write something about writing. I think that writing is a process, and, if done right, it produces a product that people want to read.

I used to tell my writing students that I was really tired about reading essays that told me something I

already knew. "Try to spice it up for me," I would plead. "Make me want to read what you have written." The resounding question that always came back to me was "but, what if you do not agree with me? Will I fail?" I would try to reassure my students that I would not fail them for original thought and that nothing could surprise me. And, sometimes that advice worked, though most often my response fell on deaf ears, and I got essays on "safe topics." My point here is that a good expository essay can be creative and must be original. To do otherwise is to eat the same soup day after day.

I think that I have read hundreds of thousands of pages of essays, term papers, research papers, reports, and technical writing. I am pretty sure that if all those pages were still around and the ink could be bleached off them and they were returned to their pristine condition, then we might never have to cut down another tree to make paper. Alas, that is not possible, this removal of well-spilled ink or wasted ink cannot happen. Thus, if you are going to kill a tree, put words on the paper that are carefully chosen and reflect solid writing. Trees take a long time to grow, but bad ideas with little or no thought seem to spring full grown in an hour or less. Write such polished prose that the tree will be glad to know it was put to good use.

Writing should be responsive. Writing should serve a purpose. Writing should be crafted. Oscar Wilde, describing Henry James' writing, supposedly said that "James wrote prose as if it were a painful duty." Do not write bad prose. Be proud of what you have written because you believe in what you have written. Be creative and original in your writing and make your writing "tree worthy." If you write well, then one day you, too, will begin an afterword with "I have made my life by writing."

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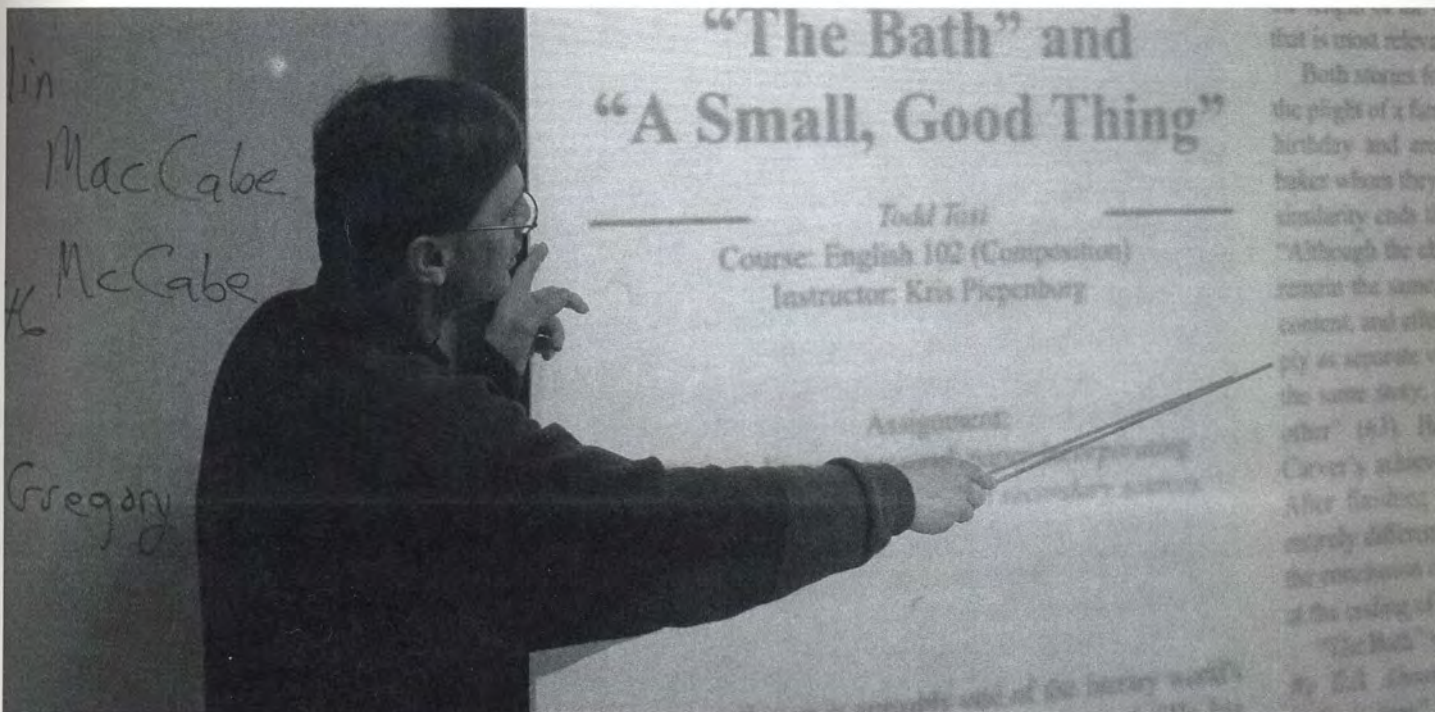
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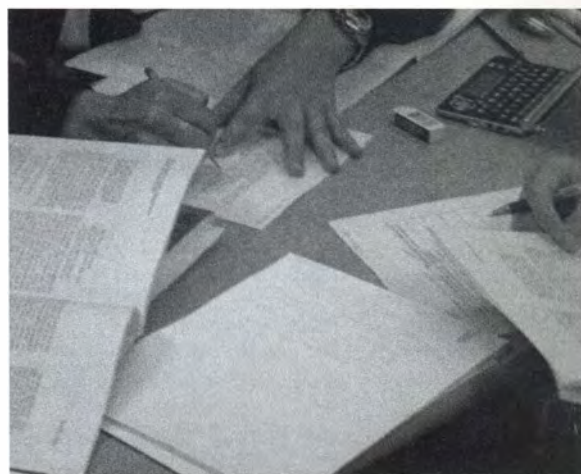
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