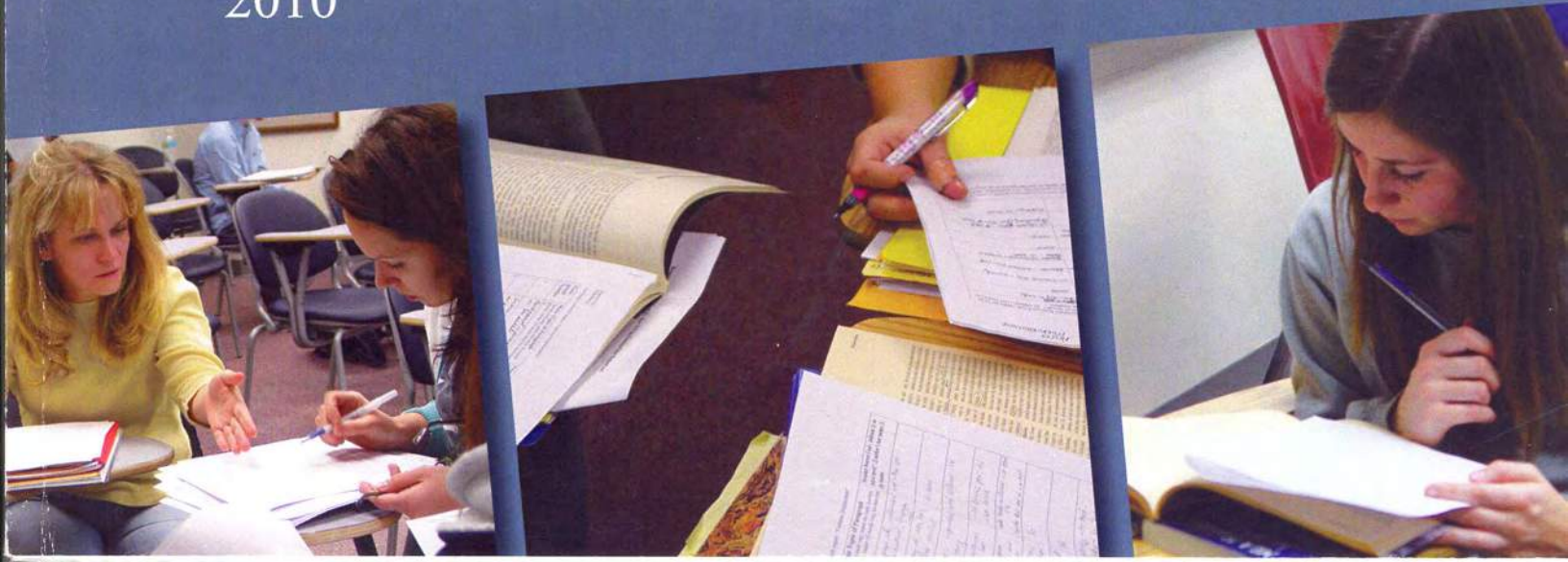




# THE HARPER ANTHOLOGY

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

Volume XXII  
2010





## Student Authors



Iwona Awlasewicz

Andrea Azzo

Justin Bailey

Amanda Boyd

Ronald Chilcutt

Kim Daniel

Gretchen Dee

Lynn Densler

Christina Diba

Alex Dudasik

Shari Emme

Teegan Fiedler

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Mike Franzen

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Dan Gallup

Casey Giglio

Richard Guth

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Michael Medsker

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Lindsay Quid

Jaimie Quintanilla

Nathan Rapp

Sarah Sagredo

Gloria Ufheil

Corey Yarbrough

Nicole Zapata



# The Harper Anthology


## Volume XXII

2010

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

Prepared by  
*The Harper Anthology* Committee:

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with all submissions

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Submissions are read each January by the  
members of the *Harper Anthology* Committee,  
and they are rated on a 5-point scale. Committee  
members do not rate their own students' papers.

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# Foreword: Writing as a Porthole Opening onto Eternity

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Richard Middleton-Kaplan

Editor's Note: Professor Middleton-Kaplan has been part of Harper's full-time faculty since 2002, teaching courses in the English and Humanities Departments. He has especially enriched the lives of Harper students through his courses focused on nonviolence and social activism, the Holocaust, world literature, and American literature, and he has also taught summer courses for Harper students in Paris. He has published articles and made conference presentations on the literature of the Holocaust, on the works of Herman Melville, and on writers such as Aristophanes, Dostoevsky, and Arthur Miller. In this Foreword, Professor Middleton-Kaplan honors the student writers published in this volume and provides succinct and informed guidance for those facing future assignments or completing present ones. There is much good advice and inspiration for writing to be found in these opening thoughts.

---Kris Piepenburg, Chair,  
Harper Anthology Committee

"The only joy in life is to begin," opined the Italian writer Cesare Pavese. And so let us begin, joyously—in celebration of the stellar student essays gathered in this collection.

The student writers in this volume now join the company of published authors. It is a heady achievement, conferring the undeniable thrill of seeing one's name in print in a tangible volume. With their essays selected by faculty for inclusion, these writers can feel justly proud of their accomplishments.

How did they achieve this level of mastery? When they encounter future assignments, how will they replicate the feat of making their academic prose defy the prosaic? What can we learn from their excellence? At the risk of over-generalizing (a risk which, having acknowledged, I will now ignore), I would suggest the following.

First, they wrote with a conscious awareness of their readers. Perhaps the first step in becoming a good writer is acquiring this consciousness. A diary or journal only has to make sense to its author, who may return to passages years after composing them and find that the words awaken long-slumbering memories, sensations, and even aromas. However, the writer who writes for others cannot use this private code, but must find a language in common with readers.

On occasion I will be reviewing a paper with a student in my office, and I will ask what a confusing sentence means. It's not unusual for the student to re-read the sentence and say something like, "I don't know what it means. It made sense when I wrote it, but now I can't tell." If the writer can't tell, of course, then neither can the reader. You hold in your hands a collection of essays by writers who can tell what they meant, and who did tell their readers exactly that—in lucid prose.

Second, these writers captured the true spirit of the word "essay." The noun which we use to describe an academic paper derives from the verb "to assay," meaning to assess, to test by experiment, to try out, to explore. This is what the great essayists do: They put forward a subject or a proposition, and then they test it out in an essay by turning over the idea and examining it from all sides, letting their thoughts roam over it. The first great essayist, Michel de Montaigne, used the form to explore his thoughts on topics ranging from sadness to idleness, friendship, sleep, solitude, cannibals, and the custom of wearing clothes. The great essayists who followed—Pascal, Samuel Johnson, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, William Hazlitt and Charles Lamb, Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin, Emerson, Woolf and Wilde, Orwell, Bertrand Russell, and in our own time Stephen Jay Gould and Gary Snyder—all of these used the essay to test out their ideas for themselves and for us. If you have not read their essays, I urge you to go exploring in the caves of their words. You may need a hard hat and flashlight from time to time, you may slip and stumble, but what you stumble upon will surprise, delight, and enlighten you. The essays in this issue of *The Harper Anthology* are written in that same spirit of exploration and discovery.

As an instructor, I prize essays that not only fulfill all the requirements of a writing assignment, but that go beyond that, using the assignment as an occasion to craft a piece of writing that is compelling enough to command attention on its own terms. In literary studies, we have the term "occasional verse" to describe poetry written to commemorate an occasion, such as a particular event or incident. These are the poems that a nation's

---

**Foreword: Writing as a Porthole  
Opening onto Eternity**

poet laureate has to crank out every time there's a royal birth or wedding or death or coronation... England's poor present poet laureate, Andrew Motion, no doubt has beads of blood and sweat already forming on his brow as he trembles over how he will memorably commemorate, to royal satisfaction, the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton.

Freed from the burden of royal disapproval, the writers in this volume meet the burden of transforming the occasion of an academic assignment into an occasion for original, in-depth examination of a topic. Moreover, they achieved this by capturing our attention from their very first words.

A writer's relationship with the reader begins before the first sentence; it begins with the title. In everyday physical encounters, when you meet someone new, you create an impression with the warmth of your smile, the glint in your eye, the lilt in your voice, the firmness of your handshake. First impressions are crucial; you never have a second chance to make a first impression. In writing, with only ink dots on a page to create that impression, the title substitutes for the handshake. *Comparison-Contrast Paper?* A limp handshake of a title. *Essay #4?* A sign of a writer glancing down, embarrassed, at his own shoe tops instead of looking you directly in the eye. Compare those feeble titles with the inviting titles in this volume and you start to grasp how a great title grasps you.

For example, take James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. The word "Justified" lets you know that you won't be subjected to a sappy confession, but rather a defiant defense. Here are some other titles to ponder: Manuel Puig's *Eternal Curse on the Reader of These Pages*. Carson McCullers's *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*. Malcolm Lowry's *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid*.

For the intriguingly bizarre, Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and Tom Wolfe's *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* spark a reader's interest.

On the lighter side, we find Sherman Alexie's *Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, Elizabeth McCracken's *Here's Your Hat What's Your Hurry*, and Cynthia Heimel's *If You Can't Live without Me, Why Aren't You Dead Yet?!* You can depend on Heimel for stiletto-sharp appellations; I still chuckle at her biting title *Get Your Tongue Out of My Mouth, I'm Kissing You Good-bye!*

The longest title I've seen is from a 1950s guide to parent-teenager relationships. Capturing the typical evening conversation between the conventional *Ozzie and Harriet* harried parent and the strange new creature called a "teenager" that emerged in the '50s—a creature corrupted by the world of James Dean, Marlon Brando, and the dangerous devil music dubbed "rock n' roll"—the helpful guide was called *Where Are You Going? Out. Who Are You Going With? Nobody. What Are You Going to Do? Nothing*. I'm not sure how it all fit on the spine of the book, but that's a snappy title!

With each of these openings, I am immediately transported into the author's universe without even realizing that I have left my own. Whether it's a fictional or a scholarly universe makes no difference; in either case, I want to surrender my vision of the mundane to the writer's vision of something—anything—that will widen the optical field of my cosmos.

"The limits of your language are the limits of your world," said the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. When we step inside another writer's language, our own worlds expand to ways of being and thinking that we would otherwise never encounter.

How do the student writers here expand your world? Partly through fluid thought and graceful expression. Those have long been the writer's goals. In the early sixteenth century, Baldesar Castiglione wrote *The Book of the Courtier*, hoping to illuminate the virtues of the ideal courtier. The chief virtue was *sprezzatura*, a word Castiglione coined, which means something like our word "nonchalance," but also something more:

I have discovered a universal rule which seems to apply more than any other in all human actions or words: namely... (to use perhaps a novel word for it) to practice in all things a certain *sprezzatura* which conceals all artistry and makes whatever one says or does seem uncontrived and effortless. I am sure that grace springs especially from this, since everyone knows how difficult it is to accomplish some unusual feat perfectly, and so facility in such things excites the greatest wonder.

If I may indulge in a bit of fanciful time travel, I imagine that Castiglione would have been pleased with the artful artlessness herein, for despite the authors' labor, in the fabric of these essays, the seams do not show.



The graceful ease of polished prose is deceptive. Read a paragraph of Hemingway's prose and you may think that his simple-sounding style came naturally to him. In fact, it was the product of years of laboring at his craft, teaching himself to pare away all but the essential. "Writing is easy," he said, adding with his characteristic delicacy: "You sit down at your typewriter...and you bleed."

Much of the hard work takes place in the uncelebrated act of revision. Novelist James Michener conceded that he was one of the world's worst writers... but one of the world's great re-writers. Hemingway told an interviewer that he had revised the last paragraph of *A Farewell to Arms* forty-three times. The astonished interviewer stammered out, "Why? What was the problem?" Hemingway's answer bore all the simplicity of his chiseled prose: "Getting the words right." It sounds so simple, but as every writer knows, it isn't.

Where does the hard work of revising end? Somewhere this side of death and insanity, one hopes.

When the hard work goes well, something magical can happen. A beloved friend of mine writes prolifically and passionately. I once asked him if he actually enjoys writing when he is in the midst of it. He answered that the act of writing is the closest he ever feels to being in touch with eternity. If you have ever sat down at your desk to write something, only to look up and realize that six hours have just evaporated, you know what my friend is describing. Time drops away, the profane world vanishes, and there remains just you, your thoughts, and eternity.

Perhaps it was such a state of mind that enabled Machado de Assis to dedicate his novel *Epitaph of a Small Winner* "To the first worm that gnawed my flesh."

Herman Melville transcended time and space during the composition of *Moby-Dick*. He wrote the novel in a tiny room at a farmhouse in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. I haven't been there to visit, but I don't get the impression that it is the most Romantic site in the world. And yet Melville was so immersed in his subject that when he looked out from the small window of his lonely writer's garret, he felt as though he was looking out a porthole; the telegraph poles appeared to him like ships' masts; in "the gigantic shape of Greylock," the local mountain, he saw the shape of the massive white whale. He wrote to his publisher, "My room seems a ship's cabin; & at nights

when I wake up & hear the wind shrieking, I almost fancy there is too much sail on the house, & I had better go on the roof & rig in the chimney."

Fortunately for us, Melville and his farmhouse survived the stormy seas of composition. He completed the journey and brought his tale safely into port—just as the writers here did with their essays. And that brings us to the joy of typing the last word, the satisfaction a writer feels when the writing task is finally finished.

Pavese was wrong. To begin is not the only joy. There is also joy in concluding.

---

## Battle for Nigeria

Iwona Awlasiewicz

Course: Literature 208 (non-Western Literature)

Instructor: Kris Piepenburg

Assignment: *One option for writing a paper about an African work of literature involved evaluating the quality of life and the state of culture in Lagos, Nigeria, as presented in Chris Abani's 2004 novel GraceLand.*

The culture of Lagos, as emerging from the pages of *GraceLand*, a novel by Nigerian writer Chris Abani, is a junkyard of objects and ideas where complex and sophisticated blends with crude and simple, where Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* is wedged next to a cheap mass-market pamphlet titled *Beware of Harlots*. The idea of Nigerian culture as a garbage can is not new. It appeared in the poem by Catherine Acholonu titled "Nigeria in the Year 1999," but in Abani's *GraceLand*, the realization of how abandoned Africa is becomes overwhelming. In the novel, the local library, for example, contains outdated and random volumes, "books with the word 'Bantu' in their titles," or "treatises on Russian and Chinese culture and politics" (55). Such is the fate of post-colonial Nigeria in the early 1980s when the action of the novel takes place. Having gained its freedom and independence, the country redefines those very notions. Elvis, the novel's teenage protagonist, gathers information about the world from the back of an old issue of an entertainment magazine. Africa, besides serving as the largest refuse dump, is the rest of the world's favorite laboratory. As described early in the novel, pharmaceutical companies dump drugs of unknown provenance and clinical purpose (Pracetmol), and American tobacco companies get kids addicted to cigarettes by giving out free samples to everyone during a movie screening they sponsor. What survives the postatomic holocaust landscape of Nigerian culture in *GraceLand*? The American exports: the mythology of John Wayne movies and the cultural heritage of

Elvis Presley, the marketing strategies of the Coca-Cola Company that make it more available than bread. While Coca-Cola and Phillip Morris count their profits, Nigeria pays a great price for opening themselves to the beacons of American pop culture, a price our own culture paid somewhere along the industrial revolution of the end of the nineteenth century: desensitization of the spirit.

Elvis, *GraceLand*'s main character, is sixteen years old when he moves with his father from a village buried deep in Nigeria to Lagos, a cosmopolitan port city. Throughout the novel, we roam the town with him as he performs odd jobs, trying to make a living. From construction to smuggling of body parts, we experience with Elvis the worst Nigeria has to offer, but we also realize that European colonization has been the touch of evil for Africa.

Still living in his village, Elvis is five years old when he experiences his first "rite of passage," the "killing of the eagle" ceremony, "the first step into manhood" (19). He is stripped of his clothing and dons a grass skirt, while his Uncle Joseph covers his body with "red and white designs." When the painting ritual is over, Elvis is handed his first kill: a chick at the end of a bow. It was still alive, a sign of fresh kill. "Is this an eagle chick?" enquires Elvis. The reply: "No, it is chicken, eagle is too expensive" (19). The rest of the ceremony is equally stark and deflated, as if the spirit has gone out of the ritual itself. The elders who go through the motions as if they've forgotten the purpose of it, and the rotting chicks--eagle substitutes hanging from the iroko tree, the clan shrine "like grotesque ornaments on a Christmas tree" (21)--are all symbols of a spiritless religion, just like Christmas is for modern Catholics. The new oracle for the tired masses is pronounced by Joseph, Elvis's uncle, when the boy turns away from the smell of the "decaying birds": "but it stinks" complains Elvis. "So does life, boy. So does life" (21), says Joseph. Just like for members of the Western culture, Christmas is not Christmas without gifts under the tree; Elvis can truly feel like a man only when "drinking his Fanta" (22) with his older cousins afterward. American mass-market culture has replaced the Igbo mythology. And, the kola nut ritual does not stand a chance compared to "de new oracle" (54) of television -- the source of wisdom for Redemption, Elvis' best friend.

With European colonization, not only did the Igbo people abandon their own sources of spirituality, but they did not adopt the new God, either. Now, stripped naked of all redeeming qualities of religion of any kind, they have nowhere to turn. Innocent, Elvis's cousin, a teenager at the time, took part in the Biafran-Nigerian war in the 1960s as a member of the Boys' Brigade. One day when Elvis still lived in the village of Afikpo, his cousin tells him a particular story he remembered from the war. They stumbled upon a burned down church with bodies strewn all over the mission. He witnessed his leader, the Captain, a boy of seventeen, rape a nun: nothing was sacred, no one was safe. Even though they did not commit the other atrocities they had stumbled upon in the burnt-out church, Innocent knew there was no difference between them and the governmental soldiers: "There was only one God in war: the gun. One religion: genocide" (211). The hymns and prayers he has learned in missionary schools did not offer any reprieve: "It was Harmattan, and everything was coated in fine red dust. A sloughed-off fragment of another hymn popped into Innocent's head, the words flooding: 'Are you washed in the blood, in the soul cleansing blood, of the Lamb?' He shrugged it away and went back to his playing" (211).

Innocent's war story sheds some light on the irreverent attitude that Nigerians in the novel have toward death and dying. In this novel, life is cheap and death is meaningless. The narrator describes traffic mishaps in Lagos:

It was dangerous, and everyday at least ten people were killed trying to cross the road. If they didn't die when the first car hit them, subsequent cars finished the job. The curious thing, though, was that there were hundreds of overhead pedestrian bridges, but people ignored them. Some even walked up to the bridges and then crossed underneath them. (56)

People die the way they live: lonely, anonymous, and insignificant, as if the two phases of human life were one, a permanently morphed and undistinguishable hell. Earlier in the novel, Elvis describes what passes for a pavement in Maroko, narrow planks of wood thrown across a swamp: "Elvis stared into the muddy puddles, imagining what life, if any, was trying to crawl its way out" (6). What crawls

out is Elvis's life, the life of his family and friends, mixed with feces, rats, and Coca-Cola bottles. Life in Maroko, a slum in Lagos, takes root in a garbage can, and living is an exhausting business. The major pre-occupation is scraping for remnants of food (when Elvis meets Okon for the first time, the latter is nose-diving in the mud, looking for scraps outside a street restaurant), eking out a living with no guarantees and unpredictable results. A father of ten sells used clothing on a street to make some money. The police attack his little enterprise and destroy the goods for reasons unknown to us. The distraught man commits suicide. Life has no value. Dead bodies, like road kill, are not picked up off the roads "because the government place a fine on dying by crossing road illegally" (57). But, Elvis wants to know, if there are road bridges offering a safe crossing, why is it that people do not want to take them? The answer Elvis is given by a fellow passenger on the bus is simple: if it's your time to go, no bridge is going to help you. It's obvious this man has given up all responsibility for his own life. He is not in charge, has no control. Like everyone else in *GraceLand*, he is a zombie, a walking dead.

The dehumanizing indifference to death and dying throughout *GraceLand* is a direct result of the "Westernization" of Nigeria. Western culture creates enough of an "itch" without giving the ability to scratch it. Lagoans do not live in isolation anymore. Through the miracle of television and the wealthy members of their own group, they get an occasional glimpse of what life could be like: cars, roads, clean homes, running water, blush gardens ("the itch"), but they are not given basic tools nor governmental support to be able to fulfill their desires ("scratching the itch"). The city brings with it hope for a better life (jobs, schools, hospitals, etc.) but for those who are unlucky, the separation from the family and the food-producing soil is deadly. The city of Lagos with its lack of amenities and basic infrastructure turns from a promised land to a jail cell. It is a breeding ground of crime, disease, and debilitating poverty.

The destructive effects of the city with all its Western ideas become very apparent in comparison to the life in Afikpo, a typical Nigerian village where Elvis is born. There is order and purpose, even in death. Young Elvis asks his grandmother, Oye, about "bush mango

trees” which tend to grow in straight lines. She tells him a parable about criminals who were buried standing up and became trees. “You know why tha criminals were killed that way? Redemption. In death they were given a chance to be useful...” (21). In the African village, death has a redeeming value. Through myths and parables, life and death acquire order and meaning. Beatrice, Elvis’s mother, is dying, but there is a lot of tranquility in that knowledge. She spends a lot of time with her mother and son: they work together and support each other – Beatrice in her garden and Oye as a medicine woman. Family members have time to come to terms with what’s coming. There is also hope, a strong belief that Beatrice will be “reborn into the lineage” (37). Death has its place in the chronology of human life. When it finally comes to Sunday, (Elvis’s father) toward the end of the novel, he gets to experience the spiritual aspects of his culture because he takes a stand. Right before he is mowed down, he sees the spirit of his wife and a leopard, “the totem of his forefathers” (287) who guide him to the afterlife through the wasteland that is Maroko. But Sunday’s death is abrupt, violent, and absurd.

Sunday’s vision right before his death points to a facet both Western and Igbo culture have in common: the dismissive attitudes both cultures have towards women. As the narrator explains it, “It was an arduous life, complicated by the fact that they had all just emerged from a three-year civil war in which most families lost members vital to the rebuilding of their lives. Women were missed more than men, because they made up the main work force” (37). Throughout *GraceLand*, there are very few male role models: Sunday is immobilized by his anger and frustration. Feeling cheated by life, he resigns to inaction. Redemption is a survivor who would do anything for a buck; Okon is a good-natured child molester. The men in the novel are an army of the unlucky, feeling-sorry-for-themselves foot soldiers. They are a resigned and defeated lot. Sunday beats his son to a pulp when he catches him cross-dressing under the watchful eye of Aunt Felicia and her girlfriends. Interestingly enough, one of the few working men depicted in the book is a “dung man” who is “understandably aggressive and bad tempered” and “never smiles” (64). Women are the peacekeepers. At least they do all the work. The novelist, Mr. Abani, might

have been describing a socialist propaganda poster from 1949 when he wrote: “Happy, buxom women who carried cinder blocks on their heads to the upper levels, their fat shaking as they exploded into laughter at some joke” (28). Women, usually mothers, cannot afford the luxury of nervous breakdowns. They have to feed their children. They do what they have to do to survive. At his short-lived construction job, Elvis is taken aback by Angela’s tolerance and quiet permissiveness of the chief mason’s overt sexual advances: “If I want I go let am touch me, no be sleazy thing, na practical thing – like feeding goat or tending chicken. Is only you men dat make it more dan dat” (29). Only a woman can understand what it’s like living inside a man’s world. Elvis can be offended, but Angela has to survive. While Sunday spends his days drinking on the veranda, Comfort, his second wife, goes to work. Even though she is the one who earns a living and supports her family, without a man she is nothing, she has no credibility. Redemption explains this to Elvis one day: “A divorced woman with three children in dis society? Shit, dat’s a hard life. She needed your father to give her some kudos. Dat’s all. Simple. Now nobody can call her a harlot or wonder which man is supporting her. She only wanted the respectability dat being with a man can bring” (50). Under the watchful eye of Beatrice, the garden is tamed and bears fruit. Her garden turns into a jungle after her death: “But here in the orchard, nature had its own designs, and whatever the initial order or plan had been, it soon gave way to a tangled mass of red and white guavas, oranges, mangoes, soursops and bright cherry shrubs” (145).

The most poignant image of the Western influence and the result of its digestion by the Igbo comes when Elvis describes his attending dance classes in Mr. Aggrey’s studio. Those Nigerians who stood a chance of being promoted within the civil servant ranks attended tango and waltz classes in anticipation of “social evenings that came along” (85) with the promotion. Because the dancers’ bodies were not used to the “upper-body comportment required in formal dance” (86), their teacher designed a tool which would help stiffen them up: wooden crosses. As the narrator explains, the dancing students become “Beautiful black dancers, stapled to wooden crosses that pulled them upright and stiff like marionettes; a forest of

## Battle for Nigeria

Pinocchio, waltzing mug trees, marching like Macbeth's mythical forest" (87). The beautiful waltz turns into dance macabre.

Igbo culture shrivels as soon as it comes into contact with western culture. Maybe that's because western culture is represented by consumer pop culture rather than its high-brow equivalents. Westerners have choices: we can opt not to drink Coca-Cola, walk out of the movie theater if the projector is not working, or stand in front of a bulldozer in protest, knowing that our life is going to be respected. Nigerians react, but they do not choose. They would be better off defining themselves as a nation with their own culture without the second-rate garbage the first-world countries keep bestowing on them. Having caught the glimpse of a life as advertised, albeit, in the old issues of the Entertainment magazine, they want the whole thing. So, like Elvis at the end of *Graceland*, they leave behind the homeland they feel no loyalty to, if they are lucky enough to have survived the heart-numbing violence, chaos, and permanent hunger. Abandoned by their former colonizers, their own government and the United Nations, like naked children, Nigerians like Elvis crawl through a heap of garbage onto the closest airport and go where the grass is greener: the land of Coca-Cola and Clint Eastwood.

No one wants to take responsibility. Every character in *GraceLand* feels justified by his or her own needs. This opportunism and an overwhelming sense of inertia are ultimately the great drama of the novel and the country: a realization that Elvis and his friend Redemption are Nigeria's future and if that's the case, Nigeria has no future.

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Evaluation: *With a sharply discerning eye, Iwona illuminates this novel extremely well, and her writing in this paper is energetic, passionate, and critical. She clearly sees what the novelist seems to want us to see, in all of its sadness and grotesqueness.*

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## Father *Thinks* He Knows Best

Andrea Azzo

Course: English 101 (Composition)

Instructor: Andrew Wilson

Assignment: *Students were asked to write an essay that tells a personal story, and to refer in the essay, in some way, to one of the readings we'd covered to that point.*

In America, most students have the freedom to choose what they want to do with their lives. They may study hard in school to become doctors; they might follow their passions to be fashion designers. In this society, graduates can be whatever they want to be. They are preached that very statement in early elementary school. Teachers ask, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" They don't give an ultimatum and say, "You have two choices: be a teacher or a nurse."

My dad did that, though. He demanded that I become either A) a teacher, or B) a nurse. So, I'm going to be a Spanish teacher after I graduate. This is not because I want to, but because I have to. I didn't have the privilege, as many do, to choose my future career. If I had, I would be majoring in mass communications. Instead, I find myself sitting in a Spanish class where I can only follow half of what is said, pretending to understand, and smiling when the teacher looks my way.

It's not that I don't want to be a Spanish teacher; I would just prefer to be a journalist. I watch and read the news religiously, write for the school newspaper, and have a weird obsession with Anderson Cooper. I've envisioned myself writing for a major online newspaper, like *The Chicago Tribune*, for the past couple of years. Yet, all of that has come to an abrupt end, with the harsh reality that my dream is just a dream, and that there is meager chance of it becoming an actual possibility.

My dad made sure he beat that into my head. Growing up in Lebanon in the midst of a civil war, he had seen his share of hardship. He used to tell me stories about the smell of corpses as he walked to school. He'd

talk about the religious struggle between the Muslims and Christians. The PLO, under Yasser Arafat, terrorized the streets of Lebanon for years. No Christian felt safe there, and since my dad was a Christian, he decided to flee the country before it was too late. He came to the United States and settled in Chicago, where he met my mom. She, too, had also emigrated from the hazardous conditions in Lebanon. They could relate on that occurrence, and they got married about a year after.

Now, six children later, my father is faced with the grim stages of his life: growing old. For the first time in my life, I can see how the milestone of his fiftieth birthday has caused him to age quite a bit. The impression of crow's feet can be seen around his eyes. He struggles going down the stairs, descending one step at a time, just as a toddler does when he first learns to walk. He complains of chronic back pain, wearing a brace on his bad days. Recently, though, it's his foot that bothers him.

In spite of all this, he has remained a sharp-minded individual. I don't know any other person who can name the capitals of every country, recall details of every historical event, or reference stories he read in the newspaper ten years ago. My dad is the smartest guy I know, and I respect him. And that's why I'm having trouble accepting his insistence that I be a teacher or nurse. This all started just a few months ago, on the day of freshman orientation. As an eager freshman, I was excited to start college in a new environment. I wanted to reassert who I was by majoring in journalism. I chose that as my major, and my counselor picked out my classes. I thought my dad would be ecstatic about my aspirations.

When I came home, my father greeted me with unwelcome arms. He looked like Bigfoot, shouting at me furiously, with devil horns coming out of his bald head, telling me that I was throwing away my education by majoring in journalism. He explained that my older cousin and his friends at O'Hare Airport (where he works) had all majored in journalism, but none of them actually got jobs in the field. Instead, he said, they work at jobs that require no college degree whatsoever.

I sat there, determined at first to prove him wrong. I said to myself that I would show him I wasn't like his friends or my cousin. I would major in journalism, and there was nothing that he could do to stop me. Then my rationality kicked in, and I did my research online. Using Google, I found that my father was right, as he usually was.

There were so many horror stories online about students who were having trouble finding jobs with degrees in journalism. By contrast, there was a plethora of jobs available in the teaching field. After much deliberation, I changed my major to Spanish education. A week before the school year began, I scurried back to Harper. I had to drop my mass communications and math classes to compensate for adding my Spanish class. I altered my entire schedule to make my dad proud of me.

I went back home that day, feeling exhausted and somewhat liberated all at once. Because I surrendered to my father's demands, because I gave up my career choice, because I felt inferior to my dad, I thought he'd be proud of my decision. After telling him I was going to be a Spanish teacher, he scoffed at me. He told me I had no expertise as a non-Hispanic to teach the language to the next generation. He stated that I had a better chance becoming a journalist.

I was baffled and stood there, holding back the tears that were fighting their way out for the past month. I did everything that he insisted. Obediently, I followed exactly what he said. It was at that moment he told me that, by teacher, he meant I should teach children. By children, he meant those little, annoying rugrats that tug at their mothers' legs: second graders.

There was no way, I thought, that I was going to teach children with no intellects how to keep their fingers out of their noses or how to tie their shoes. I simply couldn't do it. It takes considerable patience to teach seven-year-old kids. It was enough that I had to deal with the screams of my nine-year-old sister and the constant crying of my two-year-old sister. I wasn't going to be an elementary school teacher, no matter what my dad said.

I trudged away from my father, feeling defeated. With my shoulders slumped, I shut the door in my room and contemplated my future. Following bouts of hysterical sobbing into my damp pillow, I concluded that I was old enough to make vital decisions on my own. I didn't need my father's support anymore. I stuck with my commitment to be a Spanish teacher. It seemed, after all, like a fun and enjoyable career. Although it was not the same as being a journalist, teaching does entail much concentration and hard work. I don't blame my dad for ruining my life, but he did erase my dream. Thanks to his practicality, I'm settling for a reachable career in lieu of striving for one I've hoped for. My thoughts circulate

around what kind of teacher I'll be, not what kind of articles I'll be writing. I'm not sure if I feel discouraged, or if I should be praising my father for protecting me.

That is, after all, all he is trying to do. He only wants what is best for me. In Sandra Cisneros' "Only Daughter," she explains, "everything I have ever written has been for [my father], to win his approval" (126). Cisneros secretly wrote to feel accepted by her father. At the end of the story, she finally gets his acceptance by publishing a story in Spanish that her father finds entertaining. Like Cisneros, I want my father's acceptance. He has been a huge influence on my life. And the truth is, I *do* need his support—his financial support, yes, but especially his emotional support—to continue my studies. But it bothers me that for him, college serves the strict purpose of enhancing my likelihood of landing a great job; for me, college is recreational and (most of all) experimental, a place to investigate one's passionate interests. I want to spend my four semesters at Harper experiencing everything college features, as a person awake with curiosity, not as a zombie who only attends to improve my résumé. I'm not yet ready to settle on what I want to do with my life. I plan on joining more clubs and organizations to discover who I really am.

If my dad isn't happy with that, he'll have to tolerate it. I have already sacrificed a great deal to please him, but I'm weary of adhering to his wishes. He is not Aladdin, and I am not his genie. It's finally time I escape the lamp he has locked me in and fly to wherever my heart takes me. Where I'll end up, I don't know, but one thing is certain: it won't be the second-grade classroom, and I can no longer stand silently by while my dad, whom I love, steers me confidently toward my (which is to say, *his*) destination.

### Works Cited

- Cisneros, Sandra. "Only Daughter." *The Prose Reader: Essays for Thinking, Reading, and Writing*. 8<sup>th</sup> ed. Ed. Kim Flachmann and Michael Flachmann. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2008. 125-28.

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Evaluation: *This is a good essay and a little surprising in its frankness. As the essay explains, Andrea's secret dream is to become print journalist, and I think the reader can see a little "journalistic" leaning in the writing here: quick, to-the-point sentences, for instance, and some detail but not an overabundance of it.*

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## The Gospel According to *Goblin Market*

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Justin Bailey

Course: Literature 232  
(English Literature 1800 – 1914)  
Instructor: Jessica Walsh

Assignment: *Students were free to choose their own topics for the analytical papers for this course, and Justin chose to discuss the biblical subtexts in Christina Rossetti's longer poem Goblin Market.*

But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
He was crushed for our iniquities;  
The punishment that brought us peace was upon  
him,  
And by his wounds we are healed.  
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
Each of us has turned to his own way;  
And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.  
(Isaiah 53:5-6)

What have goblins to do with gospel? In the eyes of many readers, not much. Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* is commonly read with a moralistic theme: avoid temptation or the baddies will get you. Rossetti herself seems to suggest that the poem's theme is the value of sisterhood: "For there is no friend like a sister / In calm or stormy weather" (562-563). More contemporary readers argue that the poem, notable for the sensual relationship between the sisters, is a tract for lesbianism (or even incest). All three of these readings are understandable, but superficial. What Rossetti is doing is much more profound: she is re-

presenting and dramatizing the Christian gospel. It is the story of temptation and fall, sacrifice and redemption, in which one sister's healing is accomplished through the vicarious suffering of another. We can see this by laying the poem side-by-side with the biblical text. As we will see, this reading best makes sense of the narrative and imagery in the poem and is broad enough to explain the alternate interpretations.

Rossetti's imagination was thoroughly biblical, and thus the poem is rich with biblical imagery, symbolism, and allusion, which illuminate the picture that she is trying to paint. The cry of the goblins at the outset of the poem, "Come buy our orchard fruits, / Come buy, come buy," finds resonance with at least three biblical passages. First, it is the antithesis of Yahweh's invitation to the thirsty in Isaiah 55.1-2: "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come buy wine and milk without money and without cost." Whereas Yahweh calls the thirsty to be healed, the goblins invite them to their destruction. Second, it parallels the tempting call of Madame Folly in Proverbs 9:13-17: "The woman Folly is loud; she is undisciplined and without knowledge. She sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the highest point of the city, calling to those who pass by, who go straight on their way. 'Let all who are simple come in here!' She says to those who lack judgment. 'Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious.'" Finally, and most obviously, the temptation of Eve is in view. The fruit of the goblins is described as "sweet to the tongue and sound to the eye" just as the Edenic fruit was "good for food and pleasing to the eye" (Genesis 3:6).

Rossetti is here depicting the archetypal temptation scene: it is a recasting of Eve's temptation, a story that is replayed every day in the temptations of everyday Lauras and Jeannies. So Laura says: "I ate and had my fill, / Yet my mouth waters still; / Tomorrow night I will / Buy more..." (165-168). Goblin food, a symbol of sin, is sweet to tongue but bitter to the belly. It satisfies like salt water: to paraphrase Lewis, it leaves an ever-increasing appetite for an ever-shrinking pleasure. For Laura, the pleasure does not only shrink; it disappears, so that she is unable to hear the goblin cry. She is left with nothing but the ache, haunted by the terrible longing for something that cannot satisfy: "Must she no more such succous pasture find, / Gone deaf and blind?" (258-259).



Interestingly, throughout the biblical text, the consequence for idolatry is to get what you want, you begin to resemble what you worship. Just as idols are inanimate, having eyes that cannot see and ears that cannot hear, so too idol worshipers are described as becoming spiritually dull: they too have eyes that cannot see and ears that cannot hear. So Psalm 115:8, speaking of idols, describes them thus: “they have ears, but cannot hear, noses but cannot smell; they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound from their throats. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.” In other words, sin is less like breaking rules and more like being addicted to a drug or being enslaved to a wicked master: the result is a loss of life and vitality. Rossetti is describing a person who has given herself to an idol (Laura pays for the fruit with her hair, her tears!), and the one who wants to eat ends up being eaten alive – becoming spiritually inanimate, living yet dead. Thus, Laura is appropriately described as “deaf and blind” and “cold as stone,” and “Her hair grew thin and gray; / She dwindled, as the fair full moon doth turn / to swift decay and burn / Her fire away” (276-280).

If the poem were simply a treatise on avoiding temptation, then we would expect Laura to suffer such as she has and then to die, and the virtuous Lizzie to mourn her death but to experience blessing. If this were the ending, then we could comfortably frame the poem’s message this way: give in to sin and you will suffer; be good and you will be blessed. This is a common religious message: it is karma and retribution, justification through good deeds. Perhaps it is because this is an expected religious conclusion that readers tend to quickly paint the poem with this brush. But this is not the way that the narrative goes! Instead of having the death of the fallen sister, we have her redemption; instead of seeing the blessing of the obedient sister, she suffers the violence of the goblins willingly. This is nothing less than a powerful dramatization of the Christian gospel: that we are saved not by our own goodness, but through the goodness of another. The karmic cycle happens—Laura reaps what she sows—but the whole cycle is interrupted by something that breaks down the moralistic machine: grace. Grace, in the person of Lizzie, intervenes.

Lizzie goes to the Goblin Market, not for her own sake, but for her sister. The scene is poignantly demonic.

Here is Aslan before the minions of the white witch: the goblins laugh and shriek with joy at her coming. She is tempted, just as her sister was. When she fails to give in, they begin to grunt and snarl, and they become violent:

Their looks were evil,  
Lashing their tails  
They trod and hustled her,  
Elbowed and jostled her,  
Clawing with their nails,  
Barking, mewing, hissing, mocking,  
Tore her gown and tore her stocking,  
Twitched her hair out by the roots,  
Stamped upon her tender feet,  
Held her hands and squeezed their fruits  
Against her mouth to make her eat. (397-407)

Whereas Laura offered her hair to pay for the fruit, Lizzie’s is torn out, reminiscent of the plucking of Christ’s beard. Compare Rossetti with the Passion scene from Matthew’s gospel (27:27-31):

Then the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. “Hail, king of the Jews!” they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

Rossetti’s scene has been compared to a rape scene. It is that—the rape of good by evil—but it is more: it is a crucifixion. And yet the assault is not the end of the story, because in this story, good is stronger than evil. When evil has spent itself, when it has exhausted itself, when it has done all that it can do, Christ rises. And so does Lizzie. The goblins are defeated: “At last the evil people / Worn out by her resistance / Flung back her penny, kicked their fruit” (437-439). Lizzie returns home without fear of goblin men, “with haste / And inward laughter” (462-463).

Now comes the redemption of her sister, as Lizzie invites her in Eucharistic fashion, to feast on her flesh, to be healed by her wounds:

Did you miss me?  
Come and kiss me.  
Never mind my bruises,  
Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices  
Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,  
Goblin pulp and golden dew.  
Eat me, drink me, love me;  
Laura make much of me:  
For your sake I have braved the glen  
And had to do with goblin merchant men.  
(465-474)

Laura's healing, ironically, comes through the same fruit that spelled her downfall. But the significance is that the fruit has been somehow transformed by the suffering of her sister: indeed, she must drink it off of her sister's body. This is necessarily sensual, because the Eucharist is a sensual act of worship. A sacrament is a visible word, a promise that can be touched and felt, chewed and swallowed. "This is my body," says Christ, "which is broken for you. This is my blood, which is poured out for you." Or in another place, "Eat my flesh and drink my blood." Jesus' words are even more startling and puzzling than Rossetti's. But the meaning of both is the same: what is needed is nothing less than a sensual experience, something that is as real as eating and drinking. It is more than sensual, but not less. Redemption is not received at an arm's length, antiseptically. It requires sensual participation, body and soul: kissing, eating and drinking, chewing and swallowing. The Eucharist is a remembrance feast of the healing that has been found through Christ's sacrifice; Laura, too, is healed by her sister's wounds.

Laura, upon receiving the "antidote," must pass through "bitterness without a name." This is a repentance scene:

Ah! Fool to choose such part  
Of soul-consuming care!  
Sense failed in mortal strife:  
Like a watch-tower which an earthquake  
shatters down  
...  
She fell at last;  
Pleasure past and anguish past,  
Is it death or is it life?  
Life out of death. (510-515, 521-524)

After Lizzie's sacrifice and Laura's repentance, Laura experiences nothing less than a resurrection, "life out of death." We see this in the springtime/rebirth imagery that is used to describe her awakening: "dew-wet grass"; "new buds with new day / Opened of cup-like lilies on the stream"; "Her breath was sweet as May / And light danced in her eyes" (532-536, 541-542).

To recap the narrative of the poem: a woman gives into temptation, and the fruit of her sin slowly begins to consume her, turning her slowly into one who is living, yet dead. Her uncorrupted sister offers herself willingly to the goblins' violence and is not overcome. She then can invite her sister to share in the fruit of her sacrifice, which, flowing from her wounds, brings healing and life out of death. This is the Christian gospel: that we are saved not through our own moral fortitude or ability to overcome temptation, but that Another has come, one like us, tempted in all respects yet without sin. This one has exhausted the powers of evil through his sacrificial death, and has offered us his goodness, his victory, his life. What he has done has somehow saved us, if we will open ourselves up to receive it, if we will enter in and taste, eat, drink, experience his redemption.

This reading of the poem is broad enough to encompass the other three streams mentioned above: it dramatizes the victory over temptation and sin, it connects brotherly or sisterly affection to Christ, our elder brother, and it makes sense of the sensual, which is but a shade of the spiritual. On the first count, temptation is not overcome by mere fortitude of will, but by remembering the gospel. Laura tells her children about not only the terror of her sin—"their fruits like honey to the throat / But poison in the blood"—but also the goodness of her savior: "Would tell them how her sister stood / In deadly peril to do her good, / And win the fiery antidote" (554-555, 557-559). Secondly, Rossetti's concluding words, "there is no friend like a sister" hearken back to Proverbs 18:24: "a man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother." The proverb has classically been read Christologically, inspiring spirituals such as "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" and "Jesus, What a Friend for Sinners." If we see Lizzie as a picture of Christ, the connection becomes apparent, and the conclusion decidedly spiritual. Finally, Jewish and Christian commentators have always drawn

close parallels between the sensual/sexual and the spiritual. Whereas the Freudian says, “spirituality is sex,” the Christian responds, “no, sex is spirituality.” Song of Songs in the Hebrew Bible has been read simultaneously as a celebration of sexual love and a celebration of God’s love for his people, and in both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, sexuality is celebrated as a window to understanding the passion, intimacy, and joy of relationship with God. The intimate embrace of Lizzie and Laura, as well as the sensual feasting, is not a tract for homoeroticism, but a window to the spirituality of the poem.

### Works Cited

Rossetti, Christina. *Goblin Market*. *Norton Anthology of English Literature, The Major Authors, Volume B*. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt. 8th ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2006.

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Evaluation: *This is a brilliant, academically sound application of biblical source text to a difficult primary text. Justin takes risks with this reading while incorporating discussion of more current, popular interpretations.*

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# Soldiers and Their Families

Amanda Boyd

Course: English 101 (Composition)

Instructor: Greg Herriges

Assignment: *Students were asked to write a three-page narrative essay about something significant they had experienced—something that had shaped who they are.*

The past four years of my life have been extremely difficult. I knew that the man I married would change because of what he would be going through. I didn't think he would change for the worse, and if he did, he would receive the help and support he would need and accept it. Soldiers returning from war and their families need more support and counseling, and it should be mandatory. Soldiers and their families go through so much that they need some kind of support to help them adjust back into society.

I'd known my husband, Chad, for eight years when we got married. Chad had moved in with my family when we were seniors in high school. We graduated high school together and six months after we graduated, we got engaged. We were only eighteen years old when we got engaged and married. We married that May. He was leaving for a deployment to Iraq that July, and we wanted to get married before he left. On July fourth, Chad and I packed up all of our stuff and moved to Jacksonville, North Carolina, where he was stationed. He left one week later for his deployment. We had arranged that I would live with his friend's wife, whose husband was deploying with Chad, until we could close on a house. That October we closed on a house, or I should say I closed on a house. I never thought that when I got married and bought a house I would be signing the papers by myself instead of with my husband. I was upset I had to do it alone, but I knew I would be doing a lot of things on my own for as long as he was in the Marine Corps, and I accepted it. I knew when I married him that there were going to be

times when I needed him and he couldn't be there because he was at war. Times were going to be hard on us, but I always knew we would make it through anything as long as we worked together.

During his first tour to Iraq, he was only able to call twice a month if we were lucky, and every time he called, it was always something bad. "We had eight casualties this mission. We had ten people injured and they are being sent back to the states." Or, "We had ten casualties this mission."

During his first tour to Iraq, his platoon had lost over fifty young men and women, some of whom Chad had become close friends with. I also received a call from him that I will never forget: "I just got back from a mission. We got back early because we hit an IED. I had a severe concussion, but some people were worse than me, so I'm still waiting to be checked out." That was the worst call I received. I knew that if anyone got hurt or injured out there, they would take the most severe first, but I didn't think it would take days for the rest to be checked out. He ended up having a class two concussion. When he finally came home in February of 2007, it was one of the most memorable days of my life.

As the weeks went on, I noticed the change in him. He wasn't his happy, fun, energetic self anymore. He was a depressed, jumpy guy. He jumped at any loud noise. If an airplane went overhead, he would duck or go inside. If it thundered, he would jump. When he drove a car for the first time after his deployment, he would avoid the littlest potholes because that's what he had to do in Iraq in order to avoid an IED. He would also get extremely mad over the tiniest things, for no apparent reason. If we left the house ten minutes late, the world was over for him. He would yell and scream and rant and rave. I was always getting yelled at for one reason or another, even if what happened had nothing to do with me. His family came to visit one day, and he confessed to us that his doctor wanted to do a head scan to check for traumatic brain injury. He turned it down because he felt if he was diagnosed with that or something worse, it was a sign of weakness. His doctor never pursued the issue again. If a soldier says no, it's no. That's wrong in my eyes, just for the simple reason that if soldiers do have something wrong with them and could be given help, they should take the help to avoid

further complications. Also, not receiving the help could hurt the people a soldier works with if he or she were to go to war again. Chad was deployed exactly eight months later, without any help.

His second deployment was a lot better than his first. He called four times a week every week and didn't have any casualties the entire deployment. I thought that was amazing and thank God for it. Now, I thought things would get better. Needless to say, they didn't. He came home a little less than seven months later, and he was worse than ever. Not only was he even more jumpy and even more angry, he didn't care about life. He didn't care about the military, he didn't care about himself, and he didn't care about me. He told me he didn't care what happened to him anymore. He started to drink very heavily and would then get in a car and drive. A lot of the time, he would drink with some of his buddies, but there were nights when I woke up in the middle of the night to see he wasn't in bed next to me. I would walk into the living room and he would have empty beer cans stacked on our living room table and be completely passed out, face-down on the floor. I'd have to clean up the mess and then take care of him in the morning while he was throwing up. I knew something was wrong with him. I never held anything against him, though. He had been through a lot at that point, but he needed help. I tried to help him. I said I would go to counseling with him. I said I would go to any doctors' appointments he had. He didn't want to go. I even called the military one source number, and they said that there was nothing anyone could do except him. I was infuriated by then because my husband was mentally sick and needed help, but since he didn't want it, nobody was going to attempt to help him.

We just recently divorced because he was starting to get too violent, and we have a four-month-old little boy. I didn't want my son in that kind of environment. Chad is currently out of the military and is still in the state of mind that he doesn't care about anything. He did see one doctor who said they wanted to do some tests with him because he believed he could have post-traumatic stress disorder. He never went back. Therefore, I believe that soldiers and their families need more support and help because some of these men and women have illnesses that, if not cared for, could eventually hurt them later or even end their lives.

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Evaluation: *Amanda's essay is powerful not only because of its disarming openness, but also because of the social significance of her topic.*

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# Foreign Policy Platform: United States 2.0

Ronald Chilcutt

Course: Political Science 270 (Global Politics)

Instructor: Bobby Summers

Assignment: *Students were to outline foreign policy guidelines for the United States and provide justifications for those policies.*

## Preamble

Two hundred years ago, our founding fathers planted the seeds to grow a nation to be founded on the concepts of liberty and democracy while freeing itself from the tyranny and imperialism of the British Empire. Small and isolated, our United States grew in scope and area, eventually stretching across the continent and touching our European cousins through trade and commerce. Somewhere in that growth, we lost sight of those original dreams and strayed from our path. Where we had once fought imperialism, we were now the imperialists subjugating meek developing nations. Where once we were a citizen in a world community, now we are a hegemonic dictator forcing our values on others in the name of liberty and democracy, regardless of the customs or beliefs of those other nations. The time has come to stop and retake our position as part of the world community and not overseer of the world. We are the United States of America, and our responsibilities are for and to ourselves while upholding the virtues of liberty and democracy without infringing upon those values with respect to others in the world.

## United States Foreign Policy 2.0

We began as a nation concerned about ourselves, and we had to be, because we were small and attempting a form of governing unseen in the world at that time: democracy. As time went on, we changed the scope of that ideal as we had more contact and conflict with the rest of the world. Like Europe, we would go down the dark path

of imperialism and scar many developing nations. We would also become embroiled in conflicts from across the ocean, particularly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, specifically the two world wars. It was not wrong for us to become involved in these conflicts, but the aftermath of the Second World War has shaped our foreign policy to what it is today.

World War II left the great European superpowers weak and shattered, creating a power vacuum on the world stage. The United States, having participated in the war but not having the conflict ever touch its shores, remained strong and industrious and filled that vacuum. We had the factories, the manpower, and “the bomb.” The only thing missing was the maturity to handle this situation; we were a very young nation accepting a great responsibility. This would begin our mindset of the USA as number one, an idea that was meant to only last until the other countries could rebuild. Unfortunately, power corrupts, and the title of world protector that should have only lasted until the other great nations could regain their footing has remained engrained in our mindset until this very day and is a stigma we must strive to overcome.

There is a phobia in this nation at being anything but number one, as if anything less than number one deposits us to the ranks lower than undeveloped third-world countries. Great Britain, Spain, France, and China have all had empires that have dominated the world at one time or another, and yet they still survive and thrive as nations. The power and responsibility of trying to remain king of the mountain clouds and corrupts a nation’s judgment, causing it to take action that goes against its founding principles, in this case, liberty and democracy. I offer as evidence every conflict the United States has been involved in since the day the final bomb dropped on Nagasaki. We act as police chief for the world, but the world did not hire us for that job.

In the years following World War I, the United States practiced a foreign policy of isolationism, which was wrong and did not work and by no means is being argued for today. What is being argued for is a return to being part of a world community and not dominator within that world community. The United Nations and its sister organizations are flawed in our favor to this ideal, giving the United States either a controlling vote or veto power over any decisions to which we do not agree. We need to relinquish that power in order to cleanse our souls

as a nation. By becoming one with the greater world community, many conflicts that arise out of fear and/or distrust of the United States would cease to exist or simply melt away.

### **Nuclear Arms**

Our great nuclear arsenal built on the principal of defending our nation and our allies actually causes more problems than it solves. Nations like North Korea and Iran are working like mad to get nuclear weapons, and it is our fault. Iran has the United States in military conflict on its eastern and western borders (Iraq and Afghanistan). From Iran's perspective, they could be next, and developing nuclear arms may be the only way to maintain their autonomy. For North Korea, the development of nuclear arms is a way to be noticed and taken seriously. Without the nuclear weapons, they are just that crazy little dictatorship that the United States will eventually invade and overthrow. By stepping away from the nuclear table and not labeling nations as part of the "axis of evil," diplomacy can bloom and possibly work. We will never rid ourselves of the nuclear option, because it is a Pandora's box that can never be closed, but by not waving and pointing our arsenal at others, we become part of a world community.

### **Israel and the Middle East**

Israel is to the United States as North Korea is to China. They are the spoiled child that teases and abuses the other kids then runs to its big strong brother if the kids retaliate. It is time to let the Israelis stand on their own two feet and fight their own battles. By the United States becoming a member of the world community and not being big brother to Israel, compromises will be reached. The conflicts in the Middle East with respect to Israel remain heated because of the bullying of Israel and the perception of its unfair advantage of an alliance with the United States. Once the safety net is pulled away, the individual states will be forced to discuss resolutions to their problems. This is a risky proposal, but I believe that conflict is more likely when outsiders (the U.S.) influence than when the concerned parties are left to work it out on their own.

### **Economic Aid**

For every one hundred dollars of gross domestic product that the United States produces, we give between two and ten cents to aid the disadvantaged of the world while the world consensus average is set at thirty cents. We have been historical braggers at how much we give to assist in world poverty, but the proof is in the numbers. Under this new foreign policy, we will put our money where our mouths are and set a new bar in aid spending. With less money being spent on foreign invasions and the overthrow of world leaders, plenty will be available to give to foreign aid. If the amount of money spent on the Afghanistan and Iraq wars went to foreign aid, I would challenge you to find a case of famine or curable disease killing a child in this world.

### **Democracy**

We live in a democratic society and believe in the principles of liberty. To redeem ourselves for the sins of our past, we must shine as a beacon of those values and be a glowing example to the rest of the world of what freedom can bring. We must also accept that our path is not the path for everyone, and by trying to force it, we sully and destroy those principles that have made us great. Our form of democracy has worked for us; others may take a different path, and many times we may not agree with their choice, but it is not our place to force our will upon others. Just as the United States has grown as a nation of many races, cultures, and religions, it must grow as a member of a world community made up of a myriad of races, cultures, religions, and ideologies. Only by becoming an equal member of the world community will we truly live by the ideals set by our founding fathers of liberty and democracy.

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Evaluation: *Ronald provides an excellent examination of not only what U.S. policy should entail, but also current and historical justifications for these policies.*

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# Cars, Dinosaurs, Presidents, Oh My!

Kim Daniel

Course: Literature 219 (Children's Literature)

Instructor: Barbara Butler

Assignment: *Interview a child about his reading and write an analytical essay about his reading habits, attitudes, and preferences.*

It is a bright sunny summer day with birds chirping, butterflies fluttering, dogs chasing squirrels, neighborhood children swimming, and a jungle gym lying on the long, green grass, just waiting to be played with and jumped on. Unfortunately, Tyler Macnamera Malz is not outside and has no intention of going out. Instead, he is inside, sitting in his soft, green comfy chair, diving into a really good book.

Tyler is a six-and-a-half-year-old boy who comes from an average family living in the heart of Mount Prospect. I have been babysitting Tyler since he was two, and I have a close relationship with the family. I used to be just a babysitter known as Miss Kim, but now he looks to me as an older sister since I have been there since he can remember. He is not spoiled with money but instead spoiled by love. His parents, beginning at a young age, tried to get him involved with reading, writing, and math. Before he was in preschool, Tyler could write his name, knew his colors, knew how to count up to 100, and knew the entire alphabet with sounds. Tyler loves reading, science, and art in school. I asked him "Why?" and he replied, "I love reading, doing experiments, and drawing." Our interview took place during snack time, while I was babysitting at his house on Tuesday, July 14, 2009, at approximately 3:00 pm.

Tyler knows I want to be teacher, and I explained the interview and what it was for. Although I believe his answers, I feel that he was hesitant and was trying to please me with his answers, too. He promised to tell the

truth, and I promised I would not share the answers with mommy and daddy if he did not want me to. He said he would do his best, and so we were off on our first set of questions.

I asked him my first question, if he liked reading, and instantly he responded with "Yes." I asked, "If you could be either reading, watching television, or playing outside on this gorgeous day, what would you rather do?" He replied cautiously and said "reading." I asked him, "You would rather read than play hockey (his favorite sport) or draw a picture for mommy?" He said "Yes." I said, "Wow, that's awesome, Tyler! What kind of books do you like to read?" He immediately responded, "Cars, dinosaurs, presidents, picture books, and big books." I was shocked, thinking that I knew this little boy so well and had no idea that he liked reading about presidents. We went into more depth about why he likes these books, most important, the president books. He said "I like to learn about which presidents are on money and what they did in office." I sat there stunned and asked him, "Who is on the one hundred dollar bill?" and he answered, "Benjamin Franklin." I was officially blown away. At age seven, there was no way I could have given anyone this answer. I assumed that after the first set of questions, this interview could only get better!

I moved on to other questions, like "How often did you read in kindergarten?" and he replied, "Often. While other students were getting help, I would read on the carpet by the classroom library." I then asked "How many books did you read? Make an estimate." Tyler took time and thought about it and then said, "Two to three each time during reading time." Then I figured out that reading time was three times a week, making it roughly nine books a week in reading time, plus the books that he reads as a class, and the plethora of books he reads at home with his mom, dad, and sisters. I asked him, "How often do you go to the library?" Sadly, he responded, "Twice a week because Mommy has work the other days and Daddy is tired." "Would you go to the library every day if you had the chance?" Tyler got excited and said, "Of course! I love the children's section. I cannot wait until I can go upstairs to the grown-up books."

After I realized that Tyler is officially addicted to reading, I asked him the most in-depth question yet:



"Why?" I was expecting a long, whimsical, sophisticated answer, and I received "Because you learn stuff." I was trying to have him expand on the idea, but he just kept repeating himself. He would give examples of what he learned in the books and the books he likes to read. His favorite, which he told me at least seven times during the interview, is *Dinosaur Days*, and I asked him why. He responded with a question: "Did you ever meet a dinosaur, or know what life was like in prehistoric times?" As he was being a smart aleck, I said "No," and he said, "That's why." I realized that it was a great answer and it shut me up, and yet he amazed me with the vocabulary that he has retained from reading.

Tyler kept going on about other books that he enjoyed, and soon I got another question in: "Do you think reading is important?" Tyler said reading is "very, very important. That is how people learn so much about everything." I said, "Is it important to you?" and once again got "very important." My next question, "What kind of reading materials do you learn from besides books?" Tyler said, "Magazines, instructions, video games, street signs," and the list went on and on. Finally, in his long list, he mentioned the newspaper, and I said "perfect! What do you like to read from the newspaper?" He answered, "Comics and weather because Daddy will not let me read any more because it's too violent."

Before I could ask any more, the doorbell rang. His neighbors, Daniel and Steven, came by to ask Tyler if he wanted to play outside, which he declined. Stunned that he did not ask to go, I decided to ask "Do Daniel and Steven or your other school friends like to read?" Tyler felt bad and did not respond, so I asked him again. I felt like he thought he was telling on them. Finally, after telling him it was okay and no one was going to get into trouble, he said, "No. Daniel and Steven do, but only for school, and my school friends always talked during reading time." He said that he encourages them to read by suggesting books that he likes. Once again, I was impressed by the maturity level of Tyler, first telling his friends that he did not want to hang out and second that he still reads even though according to his friends it's the "uncool" thing to do. Then I said, "Do Mommy and Daddy read?" and he said "All the time, to me, Cait, and Lulu. Mommy and Daddy read the paper, too."

Getting down to the end of the questions, I asked, "Is television the cool thing to do?" and he said "Yeah,

everyone watches certain shows. If you do not, you're not cool." That brought back the fabulous memories of middle school, except that this is occurring in kindergarten! I asked, "How much television do you watch, Ty?" and he said "Three times a day for an hour, one in the morning, afternoon, and night, and at night it's the news." Unsure of what a kindergartner watches, I hesitantly ask, "Do you watch *Power Rangers*, *Arthur*, *Clifford*, or *Dora*?" He told me, "*Power Rangers*," and I asked if he read the books about them, and he said "No, not really; it's more interesting to watch on television. The books and television are sometimes different."

His bowl that was once full of watermelon lay empty, and I realized that I was rushed for time before his attention span wandered. I quickly said, "This is the last question." His eyes lit up, and I asked, "Do you know any common fairy tales or folk tales or children's classics?" He asked if those are the "once upon a time stories," and I said yes. Tyler answered with *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Three Little Wolves*, *Three Little Pigs*, *Peter Pan*, *Cinderella*, and *Snow White*. He only read the first three and watched the last three as movies. He did not know any folktales. As for "classics," he said "*Beauty and the Beast*," which then I told him would have gone under fairy tales.

I gave him a sucker for being such a good boy with answering the questions and being honest. I came to the conclusion that Tyler is one of the brightest boys that I have ever come across. He respects all older adults by calling them Mr. and Ms., and he is a pleasure to be around. He is the perfect student in school that responds to questions and loves to go to school to learn. He has the motivation behind him and the encouragement from his parents. Any six and a half year old boy that would rather read about cars, dinosaurs, and president books than run through the backyard and play on a jungle gym set on long, green, grass with birds chirping and dogs chasing squirrels on a bright sunny day is destined to be a very smart and successful man. That is my little rascal that I babysit; that is my little Tyler.

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Evaluation: *Kim's engaging essay about her "Little Tyler" reveals his extraordinary reading ability as well as her strong, positive relationship with him. Oh, my!*

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## Validation, Subversion, and Transcendence: An Exploration of the Sexual Dynamics between Men and Women in Yasunari Kawabata's *Palm-of-the-Hand Stories*

Gretchen Dee

Course: Literature 208 (non-Western Literature)  
Instructor: Kris Piepenburg

Assignment: *One of the paper topic choices for the Asian literature component of this course was to analyze a group of the short stories by Yasunari Kawabata, toward elucidating a theme that recurs in them.*

From the *eros* of Greek tragedy to the concupiscent lyrics of hip-hop music, the interplay between males and females has thematically dominated artistic expressions of human experience for millennia. Yasunari Kawabata's *Palm-of-the-Hand Stories* is certainly no exception. In this Nobel Prize-winning collection of seventy short stories, Kawabata explores the paradox intrinsic to human relations in which men and women simultaneously act to validate and subvert the ego and existence of one another. However, within these stories, the author constructs the subversive power of the sexual male/female dynamic not as an inevitable universal truth, but rather as bound to the ego of the mortal life. Through Kawabata's eyes, transcendence is possible as the resonant energies of sexual frictions are quelled, especially through the

naïveté epitomized in the natural world and through the equalizing power of death.

To begin, throughout the text, Kawabata utilizes the anecdotal power of his short stories to demonstrate the manner in which, when bound to Earth, men and women need each other to offer validity to their beings. Men and women are bound to find one another and couple, perhaps in the absence of volition, as symbolized by the canaries in "Canaries": "These canaries are a couple now, but the shopkeeper simply caught a male and female at random and put them in a cage" (22). However, this short piece goes further to demonstrate the manner in which men and women validate each other's existence, even when such dynamics are not ostensible. Even as a man bemoans the loss of his wife and realizes he has also lost his love for his paramour, he recognizes the manner in which he needed his wife:

It was because my wife was here that the birds have lived until now—serving as a memory of you. How was it I was able to love a woman like you? Wasn't it because my wife remained with me? My wife made me forget all the pain in my life. She avoided seeing the other half of me. Had she not done so, I would have surely averted my eyes or cast down my gaze before a woman like you. (23)

In another story, "Immortality," the ghost of a young lover implores her former lover, whom she believes to be of the living, "No, you must keep on living. If you were to die, there wouldn't be anyone left on Earth who would remember me. I would die completely" (232). This admittance reveals the rampant belief that without one another, existence becomes meaningless. A final story that embodies the necessity of men and women to validate the existence of one another is "Photograph." In this story, a man tears a photo of his teenaged sweetheart of old into half only to discover to his horror that:

The girl in the picture was beautiful and charming. She was seventeen then and in love. But when I looked at the photograph I had in my hand—this photograph I had in my hand—this photograph of the girl severed from me—I realized what a dull girl she was. And until that moment it had been the most

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beautiful photograph I had ever seen . . . . But in an instance I awoke from a long dream. My precious treasure crumpled. (25)

When separated, the young man and woman of the photograph are stripped of their beauty and their life. What was once beautiful and vibrant becomes dull and meaningless.

Paradoxically, just as men and women depend on one another to give meaning to each other's existence, Kawabata portrays the sexual dynamics of the male/female relationship as additionally and inevitably destructive. The latent power of this dynamic is constructed as innate, rather than learned, and present even in the nubile young girl in "The Ring," as the unidentified narrator describes, "The girl, who seemed to have nothing else to do, smiled at him, showing herself off, as if to attract him to her rosy pink body. A split second glance at her told him that she was the child of a geisha. Hers was an abnormal, precocious beauty, in which he could sense her future purpose of giving sensual pleasure to men" (18). In "Love Suicides," a man tries desperately to control the actions of his scorned wife and child in order to protect himself, only to find that as his efforts intensify, so do his perils: "They ceased eternally to make even the faintest sound. In other words, the mother and daughter died. And strangely enough, the husband lay down and died beside them and died too" (57). However, it is in "Death Mask" that the reader can observe perhaps most clearly the manner in which men and women are destined to play out their pernicious games when constrained by ego and mortality. This is demonstrated in a moment when a lover, realizing his moribund beloved can no longer participate in such dynamics, no longer poses a threat: "The man who now held her in his arms as she was about to die harbored no anxiety that he would lose her to another, so perhaps he was fortunate compared to her former lovers who had been tormented, knowing there was no way to keep her heart except to kill her" (164). Once again, the reader observes the inevitable and subversive dynamics between men and women. So destructive are these dynamics and the accompanying urges of jealousy and violence, that only death can alleviate them. In addition, the woman's life and joys are determined and defined by her sexual

identity as it is constructed in the male/female relationship. Nearing death and without the competing forces of her other lovers (a validation of her female sexual power), the lover no longer feels threatened or impassioned.

Despite the seemingly contradictory forces of validation and destruction implicit in the male/female dynamic, Kawabata does suggest ways in which men and women can find themselves emancipated from such subversive influences. To begin, he recognizes that these detrimental forces only become effectual through awareness. This is symbolized in the sweet ignorance of the young boy and girl in "The Grasshopper and the Bell Cricket," who fail to appreciate the reflections of each other's names upon their hearts: "The girl's lantern, which dangled loosely from her wrist, did not project its pattern so clearly, but one could still make out, in a trembling patch of red on the boy's waist, the name 'Kiyoko.' This chance interplay of red and green—or if it was chance or play—neither Fujio nor Kiyoko knew about" (16). The author, speaking through the student observing the child's play, implies that with time and cynicism, something will be lost as the distinctions and awareness of sexuality will emerge between the young girls and boys:

And finally, to your clouded, wounded heart, even a true bell cricket will seem like a grasshopper. Should that day come, when it seems to you that the world is only full of grasshoppers, I will think it a pity that you have no way to remember tonight's play of light, when your name was written in green by your beautiful lantern on a girl's breast. (17)

The power of innocence which predates awareness to escape the destructive inevitabilities of male and female relationships is also evidenced in the innocent love of the young boy and girl in "Up in the Tree," whose relationship appears juxtaposed against that of the boy's acrimonious parents, which seems surfeited with the aforementioned subversion of the inevitable gender conflict. However, "Up in the Tree" additionally encapsulates another vehicle of transcendence: nature. Like the fields of "The Grasshopper and The Bell Cricket," the tree provides a refuge from which the boy and the girl can escape the world and perhaps prolong the onset of their sexuality and its ensuing power and pain. At the end of this story,

the narrator states, "Although they weren't that high off the ground, these two little lovers felt as if they were in a completely different world, far away from Earth" (22). Lastly, to return to the short story "Immortality," the image of the tree as a vessel of transcendence and peace is also present. The young couple, relinquishing the ego (symbolized by the girl's desire to be remembered on Earth) and the secular world, disappears into a tree, never to be seen again.

However, the most consistent manner in which men and women successfully transcend the destructive forces of the inevitable male/female conflict is through nature's ultimate manifestation, death. In "The Incident of the Dead Face," a mortally ill woman and her seemingly estranged husband find peace only in the moment of her death:

Tears suddenly trickled down the mother's cheeks. "The human spirit is a frightening thing. She couldn't die completely until you came back. It's so strange. All you did was take one look at her and her face became so relaxed . . . It's all right. Now she's all alright." (31)

"Death Mask," however, particularly begs the reader to consider the notion that in death men and women can finally discard the gender identity that simultaneously attracts and repels them from one another. At her wake, two of her former lovers converse:

"Her whole life was the tragic drama of the joy of being a woman. Until the last moment, she was all too much of a woman." He put out his hand, feeling that a nightmare had vanished. "If she has finally escaped that tragedy, then we can shake hands now—here before this death mask in which we cannot distinguish female from male" (166).

Through her death, the distinguishing and divisive gender identity is overcome. Not only does the woman find peace as she is relinquished and released from the trapping powers of her own sex, but the men in her life can also find unity. The androgyny of the mask reflects the manner in which she has left the identity of her female sexual identity behind her.

Finally, while death represents an end to mortality and life on Earth, Kawabata also reveals earthbound experience and revelation through which men and women can be unfettered from the destruction of their sexual dynamics. In "The Sparrow's Matchmaking," a man filled with anticipation and angst about his search for a mate witnesses a small act of nature that engenders epiphany:

As he looked intently at the water's surface, a black pointy stone thrown by God plummeted into his field of vision. A pair of mating sparrows had fallen from the roof. Flapping their wings in the water, the two came apart and flew in different directions. He understood this flashing glimpse of God (67).

He learns that he is to be reborn in the next life as the mating sparrow. This anecdote represents a moment of transcendence in which the angst created by the simultaneously enlightening and subversive male/female dynamic is emancipated. Perhaps it is that fear of loss and jealousy that is responsible for so many of the perils of love and relationships. With the knowledge, that all will be lost and gained again in a cycle that transcends the earthbound dimensions of his individual life, the man relinquishes the ego of his individual existence. As a result, he is somewhat released and able to find peace without fear, accepting without question the relationships that will enter his current life and while doing so, "The ripples on the water's surface spread out and grew calm again" (67).

The most powerful and humbling demonstration of the power to overcome the subversion of male/female dynamics is found in the story entitled "There is a God." In this story, Kawabata juxtaposes two psychological relationships: that between a local poultry man and his vulnerable, crippled wife and that between the same girl and a local traveler who had formerly seduced her, before palsy had affected her body. When observing the relinquishment of the individual ego manifested in the tender love and gentle gestures the poultry seller shows towards his crippled wife, the other man realizes that when the individual ego and identity that distinguishes one human from another is relinquished, transcendence is also possible:

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He understood that having thought he had made her unhappy was a mistake. He understood that he had failed to know his proper place. He understood that human beings cannot make other human beings unhappy. He understood also that it was a mistake to have sought her forgiveness. He understood that it was conceit for a person who has raised himself by wrongdoing another to seek forgiveness from the person laid low by the wrong. He understood that human beings cannot wrong other human beings. (80)

The crimes of his sex are made irrelevant and bound to something evanescent and trivial when compared to the transcendent love the man expresses for his wife—a love which supercedes ego and eclipses the traditional divisions of the male and female sex.

In this collection of stories, Kawabata admonishes the reader of the perilous nature of human sexual dynamics. Yet, from these stories, the reader can also find hope in rare but beautiful moments of emancipation and transcendence.

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Evaluation: *Gretchen's paper is superior, in the depth of her thesis, in her perceptive discussion of multiple works and key passages, and in her precision of expression. This critical study of Kawabata's stories would enlighten any reader.*

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## Individuality Versus Group Association

Lynn Densler

Course: English 100 (Composition)

Instructor: Barbara Butler

Assignment: *Write an essay about a significant event in your life.*

Awakening on a breezy, sunny July day in 1996, I went to the Chicago Department of Human Services. I lived in Wheeling, and the drive appeared to go on forever, yet in reality it was only a 45-minute drive. I had separated from my husband and had to get assistance for medical, financial, and food. As I was sitting there waiting for my turn, it dawned on me that I was nothing but a number among many others that were only numbers, too. I was picturing in my mind a herd of cattle after being branded, being prodded along a trail. I felt like an animal. There was no sense of personal individuality, and the people who worked there did nothing to change this vision for me. I felt as if I were turning from a human being into a nonentity.

For me, this was a time of drastic changes. I could have stayed in an unhappy and unhealthy marriage; however, I decided to take a gamble and go with the unknown. I was hoping the changes would hold something positive for me and my four small children. I was not sure what our future would now hold. This decision and leap of faith affected not just me but my children, too. I realized the trap that I believed I was stuck in was not really locked, and I could get out from under this dysfunction. This was the first step toward independence and freedom. Part of the trap was the mistaken "illusion" of financial support from my ex-husband. I had no marketable skills, and I had the responsibility of caring for my children, which kept me from taking this life-changing decision of divorce sooner.

As I was sitting on a cold metal folding chair in the waiting area of "Public Aid," I could not help replaying the tapes I grew up with, having been told on more than one

occasion that welfare was only for the lazy, uneducated, and unskilled, and mainly for the "minorities." I grew up in a "bigot's" home. I was white, somewhat intelligent, and educated. I lived in the suburbs, and I felt so ashamed because I had failed at achieving and living the all-American middle-class dream. While sitting there waiting to see if I could qualify for assistance, this overwhelming feeling of shame and embarrassment kept washing over me. I had hit rock bottom and hit it hard. In my mind from pre-conceived messages, I now felt like one of those "lazy bums," and the government was making decent, hard-working people support my family through the welfare program. These were not my words or my viewpoint; these thoughts came from the generation I was raised in, the generation of "Archie Bunker," the bigot. I cried while looking at my surroundings; I seemed to be the only white person sitting there. I was taught that "well-educated white people" did not receive welfare. This fact alone was lending credence to the narrow-minded bigoted thought process I was debating over and over in my head. I felt like an utter failure.

This feeling of shame and humiliation kept seeping into my being, just as death steals a life in the middle of the night. I had a "mantra" I kept telling myself: "I am doing this for my children and we need whatever help we can get." I remember feelings of self-pity, thinking, "Congratulations, Lynn, officially you are now nothing but a number, now say good-bye to your personhood." Looking back, I now see clearly where my pride and my ego were under attack. However, that was the day I came to know the difference between humiliation and being humble. Humble, to me, means not allowing my ego to be in control for, when it is, I am "easing God out" (EGO). Today, I know He is in control and I am not.

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Evaluation: *Lynn creates a poignant account of her experience at the Department of Human Services. She lays bare her soul and poetically expresses her epiphany on the day she "came to know the difference between humiliation and being humble."*

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# Azar Nafisi

Christina Diba

Course: Great Ideas of World Civilization  
(Humanities 105)

Instructor: Andrew Wilson

Assignment: *Each student was to write an essay introducing the reader to a great thinker who is still living.*

Who can account for the characteristics of a great thinker? According to one online source, “*anyone* can be a great thinker. Sure, some of history’s so-called ‘thinkers’ had genius-level IQs and schooling, but most were normal people who needed or wanted to find solutions to everyday questions” (“What Makes a ‘Great Thinker’”). When presented with the idea of a great thinker, some may consider momentous world citizens such as Abraham Lincoln, Henry David Thoreau, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mahatma Gandhi; however, Azar Nafisi, a professor and writer, exhibits qualities similar to those of other famous thinkers. Although she hasn’t necessarily amended any laws, she has voiced her concerns and advocated for human rights so that the public may join her important effort to change Iranian laws.

In the memoir *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, by Azar Nafisi, the author bears witness to women, just like herself, who have fallen at the hands of oppression. By reading Nafisi’s remarkable book, we see how those women dealt with their oppression by documenting her observations. That oppression inevitably led to the near-destruction of their freedom, which is why Nafisi held secret meetings: meetings that gave her seven female students a new

perspective on freedom in the West through Western literature. Nafisi

...was an English literature professor at a university in Tehran. Having witnessed the Iranian revolution and consequential rise to power of Ayatollah Khomeini, Nafisi grew tired of the rules posted upon women by her country’s rulers. Nafisi had visited the United States several times before the revolution, and she appreciated the freedoms that women in other countries had. (“Azar Nafisi Biography”)

Although she has fled her homeland, she has never given up on it. She is a great thinker, for she has bravely asserted her voice concerning human rights regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is controlled by religious extremists.

Some view her as just an exemplary educator and others as a writer, an agent of literature. However, in 1981, she was banned from the University of Tehran for refusing to wear the obligatory Islamic veil. This black veil that women were forced to wear was no longer a symbol of religious zeal, but it was, in fact, a representation of the state. Khomeini and a group known as the Party of God distributed slogans which read, “Veiling is a women’s protection. My sister, guard your veil. My brother, guard your eyes” (Nafisi, *Reading Lolita* 27). As a result of the strict laws that were enforced, it wasn’t until 1987 that she started teaching again. However, Nafisi fled Iran in order to move to the United States. Now liberated from the Islamic Republic of Iran, she has earned “national respect and international recognition for advocating on behalf of Iran’s intellectuals, youth, and especially young women” (Renée, “About Azar”). Since she has made her permanent residence within the United States, she has accomplished numerous achievements. Nafisi “held a fellowship at Oxford University, teaching and conducting a series of lectures on culture and the important role of Western literature and culture in Iran after the revolution in 1979” (Renée, “About Azar”). Since leaving Oxford, Nafisi has written for various publications such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. Currently, she teaches at the School for Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University.

When Nafisi lived in Iran, she witnessed how the newly established laws had an effect upon Iranian women. Throughout all of her observations, she continually hoped that she could write a book discussing what has happened in her lifetime. However, in Iran, it was forbidden to write anything negative toward the country, which is why she wrote *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* once she moved to America. This memoir has been translated into approximately thirty-two languages and has received countless literary awards. In this memoir, she first informs her readers of her efforts to secretly encourage seven former students attending the university every Thursday morning for two years; these were students who met in Nafisi's apartment and displayed intellectual promise. Nafisi writes in this memoir that

...those of us living in the Islamic Republic of Iran grasped both the tragedy and absurdity of the cruelty to which we were subjected. We had to poke fun of our own misery in order to survive. This was one reason that art and literature became so essential to our lives: they were not a luxury but a necessity. (23)

In these concealed sessions at her apartment, she not only taught and read forbidden Western classics, but she persuaded her female readers to bring Westernized clothing underneath their veils and to put on make-up. The author states that she "had explained to them the purpose of the class: to read, discuss, and respond to works of fiction. Each would have a private diary, in which she could record her responses to the novels, as well as ways in which these works and their discussions related to her personal and social experiences" (18). According to Azar Nafisi's official website, she wrote that

...they were shy and uncomfortable at first, unaccustomed to being asked to speak their minds, but soon they removed their veils and began to speak more freely—their stories intertwining with the novels they were reading by Jane Austen, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Henry James, and Vladimir Nabokov. (Reneé, "Reading *Lolita*")

This quote demonstrates the very essence of how life for the women was constantly instilled with fear while

they tried at the same time to survive under religious and political oppression.

Of course, the reason why artistic expression and various others modes of expression ceased to exist in Iran was, ultimately, the word of a blind censor. In her memoir, she writes, "we lived in a culture that denied any merit to literary works, considering them important only when they were handmaidens to something seemingly more urgent—namely ideology" (Nafisi, *Reading Lolita* 25). This illustrates the tendencies of what Iran thought of concerning Western civilization. They believed that their influence would corrupt the minds of many Iranians -- which was considered a plot that would annihilate the Iranian culture. This was the very reason why Nafisi held the secret meetings. She believed that reading *Lolita* (and other works of literature) is imperative because we need imagination in the world we live in today. Nafisi later scribes that

...like *Lolita* we tried to escape and to create our own little pockets of freedom. And like *Lolita*, we took every opportunity to flaunt our insubordination: by showing a little hair from under our scarves, insinuating a little color into the drab uniformity of our appearances, growing our nails, falling in love and listening to forbidden music. (25-26).

Through these concealed gatherings, they were permitted to discuss their artistic expression through their emerging voices.

Azar Nafisi has and will always be an advocate for women's rights in Iran. Although she has left Iran, she doesn't believe that Iran will never leave her. She informs her audience that "now that I have written a book, I can re-create the relationship with the people living in Iran through my writings" ("Azar Nafisi"). It is through her memoirs where she can reconnect with fellow Iranian women and her former students. However, she never forgets the living conditions that Iranian women still endure. She writes that "women were scholars, police officers, judges, pilots and engineers—active in every field except the clergy" before the revolution of 1979 (Nafisi, "The Republic"). That is, women enjoyed access to numerous occupations before the revolution; however,



it clearly changed (for the worse) afterwards.

In Nafisi's memoir, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, she mentions that "we had become the figment of someone else's dream. A stern ayatollah, a self-proclaimed philosopher-king, had come to rule our land" (Nafisi, *Reading Lolita* 28). Women were inherently considered objects, and on this theme Nafisi discusses how the new regime attacked three aspects of a person's (especially a woman's) individuality. The first target was the person's freedom of imagination. Next was the attack on the publication and distribution of literature; for instance, there was a ban on certain characters within William Shakespeare's plays, for the regime believed that these particular characters demoralized the masses, and that they were particularly inclined to corrupt women. Lastly, they changed the marriage laws regarding women. For example, women were (prior to the emergence of the new regime) eligible for marriage at the age of eighteen, but this was lowered so that women could get married at the age of nine. In the article for the *Washington Post*, Nafisi wrote that "suddenly a new regime had established itself, taking hold of my country, my religion, my traditions, and claiming that the way I looked, the way I acted—what I believed in and desired as a human being, as a woman, a writer and teacher—were all alien" ("The Republic"). To illustrate the new laws concerning women, she scribes, "If she gets on a bus, the seating is segregated. She must enter through the rear door and sit in the back seats, allocated to women" (Nafisi, *Reading Lolita* 27). This form of segregation is similar to the twentieth-century experience of African Americans and how they had to give up their public transportation seats for the white community throughout America's Southern states (and, by the way, in some Northern pockets, too). Women in Iran, as Nafisi illustrates, no longer had/have any rights.

The situation in Iran is not merely one of gender inequality but, in fact, one of sanctioned male supremacy. In the memoir, Nafisi informs her readers that "they [men] are called the Blood of God. They patrol the streets to make sure that women like Sanaz wear their veils properly, do not wear makeup, do not walk in public with men who are not their fathers, brothers, or husbands" (Nafisi 26). The ayatollah created the Party of God known as the Blood of God so that they can monitor women in order to

make sure that they abide by the latest Iranian rules. The author writes that "in the course of nearly two decades, the streets have been turned into a war zone, where young women who disobey the rules are hurled into patrol cars, taken to jail, flogged, fined, forced to wash the toilets and humiliated, and as soon as they leave, they go back and do the same thing" (Nafisi 27).

It is through oppression and fear where young Iranian women have to obey the rules that have stripped them of their dignity and their freedom. Nafisi writes that "when I went back home after the revolution of 1979, I discovered that home was not really home. Everything that had been familiar during my youth had changed beyond recognition" ("Azar Nafisi"). With the latest laws, women are forced into inequality by forms of segregation, and Iranians are coerced into believing that Western civilization is corrupt. In utter discord with what Westerners understand to be women's rights, Iranian women have to tolerate the newly established decree to cover up as much of their bodies as possible. Collectively, they are essentially viewed as an object instead of an equal. The author states that in Iran "I would first be checked to see if I have the right clothes: the color of my coat, the length of my uniform, the thickness of my scarf, the form of my shoes, the objects in my bag, the visible traces of even the mildest makeup, the size of my rings and their levels of attractiveness, all would be checked before I could enter the campus of the university" (Nafisi 29). And once more, if women presented any form of insubordination, they would be taken to jail, flogged, and fined.

Although women are the main focus of (negative) change, Nafisi recalls various forms of censorship within her homeland known as Iran. Iranian women are continually suffering, but there are other forms of restriction—and others (not only women) who suffer from the fierce letter of Iranian law. Nafisi recalls that "other freedoms were gradually curtailed, and the assaults continued: attacks on freedom of the press; the censorship of books; a ban on dancing, on female singers, on most forms of music, on films and other forms of art, followed by systematic attacks against intellectuals who protested these forms of oppression" ("The Republic"). Literature, music and various forms of art have been viewed as corrupt; following the example of all repressive regimes

throughout world history, Iran's post-revolution regime believes that Western civilization uses such material to distort the Iranian's perspective of life and that of freedom. Nafisi informs her audience that "I had lost my connections to that other home, to the America in which I had learned to love Henry James, Richard Wright, William Faulkner, Peter Taylor, and Eudora Welty" ("The Republic"). As a result of Iranian censorship, Nafisi fled to the United States in order to let her voice be heard. In the United States, unlike Iran, she has the ability to voice her concerns and advocate for Iranian women's rights without having to look over her shoulder for the group known as the Blood of God.

Through her memoirs and various lectures, Nafisi paints a vivid portrait of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. She is continuing to make a political and literary difference within the world. She believes that we have the right to fight what is life-denying because we are supposed to preserve a culture that is worth living; that is why she will always discuss and protest the harsh living conditions bestowed upon the citizens, particularly female citizens, of Iran. She writes, "I think that is what makes literature and books so wonderful – they transcend geographical boundaries" ("Azar Nafisi"). Through her literature, she wants to make the public aware that even though the Islamic Republic of Iran is viewed as an unpleasant location to travel to, there are citizens within the country that are against the ayatollah and his rules. Recently, she has made people aware of the issues perplexing her country, and we ourselves might note that Iranians (by the many thousands) in her homeland are, as I write this, protesting recent election results, feeling certain that the outcome was doubtful at best and rigged at worst. Those discontented citizens are out on the streets risking their lives to voice their opposition, and their example is why Nafisi believes as well that we are our own enemy—for we have to face the fear that is within ourselves. The only way that Iranians can move forward in life is to realize that they essentially don't have any rights. They are the ones that have to confront their fear, their legitimate fear, by protesting for what they believe in. In that way, they can preserve their culture for future generations. Nafisi wants readers to have the right to read and articulate themselves. She writes, "we need to write

about this. We need to recount what happens to us and to others when we strive to save ourselves from despair, to remind ourselves that tyrants cannot confiscate what we value most" ("The Republic"). She wants freedom for those that are deprived of it. Home, she argues, is where one feels that she belongs. She doesn't consider Iran as her home any more—not since the revolution of 1979. However, that hasn't stopped her from longing, as many of us do, for what once was, and even for something better than what once was, something never before seen in the world of Islam.

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Evaluation: *Christina had not read Nafisi's book before our class, and the experience of reading it and writing this paper (and presenting it to the class) seemed to energize Christina, who is herself of Iranian descent. In this paper, the reader picks up on an emerging awareness, on Christina's part, of some of the powerful and repressive forces of injustice.*

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# The Dark Ages of Chicago

Alex Dudasik

Course: English 102 (Honors Composition:  
Chicago Literature)

Instructor: Nancy L. Davis

Assignment: *Write a literary research paper.*

Today, Chicago is a major U.S. city. Its central location in the United States, as well as accessibility by car, train, boat, and plane, makes it a great place to open a business. It holds many headquarters of major companies and the campuses of many well-respected colleges and universities. It has a diverse population and is mostly looked on as one of the best examples of a U.S. city. Besides being a great place for the people living there and in the surrounding suburbs, its beautiful lake, many fine museums, and loads of shopping venues make it an ideal tourist location. Many people come from around the world to either visit Chicago or start their life there. However, it has not always been like this. In the past, Chicago has been oppressive and unfair to immigrants, minority races, and women. This common thread of unfair treatment left these groups doomed to failure. We see this vividly in key works about Chicago, namely, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, Richard Wright's *Native Son*, and Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*.

Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* is a story about immigrants. Set in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is about a Lithuanian family who has moved to Chicago for a better life. Soon they find out America is not all it is cracked up to be, as they struggle for money and try to survive in the depressing Packingtown, the nation's main supplier of meat. Here is a glimpse of the living conditions in Packingtown:

The roadway was commonly several feet lower than the level of the houses, which were sometimes joined by high board walks; there were no pavements—there were mountains and valleys and rivers, gullies

and ditches, and great hollows full of stinking green water. In these pools the children played, and rolled about in the mud of the streets; here and there one noticed them digging in it, after trophies which they had stumbled on. One wondered about this, as also about the swarms of flies which hung about the scene, literally blackening the air, and the strange, fetid odor which assailed one's nostrils, a ghastly odor, of all the dead things of the universe. It impelled the visitor to questions—and then the residents would explain, quietly, that all this was "made" land, and that it had been "made" by using it as a dumping-ground for the city garbage. ... Here was a great hole, perhaps two city blocks square, and with long files of garbage wagons creeping into it. The place had an odor for which there are no polite words; and it was sprinkled over with children, who raked in it from dawn till dark. Sometimes visitors from the packing-houses would wander out to see this "dump," and they would stand by and debate as to whether the children were eating the food they got, or merely collecting it for the chickens at home. Apparently none of them ever went down to find out. (Sinclair 28-29)

As Jon A. Yoder sums up, "[*The Jungle*] called the attention of the world to Upton Sinclair. For his portrayal of Lithuanian peasants who come to America vividly suggests that our melting pot is less appetizing than the terms offered on our Statue of Liberty" (Yoder 501). The deplorable living conditions left the immigrants prone to illness, further weakening them, and leaving them vulnerable to failure even before facing the harsh treatment of those in power. Once they arrived, they were treated unfairly, lied to, taken advantage of, and subjected to intense discrimination. An example of this is the poor conditions workers were subjected to in the factories. Not only were they risking life and limb working there, but if something did happen, they would be thrown to the side to let a more able-bodied person take the position, and on top of that, the pay was not enough to live on, or fair, for the brutal tasks they had to accomplish. This is supported by Murno:

The brutalization is underscored by Sinclair's use of numerous analogies that compare the individuals to wild and hunted animals and parallels the fate of

the innocent livestock to the fate of the common working person. Factory life is variously compared to an inferno, a bubbling cauldron, and a medieval torture chamber, where it is considered good sport to extract the last ounce of flesh from the hapless workers. The factory, however, is only a reflection of society's disregard for democratic values and its indifference to truth and justice. (n.p.)

In addition to difficult working conditions, the immigrants' wives were sometimes forced to perform sexual acts for people in positions of power for fear of losing their jobs, and the jobs of their family if they did not comply. Not only would this take away the pride and integrity of the women, but also of their spouses, leaving them powerless, with the only alternative being to starve to death. In *The Jungle*, this is depicted in a scene between Ona and Jurgis:

Again, for a space, there was no sound but his panting. Ona's eyes closed and when she spoke again she did not open them. "He told me—he would have me turned off. He told me he would—we would all of us lose our places. We could never get anything to do—here—again. He—meant it—he would have ruined us."

Jurgis's arms were shaking so that he could scarcely hold himself up, and lurched forward now and then as he listened. "When—when did this begin?" he gasped.

"At the very first," she said. She spoke as if in a trance. "It was all—it was their plot—Miss Henderson's plot. She hated me. And he—wanted me. He used to speak to me—out on the platform. Then he began to—to make love to me. He offered me money. He begged me—he said he loved me. Then he threatened me. He knew all about us, he knew we would starve. He knew your boss—he knew Marija's. He would hound us to death, he said—then he said if I would—if I—we would all of us be sure of work—always. Then one day he caught hold of me—he would not let go—he—he—" (Sinclair 146)

Also, these immigrants were exploited by the business community with false advertising and tricks, and the naïve immigrants were lured in and taken for a ride with what little money they had. For instance,

when Jurgis and his family went to buy a house, they were told the houses were new, when in reality the houses were not new, they just had a fresh coat of paint on them. In addition, they were not told they would have to pay interest on the house, so they really could not afford it, even with all of them working. They knew immediately, however, that the ad they saw for the house was somewhat misleading when they saw it, as shown in this passage: "...He escorted them to the house, which was one of a long row of the typical frame dwellings of the neighborhood, where architecture is a luxury that is dispensed with. Ona's heart sank, for the house was not as it was shown in the picture; the color-scheme was different, for one thing, and then it did not seem quite so big" (Sinclair 47). It is clear why Upton Sinclair titled his book *The Jungle*, because for the immigrants it was like they were in a jungle facing danger and perils at every turn, as stated by Walter Rideout: "The title of the book itself represented a feat of imaginative compression, for the world in which the Lithuanian immigrant Jurgis and his family find themselves is an Africa of unintelligibility, of suffering and terror, where the strong beasts devour the weak, who are dignified, if at all, only by their agony" (47). Only by their agony, indeed.

*Native Son*, written by Richard Wright, is a perfect example of Chicago literature that exemplifies the oppression and exploitation of African-Americans in the mid-1900s. Bigger, the main character, was subjected to racial discrimination which led to him killing a young white woman, Mary Dalton. This book forced America to question their treatment of minorities, and to face the fact that hatred is the root of all evil. As Irving Howe stated,

In all its crudeness, melodrama and claustrophobia of vision, Richard Wright's novel brought out into the open as no one ever had before, the hatred, fear and violence that have crippled and may yet destroy our culture. ... A blow at the white man, the novel forced him to recognize himself as an oppressor. A blow at the black man, the novel forced him to recognize the cost of his submission. (63)

At a very young age, black children realized they did not have the same opportunities as white children, which grew into intense feelings of inferiority as adults. The mindset of young black children is shown well in the following passage in the book:

They squinted at a tiny ribbon of unfolding vapor that spelled out the word: USE. . . . The plane was so far away that at times the strong glare of the sun blanked it from sight.

"You can hardly see it," Gus said.

"Looks like a little bird," Bigger breathed with childlike wonder.

"Them white boys sure can fly," Gus said.

"Yeah," Bigger said, wistfully. "They get a chance to do everything." (Wright 16)

As the children grew, so did their feelings of incompetence, inequality, and distrust with the white population. They were continually subjected to segregation and discrimination, and they always got the short end of the stick. A sense of defensiveness was well established within them as they entered adulthood. This is well exemplified in the following passage:

Inside his shirt he felt the cold metal of the gun resting against his naked skin; he ought to put it back between the mattresses. No! He would keep it. He would take it with him to the Dalton place. He felt that he would be safer if he took it. He was not planning to use it and there was nothing in particular that he was afraid of, but there was in him an uneasiness and distrust that made him feel that he ought to have it along. He was going among white people, so he would take his knife and his gun; it would make him feel that he was the equal of them, give him a sense of completeness. Then he thought of a good reason why he should take it; in order to get to the Dalton place, he had to go through a white neighborhood. He had not heard of any Negroes being molested recently, but he felt that it was always possible. (Wright 43)

This despair and defensiveness is further elaborated upon by Evelyn Gross Avery:

Products of a lower-class black environment, Wright's rebels are well acquainted with hunger, disease, poverty. They learned quickly from frightened mothers and beaten fathers not to expect much from America. Their dreams of power are undercut by the reality of Jim Crow and more subtle discrimination. Ambition is discouraged;

impotency reinforced. All entrances and exits are blocked. Trapped, Wright's black man may choose to suffer his fate passively: he may reluctantly accept his status as a victim. (597)

It is within twenty-four hours of first meeting the Daltons that Bigger commits the murder of Mary Dalton, which was actually an accidental suffocation. This was because Bigger felt trapped when he was alone in the bedroom with an intoxicated Mary, and worried that if he got caught, he would be accused of raping her. Max, Bigger's defense attorney, also makes the case that Bigger is like most Negroes, and that the blame of Mary Dalton's murder should fall on the white people, because of their treatment of blacks, as shown here:

"Multiply Bigger Thomas twelve million times, allowing for environmental and temperamental variations, and for those Negroes who are completely under the influence of the church, and you have the psychology of the Negro people. But once you see them as a whole, once your eyes leave the individual and encompass the mass, a new quality comes into the picture. Taken collectively they are not simply twelve million people; in reality they constitute a separate nation, stunted, stripped, and held captive *within* this nation, devoid of political, social, economic, and property rights." (Wright 397)

Richard Wright used murder to drive his point home, and he was clear about his reasons for it, as the following commentary indicates:

He wanted people to read his books and get angry, not tearful. "I swore to myself that if I wrote another book, no one would weep over it; that it would be so hard and deep that they would have to face it without the consolation of tears." He wanted readers to feel his own anger and hoped they would be moved enough to take action to change the conditions that black people faced every day. He did not want people to feel that merely reading his books would make racial prejudice disappear. Richard wanted his new novel to be so powerful and honest that it would be an act of revolution. Previous black writers had avoided violence and

rage in their works, but Richard saw a definite need for these elements in his writing. (*Native Son: The Story of Richard Wright*)

Like the immigrants before them, minority races were being treated just as unfairly and unjustly in the great city of Chicago. It left these populations with feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and a sense of despair that they could never improve the situation they found themselves victim to.

Another piece of Chicago literature that supports the inequitable opportunities available to minority populations is Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*. It highlights the experiences of Latino girls and women in Chicago during the mid-1900s. It portrays the dreams of these young Latino girls and the harsh realities they face as they grow up and realize the limitations placed upon them. During this era, television made these girls aware of how disadvantaged their environmental conditions were, in comparison to the average white family portrayed on television. This is supported by Harold Bloom: "Within this first chapter, Esperanza immediately indicates the gap between the white middle class families portrayed on TV and the Latino experience in the barrio of Chicago. The white world has three bathrooms to the Corderos' one, and enough bedrooms for every child to have his or her own" (n.p.). Although their families longed for their children to grow up in stable communities with safe housing, their income limitations severely restricted them from achieving these goals. The house of their dreams is well reflected in the following passage:

They always told us that one day we would move into a house, a real house that would be ours for always so we wouldn't have to move each year. And our house would have running water and pipes that worked. And inside it would have real stairs, not hallway stairs, but stairs inside like the houses on T.V. And we'd have a basement and at least three washrooms so when we took a bath we wouldn't have to tell everybody. Our house would be white with trees around it, a great big yard and grass growing without a fence. This was the house Papa talked about when he held a lottery ticket and this was the house Mama dreamed up in the stories she told us before we went to bed. (Cisneros 4)

The house they live in is described next:

But the house on Mango Street is not the way they told it at all. It's small and red with tight steps in front and windows so small you'd think they were holding their breath. Bricks are crumbling in places, and the front door is so swollen you have to push hard to get in. There is no front yard, only four little elms the city planted by the curb. Out back is a small garage for the car we don't own yet and a small yard that looks smaller between the two buildings on either side. There are stairs in our house, but they're ordinary hallway stairs, and the house has only one washroom. Everybody has to share a bedroom—Mama and Papa, Carlos and Kiki, me and Nenny. (Cisneros 4)

Ellen McCracken comments: "On the surface, the compelling desire for a house of one's own appears individualistic rather than community oriented, but Cisneros socializes the motif of the house, showing it to be a basic human need left unsatisfied for many of the minority population under capitalism." (McCracken 172)

This book also clearly details the submissiveness expected of Latino girls and women to males in general, and specifically to their husbands, and the severe restrictions placed on them. They seem to accept it because they have no other choice or options available to them, and this is the life path that has been prepared for them, with no way to escape it. The following passage from "Linoleum Roses" tells how a young girl feels after being married and the restraints then placed on her:

Sally got married like we knew she would, young and not ready but married just the same. She met a marshmallow salesman at a school bazaar, and she married him in another state where it's legal to get married before eighth grade. She has her husband and her house now, her pillowcases and her plates. She says she is in love, but I think she did it to escape.

Sally says she likes being married because now she gets to buy her own things when her husband gives her money. She is happy, except sometimes her husband gets angry and once he broke the door where his foot went through, though most days he is okay. Except he won't let her talk on the telephone.

And he doesn't let her look out the window. And he doesn't like her friends, so nobody gets to visit her unless he is working.

She sits at home because she is afraid to go outside without his permission. She looks at all the things they own: the towels and the toaster, the alarm clock and the drapes. She likes looking at the walls, at how neatly their corners meet, the linoleum roses on the floor, the ceiling smooth as a wedding cake. (Cisneros 101-102)

Jacqueline Doyle comments further:

Confined by what Rich criticizes as the "faceless, raceless, classless category of 'all women', women of color in the United States have all too often felt themselves compelled to choose between ethnicity and womanhood." ... Sandra Cisneros recalls sitting in a University in Iowa seminar at the age of twenty-two and suddenly realizing that she was "different from everybody" there: "It wasn't as if I didn't know who I was. I knew I was a Mexican woman. But, I didn't think it had anything to do with why I felt so much imbalance with my life, whereas it had everything to do with it! My race, my gender, and my class!" (Doyle)

Clearly, Cisneros' experiences growing up in an underprivileged and underserved area of Chicago placed roadblocks to success in her life and left her feeling that she was not part of mainstream society, even as a successful college student years later. Both Jurgis and Bigger experienced similar feelings and problems as Cisneros and her character Esperanza.

The common woven fabric that we see in all three works, and across several decades, is for those who lived in Chicago, and who were immigrants, minorities, or women, is that they were treated poorly by those with power, subjected to unfair practices, and robbed of the opportunities to find success and better their outcomes. They were taken advantage of, blamed for things unjustly, and kept away from others in the society for no reason. They were victims of circumstances that were beyond their control. These were truly the dark ages of Chicago.

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Evaluation: *Interweaving a tapestry of literary works emblematic of Chicago literature, Alex does an excellent job convincing his audience that Chicago was not only the city that worked but the city that reaped class, racial, and ethnic division at one dark time in its history.*

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# In the Case of Curses, Hurricanes, and Gingerbread Witches: Resentment and Despair in “The Disquieting Muses”

Shari Emme

Course: Literature 105 (Introduction to Poetry)

Instructor: Nancy L. Davis

Assignment: *Write a literary research paper using a poem as your subject.*

In the poem, “The Disquieting Muses,” by Sylvia Plath, the speaker addresses her mother regarding the troubling circumstances of her life. The resentment she feels relating to her perceived neglect and alienation by the mother is the basis for the poem. The speaker is provided with this platform in which to confront her mother with accusations that the mother is the one at fault for the speaker’s problematic issues throughout her life. It is very likely that the speaker is Plath herself, and that she uses this forum to lay blame on her own mother for the deep psychological and personal problems she has experienced. In the poem “[s]he reveals how overwhelming...the complexities of life can be” (Svetich 131). The poem contains a great deal of evidence that Plath is actually the person speaking. Anne Stevenson states that the speaker is “recognizably Sylvia [Plath]” (125) and that “the poem consists of vignettes from [Plath’s] childhood...[and] details...rooted in Sylvia’s family history” (125). As with several other of her works, Plath writes this poem out of her personal need for compassion in her circumstances. It brings to print the frustration she experiences with the

feeling of being unloved by her own mother and Plath’s plea for concern from her.

In the first stanza, the speaker begins by asking:

Mother, mother, what illbred aunt  
Or what disfigured and unsightly  
Cousin did you so unwisely keep  
Unasked to my christening, that she  
Sent these ladies in her stead  
With heads like darning-eggs to nod  
And nod and nod at foot and head  
And at the left side of my crib? (1-8)

The speaker believes that she has been cursed by these “muses” from the time she was born, who are regarded as evil spirits representing the complications she endures throughout life. Because the speaker was a mere infant at the time, unable to think or act for herself, she holds her mother responsible for these problems. Some slight by the mother has bound the daughter to a lifetime of turmoil. Janet McCann sets out that “[l]ike Plath’s other parent poems, [The Disquieting Muses]... blames the parent... for the situation of the [child].” This spiteful, accusatory tone persists throughout the poem. The speaker feels as if her life is predetermined and the difficulties she will face are all due to the mother’s disregard. Judith Kroll states that the muses’ “presence at the left side of the crib indicates the ‘sinister’ fate of the godchild” (29). It is viewed that nothing but horrific experiences are in the speaker’s future. The speaker feels that the mother’s carelessness has allowed these presences (metaphors for her problems) to affect her daughter and lay claim on her life. By the manner in which the poem is worded, the speaker’s opinion that the mother created these crises by her neglect continues throughout the entire piece.

In the second stanza, she speaks of how the mother denies the troubles the speaker experiences. “I wonder / Whether you saw them, whether you said / Words to rid me of those three ladies” (12-14). The speaker feels betrayed by the mother for not trying to do something to help her. Jon Rosenblatt declares that “[t]he daughter blames her mother for not having protected her” (73). The speaker feels that the mother has slighted her by not defending her from the dreadful experiences that she must contend with. Further, “the daughter feels that her mother’s outlook is a



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denial of her own experience of life" (Kroll 128). It may be that the speaker is also presenting that the mother, by denying the problems of the daughter and the troublesome things that surround the family, she is also denying the problems in her own life and suppressing the angst she may feel herself for events that have occurred to her in the past. Unfortunately for the daughter, the problems from which she suffers will not allow her to ignore them. They make themselves ever present at the forefront of her mind.

The speaker feels as if the mother has ignored the bad things in life by various means, including inventing stories, and she makes mention of "Mixie Blackshort the heroic bear" (10). Mixie Blackshort was a character created by Aurelia Plath (Plath's mother). Stevenson writes that Aurelia Plath "told them [her children] homemade stories. "The Adventures of Mixie Blackshort" she [Aurelia Plath] says, 'ran into nightly installments for several years'" (9). By placing this reference to an actual occurrence from her childhood, it is evident that Plath intends for this poem to reflect herself as the speaker and to concern her own life and not that of some other person she writes of while she watches from the outside. These stories referred to in the poem are viewed as an attempt to instill the children with the mother's sense that everything will be all right and nothing can harm them. The mother is "represented [as living in] a never-never land of soap-bubble happiness" (Stevenson 125), and the stories of Mixie Blackshort brought up in the poem may have been seen by Plath as her mother's way of not dealing with the real world. The mother pretends that there is nothing to worry about and, as long as she continues to think in that manner, there are no problems in life that can affect her. But the speaker knows that this view is incorrect. Hurt and harm do exist, and no one is exempt. The use of the lines wherein the mother's "witches [who] always, always / Got baked into gingerbread..." (11-12), brings to mind the thought that, if witches are only made out of gingerbread, they are unable to do harm. McCann states that the mother's idea of her own "power [is one] of unreason." The underlying sense of these lines in the poem can be interpreted to reveal that, no matter how much the mother attempts to ignore them in order to nullify their might, these dark forces are still working to cause damage.

The speaker goes on to describe the occurrences of the hurricane, in which the severity of the storm is distinguished by the statement that the windows of the father's study are blown in. While this natural disaster is occurring around them, the mother is busy giving the children "cookies and Ovaltine" (21), which are symbolic of childhood bliss. She further leads the children in a chant of "we don't care!" (24) at the hurricane. Instead of the mother attempting to move her children to a place of safety in order to protect them, all of this illogicality is taking place in the family household at her direction during a natural disaster. By ignoring the possible effects of the hurricane, the mother is exhibiting further signs of a belief that she is exempt from harm. Through the chanting, the mother thinks that she can "keep [the] irrational forces at bay" (McCann). This stanza is additional evidence that Plath is the actual speaker. In September of 1938, a devastating hurricane hit New England. At the time, Plath (who was nearly six years old) lived with her parents and brother in Winthrop, Massachusetts, located along Boston Harbor. It is believed that her personal experience during the hurricane is what Plath incorporates into the poem. According to Edward Butscher, the author "recalls the... thunderous wind and rain ripping at their house all night long; and in 'The Disquieting Muses' she would link the storm...with...her...and her mother" (11). This link may also be thought to provide a metaphor as to the emotional "storm" that the speaker (i.e. Plath) experiences when faced with the trying episodes that occur over her lifetime, for which she holds her mother responsible.

As the speaker continues, she reveals that she was unable to enjoy a carefree childhood. She is forced to participate only in activities approved by her mother. However, the speaker proves to be a failure in these pursuits and disappoints the mother. "When on tiptoe the schoolgirls danced, / ... / ...I could / Not lift a foot in the twinkle-dress / But, heavy footed, stood aside / ... / ...and you cried and cried" (27-32). The speaker participates in these endeavors in an effort to please the mother. However, as put forward by Kella Gerrisa Svetich, "the dreadful Muses constantly hover nearby, always ready to foil her attempts" (132). This causes the child, who "tries desperately hard to satisfy her mother... but is guiltridden...by her failures" (Zivley 44), to feel

that there is no hope for her future. The image "the lights / went out" (33-34) is a metaphor depicting the deep, dark, frightening sense of despondency the speaker experiences. Desperation has set in, and there is no escape from it. The speaker believes she is destined to forever be a disappointment to the mother. No matter how hard she may try, no accomplishment will be good enough or performed correctly. These instances cited in the poem may have been a reflection of numerous attempts made on Plath's own part to please her mother, in which she felt she failed her. Brita Lindberg-Seyersted states that Plath's "poems do not seem to be 'exercises,' but spring out of the poet's own experiences and feelings, for example, 'The Disquieting Muses.'" Additionally, Stevenson sets out that "her [Plath's] driving ambition to succeed...[was] the old need of giving Mother accomplishments, getting the reward of love" (126). By the speaker continuing to disappoint the mother, the malicious spell cast by the muses will not be broken. This stanza focuses on the displeasure of the mother in the daughter's inabilities, and Plath may be putting down on paper her interpretations of her own actions to gain her mother's affection that she believes she fails in attaining.

The speaker goes on to describe being forced to take piano lessons by the mother who "praised my arabesques and trills / Although each teacher found... / ... / ...my ear / ...unteachable" (36-40). The child is led down a path that she knows she does not belong on, but the mother continues to prod the daughter forward, possibly hoping that one day all of her adulation will spill over into a capacity for talent on the part of the daughter. Plath's own mother writes of this stanza that "the ambitious mother sends her tone-deaf daughter to take piano lessons" (A. Plath 215), which reflects irrationally high hopes for the daughter's skill. It is evident that the speaker is trying to make clear to the mother that the two saw this act in completely different ways. The idea is set out that the mother, by ignoring the lack of musical talent her daughter possesses, is again neglecting the speaker's feelings, thereby creating yet another obstacle for her to deal with. The muses "hound her day and night to make her try harder to fulfill her mother's ambitions and to make her feel guilty because of her inability to reach the goals her mother set for her" (Zivley 44). Because the speaker

realizes that her musical ability cannot develop simply by the will of the mother, she is once again forced to resign her attitude to that of failure and dejection in the face of the mother's eventual disappointment in her for this act.

The speaker goes on to further describe the tremendous differences in the two worlds she and her mother live in. While the mother floats away "in bluest air / ...with a million / Flowers and bluebirds that never were / ... found anywhere" (45-48), in which sensory images are meant to exhibit the idea of lasting happiness, the daughter remains facing her "traveling companions" (52), i.e. the problems that follow her due to her mother's lack of regard for the "curses" that surround her. As the mother abandons the child, "taking with her that idyllic dream" (Svetich 132), the daughter is left with her "fates, visitors from the world of madness" (McCann). By the mother leaving the daughter behind, the speaker's sense is that the mother will continue to live in a world of "paradise" forever, while the speaker must remain in her "hell" to deal with the tribulations that plague her life. The daughter is in no manner able to share the charmed life that the mother appears to exist in.

In the last stanza, the speaker concedes to the fact that these problems will never leave her. "Day now, night now, at head, side, feet, / They stand their vigil... / ... / Their shadows long in the setting sun / That never brightens" (53-57). She "acknowledges the...take-over of her being" (Howard 85) by these tribulations and deems that they will "follow and torment her wherever she goes" (Zivley 45). The speaker closes out the poem with a final recrimination. She states, "And this is the kingdom you bore me to, / Mother, mother. But no frown of mine / will betray the company I keep" (58-60), again pointing the finger at her mother as the one to blame for the issues that the speaker is afflicted with during her life. The speaker "complain[s] about how her mother...ruined her life" (Zivley 36) and Plath has "offered an exquisitely wrought, poisoned chalice" (Stevenson 126) aimed at her own mother. The speaker wants to make certain that the mother knows and understands exactly how miserable the speaker is. She hopes that, by using such a wounding tone, in some way the mother will feel a small portion of the pain and anguish the speaker is tormented with. The speaker sees the truth and understands it, something

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which her mother refuses to do. This truth is dark and evil, and the speaker knows that she will forever be tormented by the achievement of this wicked wisdom. Again, this is most likely the author speaking directly to her own mother in an attempt to make her see how Plath believes her mother has wronged her from the time of her birth.

From beginning to end of the poem, the speaker struggles with what is in the mind of the mother, and this frustrates and angers the speaker. Per Stevenson, the speaker has become a "furious, wronged [child]" (125) and the poem is her "dark, deprived and vengeful source" (125) for the expression of her outrage at her mother for these perceived wrongdoings. Throughout the poem, the speaker attempts to gain the true attention of the mother. She wants to make her understand how she has suffered. The mother's seeming indifference to her daughter's situation deals another blow to the speaker. The speaker's bitterness regarding this situation "comes through...as fist-beating" (Quinn 111). The accumulation of psychological distress the speaker experiences in her life has brought her to the breaking point, and she can no longer keep still. The anger and resentment combine to burst forth in a raging rant (the poem) aimed at the mother. Aurelia Plath states that "Sylvia achieved release when troubled by writing things out, thereby dissipating her frustration" (216). This poem is most likely one of these instances Plath's mother refers to. In her fury, the author puts down in the lines of the poem all of the contempt she feels toward her own mother regarding her negligence, which Plath feels was the cause of her predicament.

Upon reading "The Disquieting Muses," the reader clearly understands that the speaker is angry with the mother for her apparent lack of concern for her child. Furthermore, Plath actually intends for the use of this poem to be an avenue for Plath to release her own personal frustrations with her mother's attitude toward her. It is a gut-wrenching appeal to the mother for understanding and compassion. The author's sufferings throughout life are evidenced in the poem, and the work becomes a cry out for help, which never arrives.

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Evaluation: *Shari's analysis and research are first-rate. What's more, she understands Plath's work in a way that is neither mawkish nor sentimental.*

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## Longstreet's Struggle with the "Killer Angel"

Teegan Fiedler

Courses: English 102 (Composition) and  
History 261 (The Civil War)

Instructors: Catherine Restovich and Tom DePalma

Assignment: *Write a research paper incorporating the  
literature and history of the course.*

In *The Killer Angels*, by Michael Shaara, General James Longstreet, who has already lost his confidence in God, faces even greater disillusionment in his substitute, Robert E. Lee. Shaara combines Lee's divine-like qualities with Lee's "killer angel" qualities; when Longstreet recognizes this "killer angel," the result is a loss of faith in Lee, a loss of hope in this invasion at Gettysburg, and a loss of respect for himself.

A year and a half before the Battle of Gettysburg, three of Longstreet's four living children die within a week of each other from scarlet fever. The loss devastates him. It "push[es] him out of his mind, insane," (Shaara 134) but, because of his arcane manner, no one realizes how deeply he is affected. Longstreet holds God responsible for making a mistake. "He had not thought God would do a thing like that. He went to church and asked and there was no answer. He got down on his knees and pleaded but there was no answer" (134). He tries to find God, he changes his ways, gives up his parties with the men, and shuns gambling. However, his efforts to establish a connection with God are unsuccessful. "He remembered that day in church when he prayed from the soul and listened and knew in that moment that there was no one there, no one to listen" (268). This shows his final loss of faith in God; it's no longer a matter of God's fallibility, but of His existence. Because Longstreet can find no source of comfort, he cannot comfort his wife. He has "nothing to give... What he had left was the army. The boys were here. He even had the father, in place of God: old Robert Lee" (134).

With his own familial love lying in ruins, the love Lee offered Longstreet drew him like a moth to the light.

"There was that extraordinary flame in the dark eyes, concern of a loving father, that flicked all Longstreet's defenses aside and penetrated to the lonely man within like a bright hot spear" (259). The love he sees in Lee's eyes is not the only attraction for Longstreet. Just as important to him, is the power of Lee to win battles, to defeat the specter of death that stalks Longstreet. He has witnessed this power over life-and-death in Lee. When Lee took over the losing Peninsula Campaign, which included mistakes made by Longstreet, despite additional losses, he still managed to force McClellan to leave Virginia. History records the Peninsula Campaign as a Confederate victory. Following this, Lee appears invincible, overrunning the Union forces at 2nd Manassas, stealing victory from the jaws of the Union army at Sharpsburg, and imposing terrible defeat from an unassailable position in the Battle of Fredricksburg. With Lee in control, the Confederates seem unconquerable. Wielded by this supreme ruler, "Longstreet [is] the staff in [Lee's] right hand" (Wert 152), used to dominate the battlefield. Longstreet sees Lee as supernal and therefore trustworthy. When Longstreet writes President Jefferson for a change in commanders, he states, "'nothing but the hand of God can save us...Can't you send us General Lee?'" (325). It is Lee's godlike character that acts as the driving force for the Army of Northern Virginia. The men follow him loyally, no matter what cost they are asked to pay. They have faith in Lee. One Confederate officer observing the low morale in the Confederate Army of Tennessee says, "The difference between this army and Lee's is very striking. When the men move in the Army of Northern Virginia, they think they are doing the proper thing, whether it be backward or forward, and if all the success anticipated is not secured, at all events it is not Lee's fault" (324). Only Lee's army seems to move in this charmed orbit. For Lee's army, results are independent of their allegiance. By contrast, Longstreet's allegiance depends on outcomes. He is not satisfied with hope, and he is unwilling to construct a future based on faith. He is no longer willing to follow blindly; he is only prepared to follow Lee—if Lee leads where Longstreet wants to go.

As Lee's plans unfold for Gettysburg, Longstreet realizes that Lee's supreme authority carries the same quality that he had learned to fear and reject in God when his children had died. There is a willingness to spend lives, no matter how great the pain, to achieve a greater

end; this is the "killer angel" in Lee. Peter S. Kindsvatter, analyzing the "killer angel" for a *U.S. Army War College Quarterly*, includes a secondhand description that fits Lee well:

He would when the occasion demanded take enormous risks and, with an uncanny sensibility, carry them off. He was one of those rare individuals who seem to require the stimulus of danger to raise them to the highest pitch...The worse the trial to be faced, the more perfect the balance of his nervous system and the greater the increase of his physical and moral power. (47)

Longstreet had observed these heightened powers in Lee; he had seen the "bright heat in Lee's eyes, like fever...[and] felt a shudder of alarm" (Shaara 193). His alarm comes from recognizing the "divine spark" in Lee, that is about to focus all of its exceptional power on the task of destroying the spark of divinity in his fellow man, with a divine indifference for the expendable lives used to achieve his win. Longstreet refuses to be drawn in to this suspension of reality—which treats the facts of death as meaningless. He has checked the facts with eyes of cold, hard reality. Longstreet has seen the already decimated divisions. Furthermore, he knows the Union troops now occupy the unassailable ground. Longstreet fears the presence and influence of the "killer angel" in Lee when he "glance[s] at the dusty face [and sees] a shadow cross the eyes like a passing wing" (202).

As Longstreet recognizes the "killer angel" in Lee, he finds himself back in the trap of helplessness to an unchallengeable authority that demands too high a price. Lee establishes the authority for his decisions by sermonizing that "the issue is in God's hands. We will live with his decision, whichever way it goes..." (202). This relieves Lee of responsibility for the outcome of his decisions. Lee further absolves himself of responsibility when he explains to the Prussian observer, Scheibert, "I think and work with all my powers to bring my troops to the right place at the right time...[then] I leave the matter up to God and the subordinate officers" (Gallagher 43). To Longstreet, lack of answerability makes Lee less trustworthy. Longstreet's impression of God was that God gave no answer, no account for the deaths of Longstreet's

children. Longstreet cannot trust the inexplicable. In the same lecture to Longstreet, Lee adds to his answerless authority an element of detachment, by telling Longstreet: "To be a good soldier you must love the army. But to be a good officer you must be willing to order the death of the thing you love" (Shaara 202). Accountability and attachment are the two attributes Longstreet adjudged missing in God; Lee's words confirm for Longstreet that Lee, as a type of "killer angel," is also lacking in these areas. Longstreet cannot submit to Lee's paradigm of a greater purpose. He listens, outwardly obedient, but inwardly, he recoils, and the seeds of his insurgence are sown:

For Longstreet, the commanding general wanted too much. As the senior and most experienced and trusted subordinate, Longstreet had opposed the plan on the 2nd, believing it was a mistake. He knew by Lee's reaction that his counterarguments—his recalcitrance—had wearied his superior, but still he pressed for an alternative. "He was a trained soldier," a historian has written of Longstreet, "who dealt in human life with a conservatism lacking in most military men. In the intangibility of battles he took no chances. Life was too precious to gamble needlessly." (Wert 283)

Longstreet has lost his taste for gambling, not only in the nightly poker games, but on the battlefield as well. He does not want his fate in the hands of any divine being, whether it be God or Robert E. Lee; life can be thrown away too recklessly by those who, in Lee's own words, do not fear death (Shaara 202).

Longstreet refuses to offer Lee blind faith and rejects it in others as well. He interrupts his spy, Harrison, mid-sentence as Harrison delightedly worships Lee (10, 14). The next night, he challenges Armistead's conviction that their cause is "a Holy War" and "the Crusades must have been a little like this," (67) by reminding Armistead, "[the Crusaders] never took Jerusalem" and "it takes a bit more than morale" (67) to achieve victory. Armistead persists with a reverent statement about Lee, "Well, anyhow, I've never seen anything like this. The Old Man's accomplishment. Incredible. His presence is everywhere. They hush when he passes, like an angel of the Lord"

(67). Longstreet shakes his head at this “nonsense” (68); while Armistead is certain that the army of the South is capable of victory based on their confidence in Lee, Longstreet thinks, “It was all probably true. And yet there was danger in it; there was even something dangerous in Lee” (69). The danger Longstreet sees is Lee’s belief that a passionate faith-based attack will win the day, whatever the cost may be, even if the cost is incomprehensible loss.

Longstreet’s substitutes are doomed to disappoint him. In following Lee, instead of God, he will not avoid inordinate loss; and that loss will be imposed on the very men he has chosen to love in place of his family.

As Longstreet recognizes Lee’s willingness to fight against unbeatable odds, to sustain at best what Longstreet recognizes would amount to a Pyrrhic victory, he loses confidence in Lee. Until this battle, as Shaara’s reviewer, Milligan, notes, “although their views differ, Longstreet is Lee’s right hand man. The two men trust each other and are concerned for one another’s safety. Longstreet believes that good weapons will win the battle, not the soldiers themselves” (Milligan). Now Longstreet and Lee are at cross purposes. Longstreet depends increasingly on facts, and Lee continues to depend on passionate faith. Lee employs his destructible soldiers and leaves the matter in God’s hands, while Longstreet prefers to bring the force of artillery to bear on the enemy and leave the matter in his chief engineer’s hands. When Lee shares his plan with Longstreet for the third day’s attack, he is excited and “hoping to strike fire, but Longstreet said nothing, stood listening, head bowed” (Shaara 309). Longstreet cannot risk it all, when he lives by sight and not by faith. Longstreet is looking for numbers, good ground, verifiable information, and good odds. His own observations and experience have taught him what will and won’t succeed, yet Lee has fought successfully more often than not against facts, with faith. “Lee is successful because he is willing to gamble and take risks, where others would err on the side of caution” (Milligan). They approach battle plans from opposite points of view. Until Gettysburg, they have been able to compromise, with Longstreet’s rocklike calm offering Lee dependability, and Lee’s audacious, faith-based plans fully utilizing the dependable men at his disposal. Asking Longstreet to execute a plan favoring faith over facts results instead

in great doubt as Longstreet reviews the logistics of Gettysburg. Longstreet is convinced of the need to pull the army out to set up a defensive position, where they can get the Union troops out in the open and hit them hard, whereas for Lee:

The decision was clear...He could not retreat now. It might be the clever thing to do, but cleverness did not win victories; the bright combinations rarely worked. You won because the men thought they would win, attacked with courage, attacked with faith, and it was the faith more than anything else you had to protect; that was one thing that was in your hands, and so you could not ask them to leave the field to the enemy...retreat was simply no longer an alternative. (Shaara 285)

Lee listens to his heart, relying on courage and faith, which have overcome the odds before. At Chancellorsville, two months earlier, his men had beaten a Union army more than twice their size. Lee, like his men, has come to believe that their faith, along with God’s will, will make them invincible. However, there is a chink in his armor. Unknown to Lee, Longstreet, upon whom the timing of the attack depends, has great misgivings about Lee. He recognizes that the men have faith in Lee, but he sees it as a nonsensical faith that will lead them to destruction. It is a critical irony that Lee’s faith-based plan is resting on the shoulders of his most reliable subordinate, his “Old War Horse,” Longstreet, who is faithless. It is not a state that Longstreet has taken to gladly. He is well aware that Lee’s army has produced unexpected victories time after time, but he has also seen the price paid for those victories; he has identified the facts that contributed to the victories more than the morale of the men. He has boiled it down to the advantage of who has the better ground, and here at Gettysburg, there is no question in his mind, that the Union forces occupy it: “He knew as certainly as he had ever known anything as a soldier that the hill could not be taken, not any more, and a cold, metal, emotionless voice told him that coldly, calmly, speaking into his ear as if he had a companion with him utterly untouched by the rage, the war” (253). He has separated himself from all passion, not wanting anything to obscure his rationalistic assessment. He reveals his heresy of doubt to Freemantle

when he pronounces that all the cold, hard facts are against them and that it will take a "bloody miracle" (267) for them to win the next day. His words open a door of revelation for himself:

...he began truly to understand what he had said. It surfaced, like something long sunken rising up out of black water. It opened up there in the dark of his mind....The truth kept coming....He had known all this for a long time but he had never said it....In his mind he could see Lee's beautiful face and suddenly it was not the same face....He did not want to think about it....Longstreet thought: you always know the truth; wait long enough and the mind will tell you.... (267-268)

Longstreet's truth is that he does not believe in miracles; he does not believe a miracle-maker exists. He does not believe that Lee's plan will succeed; and thus, Lee's attraction is gone, as Longstreet concludes that Lee, like an angel of death, will inflict on his own army a lethal blow. It is a blow from which Longstreet can see no recovery. He knows there will be no victory, "no matter how much [he] wish[es]...or trust[s] in God..." (307). This leaves Longstreet with no one in which to place faith, not his beloved commander, and not God. In Longstreet's mind, neither can be trusted, as both are terribly ready to kill.

Lee's Gettysburg battle plans reanimate all of Longstreet's doubts about the invasion of Northern soil. When the Confederate leadership evaluated strategies for the Spring of '63, Lee had convinced Jefferson and the other generals that invading Pennsylvania would disrupt Union forces and relieve beleaguered southern cities and food sources. "Longstreet as well came over to Lee's idea for an advance north, when he was assured they would try to find a suitable piece of ground to fight a defensive battle like Fredericksburg, in accordance with the defensive offense" (Knudsen 68). Now, instead of the safer course of a defensive battle, on ground of their choosing, Lee has reverted to his previously spectacular methods of speed and surprise attack, counting on the boldness of his men to beat the odds. Longstreet, on the other hand, has taken the measure of the odds and calculated them to be unbeatable: "He had never believed in this invasion....

He did not believe in offensive warfare when the enemy outnumbered you and outgunned you and would come looking for you anyway if you waited somewhere on your own ground. He had not argued since leaving home, but the invasion did not sit right in his craw" (Shaara 11). The flaws in Lee's plan glared at Longstreet, even so "he had not the power to convince" (134) others of what he knew would be a better course.

Longstreet did establish Fredericksburg as a way to win a defensive battle, and saw that the grand strategy should be the defensive offense, but he also understood the defense is undertaken to shape conditions favorably, so the initiative can be wrested from the enemy. Once in possession of the initiative, Longstreet believed, then came the opportunity to attack and set conditions for decisive victories.... (Knudsen 74)

Longstreet was convinced they were making a deadly mistake, and history would prove him right, but in this moment, he was dragged inexorably to the offensive by Lee. "There was a grandness in Lee that shadowed him, silenced him. You could not preach caution here" (Shaara 261). Longstreet's execution of Lee's plan results in a bloodbath and the massive casualties, sustained by the South at Gettysburg, bear witness to the nightmare of war, the frailty of human life, and the failure of their hapless invasion:

The facts rose up like shattered fenceposts in the mist. The army would not recover from this day. He was a professional and he knew that as a good doctor knows it, bending down for perhaps the last time over a doomed beloved patient. Longstreet did not know what he would do now. ...All that was left now was more dying. It was final defeat. They had all died and it had accomplished nothing, the wall was unbroken, the blue line was sound. (358)

Whether his was a self-fulfilling prophecy, or the result of his ability "to see the thing clearly," Longstreet's cause of victory dies a bloody death. His prognosis was accurate.

In his analysis of *The Killer Angels*, Grauke argues that Shaara does not do justice to the Southern Cause,

when he states: "As for the Confederacy, the novel paints both Lee and Longstreet as tragically heroic figures, but it does not allow them to fight for reasons they believe in" (68). Longstreet's cause is greater than victory. His cause is loyalty to loved ones, and this cause too is dealt a mortal blow by the futility he is forced to endure at Gettysburg, out of loyalty to Lee.

The failed invasion shows the fallibility of Lee's faith-based system, and with that comes the final blow of disillusionment. Longstreet must face the fact that he has failed himself. "Longstreet felt an extraordinary confusion. He had a moment without confidence, windblown and blasted, vacant as an exploded shell.... And then the moment passed and a small rage bloomed not at Lee but at Longstreet himself" (Shaara 261). Longstreet rages at himself for not being able to put a stop to what he sees as madness. He has "never been afraid to lose it all if necessary....The only fear was not of death, was not of the war, was of blind stupid human frailty, of blind proud foolishness that could lose it all" (209). He not only stood helplessly by as a victim of faith in a man and a Cause, but he also became the victimizer. He acted the part of executioner in implementing a plan he had no faith in, which cost an excruciatingly high price in human life. Even though Longstreet is known by all as a man of truth, he has played out a lie: "They must not know my doubts, they must not...I will send them all forward and say nothing, absolutely nothing, except what must be said" (311). He finds he cannot forgive Lee for making him an unwilling accomplice in this lie. His despair presses him to charge onto the field of battle in the hopes of being killed himself. His brokenness is complete. The answer to Longstreet's desire to end it all comes as though from the mouth of God, when Sorrel says: "It's no good trying to get yourself killed, General. The Lord will come for you in His own time" (356). The faith he has denied rings hollowly through the air at his most hopeless moment.

Longstreet has rejected God but not found a satisfactory substitute. He has experienced, in personal and professional arenas, the truth that life offers no guarantees, even for those who can see danger clearly. He has seen the fervent passion of a "killer angel" in Lee, his faith-based commander, driving his men to a destination of destruction. This "holy focus" said that the men could

do the impossible if they just had enough faith. Mown down by the facts, which Longstreet had clearly foreseen, his cause of victory, and more importantly, the South's Cause, of loyalty to one another, was the final casualty. Along this momentous path, Longstreet suffered a loss of respect for himself, a crushed hope for the South, and a broken faith in Lee.

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Evaluation: *History gives us General James Longstreet of the Confederate Army. Michael Shaara's novel The Killer Angels gives us a fictionalized version of General Longstreet. Teegan Fiedler gives us a humanistic portrait of General Longstreet, whose loss of faith in himself is felt by hearts on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line.*



## Mentally Trapped: A Gender Studies Comparison of Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Faulkner's "Dry September"

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Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Kris Piepenburg

Assignment: *Each student was to write a literary research paper incorporating effective use of at least seven secondary sources, comparing two short works of fiction and using a clearly defined critical approach in reading and analysis (ie, gender studies, in this case).*

"The Yellow Wallpaper," by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, is the story of a woman who feels trapped by the "rest cure" that her husband believes will cure her nervous condition that has occurred as a result of her postpartum depression. Her husband, John, is trying to be very loving and to take care of her, but in doing so, he becomes controlling of her and treats her as a child. Her husband rents a house for them to stay in while she rests, but she finds the house strange, with the bed nailed to the floor and bars over the bedroom windows. However, the thing that distresses her most is the yellow wallpaper, which has an odd pattern that plays tricks on her already weak mind. She imagines that within the wallpaper, there is a woman who is trapped behind bars. At the end of the story, Jane rips off the wallpaper, and the reader comes to find that Jane believes the trapped woman is really her, and that she has freed herself by ripping off the wallpaper on her own. The story "Dry September," by William Faulkner, is about the response a town has when Minnie Cooper, an unmarried woman of thirty-eight or thirty-nine years of age, claims she has been raped by a black man. The town already knows her to be unreliable and does not completely believe her claim, but the men take action anyway. As critic Brian Sutton suggests, "...the men act in subconscious defense of an unstated, outmoded, but overwhelming myth.

Within that myth, white women not inhabiting a brothel embody refinement and purity" (par. 7). Minnie is seen as a defenseless white woman, and the men see that as reason enough for them to kill a black man. Minnie is generally very lazy in her day-to-day life, but the drama surrounding her lie about being raped stirs things up and brings her back attention that she had lost. However, her lie does not cure the loneliness that she feels. Between seeing other happy couples in town after the murder, and knowing that she is responsible for a murder, she is driven to insanity. "The Yellow Wallpaper" is an emotional and psychological story that gives the reader a look at the mind of a woman who is trying to overcome depression, while feeling oppressed and secluded, while "Dry September" is a distressing story that shows how an older unmarried woman is regarded in that society, and the effects that the Southern society's treatment has on her. In "The Yellow Wallpaper," Jane is a mentally unstable woman who is isolated and feels she is not allowed the stimulation that she needs to get better. Minnie Cooper is a lonely person who uses the image of being a defenseless woman to regain attention. In both stories, the main characters are driven to insanity because of their conditions and the expectations that are placed on them as women, and also in the way they are eventually incapable of handling the thoughts that most disturb them. Overall, with respect to conditions for and definitions of women, it seems "The Yellow Wallpaper" shows that women are subject to the control of men, and "Dry September" shows that women are encouraged by society to act helpless, whether they have a man supporting them or not.

The women in both of these stories have been subjected to having the way they behave greatly influenced by either the presence or the absence of men in their lives. They are expected to be in control, yet controllable. In "The Yellow Wallpaper," Jane's husband, who also acts as her doctor, tells her how she should conduct her daily life and even how to control her mind. Women are shown as needing to have control of themselves but needing the direction of a man to lead them. Her husband does see that it is up to her own self-control for her to get well when he speaks to her about her condition. Jane confirms, "He says no one but myself can help me out of it, that I must use my will and self-control and not let any silly fancies run away with me" (Gilman 923). Yet, this is only after he makes

her feel guilty about what her condition is doing to him. Jane says, "He said I was his darling and his comfort and all he had, and that I must take care of myself for his sake, and keep well" (Gilman 923). Her behavior is expected to line up with what makes her husband most comfortable. Another character who has these expectations placed on her, who is not mentioned quite as much, but who still makes a great impact in "Dry September," is the wife of one of the vigilantes, John McLendon, who is involved in the murder of the black man who Minnie Cooper has accused of rape. This woman is subjected to domestic abuse. When John finally comes in late at night, after the murder, he scolds her and bellows, "Haven't I told you about sitting up like this, waiting to see when I come in?" (Faulkner 345). She cares about her husband and is worried about him, but all he cares about is that she is not obeying what he has told her to do. It is clear that she fears her husband yet worries about him. When her husband finally comes home, the narrator describes her face as "...pale, strained and weary-looking" (Faulkner 345). John does not act as a leader for his wife; instead, he places orders on her that he expects to be followed. Sutton notes, "...the story's closing paragraphs imply that McLendon is compulsively violent, with his violence inextricably mixed with his views of sex and sex roles" (par. 6). It is common for John to come in late, but his wife is expected to be in bed already. The expectations of a wife to be obedient to her husband in the 1900s were evident in the culture.

Women's capabilities and intelligence were often underestimated in these stories. Jane feels that her husband is not being truthful in his concern for her. She senses that John thinks that she is ignorant. She thinks John is obviously putting on an act for her and that he thinks she is not smart enough to figure him out. She says, "He asked me all sorts of questions too, and pretended to be very loving and kind" (Gilman 928). Her response to his actions is, "As if I couldn't see through him!" (Gilman 928). John speaks to his wife in a way that could be interpreted as him comparing her to a child by saying, "What is it, little girl?" He also tells her at this point, "Don't go walking about like that — you'll get cold" (Gilman 924). However, John makes this statement in a very loving way, not in a way that seems to indicate

someone trying to be controlling. "Little girl," is used as a term of endearment here, but some may say that the term degrades the woman. Hudock says, "John's solicitous 'care' shows that he believes the prevailing scientific theories which claim that women's innate inferiority leaves them childlike, in a state of infantile dependence" (par. 8). Women are seen as the weaker sex, and the term "little girl" shows that in this situation the woman is seen as being frail and perhaps innocent or even naïve. She seems to find that this endearment is another one of his remarks that only shows that he does not think much of her intelligence. Jane's opinions do not seem to matter as much as her husband's. Her husband makes the decisions, indicating that she is believed to be incapable of responsible thought. Johnson adds, "Likewise the central symbol of the story ironically equates her crisis with an item of feminine frippery—mere wallpaper—that is far beneath serious male consideration" (par. 16). What she considers to be significant is not regarded as important. In "Dry September," Minnie Cooper is not seen as capable of providing for herself because she does not have a husband as her provider. A young clerk provides her with whiskey at a time when she was depressed and lonely. The clerk does not think she has much to live for. He says, "Sure; I buy it for the old gal. I reckon she's entitled to a little fun" (Faulkner 341). She is just a lonely woman in the eyes of her town. The women in the town are seen as needing their fathers or husbands to provide for them. Their ability to provide for themselves has been greatly restricted. How much women in the 1900s were able to do was dictated by the fact that men did not believe women were intelligent or strong enough to do things for themselves. These women were undervalued and seen as less capable than men.

The women in both of these stories exhibit active imaginations. Virginia Woolf believes women "...need to be accepted for what they are: creative, independent, thinking creatures" (qtd. in Korb, par. 10). Jane's husband tries to suppress these qualities in her. She is told by John that she needs to give up on her writing because it encourages her imagination. Shumaker believes, "... he is both fearful and contemptuous of her imaginative and artistic powers, largely because he fails to understand them or the view of the world they lead her to" (591). This

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statement may be very true. John's way of thinking does not include any room for imagination. His mind is very practical, possibly making him uncomfortable with his wife's creativity because it is so foreign to him. Women and men may view the world very differently as a result of these discrepancies. When Jane is describing what she thinks of the house they are staying in and the things that she imagines about it, she says of her husband:

He says that with my imaginative power and habit of story-making, a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies, and that I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency. So I try. (Gilman 920-21)

She is convinced that her husband must be right. She claims to try to keep restraints on her imagination, but she still chooses to continue feeding her imaginative thoughts by writing in secret. She tries to express herself in a secretive manner because that is the only way she can let out the emotions that are inside of her, since she is not allowed to express them in any form that she finds helpful. Schumaker states:

At some level, we see, she understands what has rendered her so thoroughly powerless and confused, yet she is so completely trapped in her role that she can express that knowledge only indirectly in a way that hides it from her conscious mind. (597)

The ideas that she has of herself are often dictated by the fact that her mind will not allow her to entirely realize the image she has constructed because of the position into which she has been placed. As a writer, she feels that her imagination is a powerful tool and a way for her to escape the reality of her life in which she feels trapped. Her imagination also leads her to find many images in the wallpaper that disturb her. Johnson maintains:

Her blank childhood walls have become inscribed with what represents, essentially, an unchosen fate demonically opposed to her childlike imaginative freedom; simply put, this fate is her psychological confinement and torture as a woman desiring creative autonomy in nineteenth-century America. (par. 14)

Women at the time were very restricted in how much they were allowed to express themselves. She feels like her position has been decided for her, and a part of her is longing to break out of it.

Minnie Cooper also indulges herself in her imagination. According to one article, "...Minnie Cooper lived vicariously through the movies, an obvious escape from an unfulfilled life" (Andrews, par. 21). Her indulgences in going to the movie, which pull her into her breakdown, make it clear that she allows herself to get emotionally connected to her imaginings. The way she sees the scene of the theater is described as, "...the lights flicked away; the screen glowed silver, and soon life began to unfold, beautiful and passionate and sad" (Faulkner 344). The movies, to Minnie, are what life really is. It is not only Minnie who lives this way, though. It seems the other women of the town wish to live vicariously through Minnie. As they are getting ready to go out to the movie, they try to get details out of her about her rumored sexual assault. In doing so, they also break the idea of women being innocent and naïve. Andrews says, "Faulkner subverts the myth of 'pure' white womanhood through their barely disguised sexual arousal at Minnie's imaginary ravishment" (par. 22). It is clear that in their imaginative thoughts they are not quite what the men believe them to be.

The power that men had to control women was evident, and the men in these stories took advantage of that power. In "The Yellow Wallpaper" Jane states, "I have a schedule prescription for each hour in the day; he takes all care from me, and so I feel basely ungrateful not to value it more" (Gilman 919). Her husband believes himself to be her caretaker and gets a bit extreme in this idea. Jane recognizes that her husband is simply trying to be a good husband and provider for her, but something about the way he controls every little aspect of her life leads her to feel less appreciative than she thinks she should. According to Gilman's ideas, women are generally seen as needing to be protected. We see that Jane's husband is now even controlling her social life when she says, "When I get really well, John says we will ask Cousin Henry and Julia down for a long visit; but he says he would as soon put fireworks in my pillow-case as to let me have those stimulating people about now" (Gilman

921). He will not allow her to see these people until he decides she is ready. However, this restriction may be in relation to when he feels ready for her to be better. There is an undertone of resentment from Jane, but she tries to make it sound as if she is being very understanding of the treatment he is putting her through and the care he is showing her. It is expected that she will follow what he says to do because he is her doctor, husband, and provider. Her husband believes that she is too weak to endure the stimulation of having people around. She believes that it would make her better to be more active and social; yet she goes along with his theory. Hudock reflects, "Because they hold unequal power positions in the relationship and in society, she lacks the courage and self-esteem to assert her will over his even though she knows that his 'treatment' is harming her" (par. 10). Her resentment becomes increasingly evident as the story progresses and she notes, "John is so queer now, that I don't want to irritate him. I wish he would take another room! Besides, I don't want anybody to get that woman out at night but myself" (Gilman 927). Women are seen as being trapped by the men that supposedly control them. She is afraid to bother her husband, showing that she feels somehow inferior in her position. She also wants to be the one who lets the woman in the wallpaper, which turns out to be her, out. According to her husband, she needs someone directing her at all times, but she feels that she is capable of caring for herself. Her husband acts strangely around her, which may indicate that he has noticed that she is not so dependent upon him anymore because her independence allows her to see that she needs to let herself out of her own disturbed state of mind.

In "Dry September," the women are not always controlled in such a direct way, but they are more subtly controlled in their options. Their days are spent quite idly because their options are limited. The narrator tells us, when the women shop during the day, "They would handle the goods and haggle over the prices in cold immediate voices, without any intention of buying" (Faulkner 340). They were out to be seen and to have something to do. They do not work, so they may not have money to buy what they want. Their husbands or fathers may control the money, leaving them dependent on the male figures in their lives for financial support. The women of this

story led lives in which they did not achieve much, nor were they expected to. Also, the men found a way to control the women through the way they protected them. The way they chose to deal with Minnie's assumed attacker, revealed that they were trying to "...restrict white women's behavior, although it is rationalized as a defense of white womanhood" (Andrews, par. 8). The men in this story use violence to maintain their position of power, which becomes evident in their way of controlling women. Control also comes in the form of protection as Sutton asserts:

Even a rumor from an unknown source, claiming that a black person, possibly a man, might have done something, possibly something sexual, to a white woman, demands in the myth's code of behavior swift, extreme vengeance as a protective reaction. Facts are irrelevant because the men assume that they must maintain a constant atmosphere of terror to protect their women from the lust of black men. (par. 7)

The protection they provide seems to be more of a protection of their own masculine image, than a protection of the women.

It was not simply the men in these women's lives that controlled them and placed expectations on them; it was also the expectations society placed on them in relation to their marital statuses. It seems that Jane's normal expectation of how women should be treated within a marriage, in "The Yellow Wallpaper," is dictated by society's influence. She says, "John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage," (Gilman 918) indicating that this is a social norm. The wife in a relationship should expect to be laughed at and not taken very seriously. The character readily accepts this response because that is what she is used to and she does not expect much more. The ideas about women commonly held by society at the time dictated her husband's beliefs, which became evident in the way he treated her. Korb feels Jane is "...a woman forced to succumb to the Rest Cure and thus, to her inflexible position in society as a prisoner of the domestic sphere" (par. 2). When the men of the town are speaking of Minnie in "Dry September," one of the men infers, "I don't believe anybody did anything. I don't

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believe anything happened. I leave it to you fellows if them ladies that get old without getting married don't have notions that man can't—" (Faulkner 338). Unmarried women were seen as lacking purpose and being unreliable. It seems they feel she does not have anything better to do than to make up stories. In her case, that is partially true; however, she did not lie just because she was bored, she was also seeking attention. She wanted to be desirable again and not have people always pitying her. When people spoke of her, they would say, "'Poor Minnie.' 'But she is old enough to take care of herself'" (Faulkner 341) because she did not have a man to support her and she was alone, but when she finally had a man, when she was about twenty-eight, they questioned the relationship. She was such a rarity, as an older unmarried woman, that she was a popular topic of conversation around the town. She had gotten so far past the normal age of having a husband that people who normally would have said she needed a man, began to say that she was capable of caring for herself. Yet, they were only inclined to say this because they did not approve of the man she was seeing and the type of relationship they believed they had. Rogalus calls Minnie, "...desperate and very dangerous" (par. 6). This statement seems to be true. Her desperation to no longer be called "Poor Minnie" drives her to her lie, which eventually led to an innocent man's murder. Women are constantly expected to meet some sort of social standard.

Although both of the main characters of these stories were dictated in some way by the expectations placed on them because of their gender, the outcomes of their situations differed. These women felt mentally trapped by their circumstances and the expectations placed on them. Jane is married, but finds the control that her husband has over her life is too much for her to handle. Minnie lacks that marital relationship, but feels lonely and empty without it. In "The Yellow Wallpaper," Jane feels that if only she could express herself and be freed of her husband's control, then her mental state would also improve. At the end of the story, her husband finds her in her room with the wallpaper torn down and she responds, "I've got out at last in spite of you and Jane. And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!" (Gilman 929). The woman she frees from the wallpaper symbolizes that she feels she has taken ahold of her own situation, and

now the power has been transferred, but it also seems that she has lost her mind, which makes the outcome more uncertain. She may really have obtained the freedom she was seeking, or she may simply be even more trapped in her insanity, while feeling a moment of freedom. It is Johnson's opinion that Jane's breakdown at the end of the story is "...a prelude to psychic regeneration and artistic redemption" (par. 4). This analysis makes the assumption that her moment of mental insanity was simply a step in her process toward recovery and self-actualization. Johnson also concludes in regards to the ending:

As we witness the narrator in the final scene, creeping along the floor, we might recall once again that her bedroom is actually a nursery. The fact that she is crawling on all fours— as opposed to lying still and docile under her husband's "rest cure"— suggests not only temporary derangement but also a frantic, insistent growth into a new stage of being. From the helpless infant, supine on her immovable bed, she has become a crawling, "creeping" child, insistent upon her own needs and explorations. (par. 18)

In "Dry September," Minnie Cooper's ending is not quite as liberating. The response of the town toward her has changed:

She walked slower and slower, as children eat ice cream, her head up and her eyes bright in the haggard banner of her face, passing the hotel and the coatless drummers in chairs along the curb looking around at her: "That's the one; see? The one in pink in the middle." (Faulkner 344)

Now that people had heard the rumor that she had been raped, the men were again interested in her. It may have given them the idea that she was desirable, or they found that they were drawn to protect her, now that she seemed even more helpless. Over the time she had been alone, people had seen her as growing to be capable of caring for herself, but now she seemed like less of a strong woman, and she fit more into the category of a woman who was weaker and needed defending. Although she was successful at gaining attention, it weighed greatly on

her mind and she was still unhappy. She is led to insanity by the constant reminders of her loneliness. She is driven to a mental breakdown while she is out with some of the other women at a movie theater. Rogalus says, "Faulkner is using the theater to objectify the world of the beautiful unreal, which is oblivious to the world of the real and the suffering. Faulkner describes the depictions of the colored lithographs in the theater as 'life caught in its terrible and beautiful mutations'" (par. 7). In the theater, Minnie feels irritated by the sight of happy couples and people in love because she is still alone. She must also have lurking feelings of guilt over her part in an innocent man's murder. When all of these stresses on her mind culminate, she can no longer hold herself together. She begins laughing hysterically, and when she is removed from the theater, she begins sobbing. The connection between her breakdown and the setting seems to indicate "...she subconsciously recognizes the illusory quality of her triumph and its horrible cost" (Andrews, par. 26). Her breakdown led to even more social attention because even the women could see that perhaps her story had been a lie. They speak of her saying, "Do you suppose anything really happened?" (Faulkner 345). Minnie had wished to gain the attention of men so that people would not say "Poor Minnie" (Faulkner 341) anymore because she was alone, but they still did when she had what appeared to be a nervous breakdown. The girls attend to her and say, "Shhhhhhhhhh! Poor girl! Poor Minnie!" (Faulkner 345).

The way these women conducted themselves was affected by the definitions placed upon them by the social expectations of the time. They did not fit the standards of how women should behave. Therefore, they were generally unaccepted and people tried to make them conform to their standards. Each woman had her own mental trials that she had to break through on her own, but the social expectations of them as women, as well as the presence or absence of a husband, affected the paths they were able to follow.

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Evaluation: *This is a first-rate gender studies comparison of these two stories. It is a well-organized and revealing paper, especially perceptive in its reading of the tragic female of William Faulkner's "Dry September."*

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## Perceptive Perceptions: Toni Morrison's "Recitatif"

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Mike Franzen

Course: Literature 222  
(American Literature—  
the Civil War to Present)

Instructor: Richard Middleton-Kaplan

Assignment: *Discuss whether and how you can tell which character is black and which is white in Toni Morrison's "Recitatif."*

I was certain that Twyla was white and Roberta was black when I first read "Recitatif" by Toni Morrison. She set it up so perfectly that they must be. She had made it abundantly clear that one had to be black and the other white. She had said that herself when describing her only published short story. So many clues were dropped that supported my logic, even if it wasn't logic at all. Logic itself couldn't help me, I'm afraid. Let me explain what I learned from this story that I hadn't known before, but what seems to be a recurring theme in just about every type of social structure I have come into contact with: assumptions toward something we don't understand (or pretend to)—in this case, the racial stereotypes that seem to define a race, whether they are true or not—rule our social networks.

You see, when I returned to class to discuss this particular short story, I came in with all the material read, a big smirk on my face, and the notion that I knew what had happened in this story when others may have been confused. Twyla was white, even when it was never said. Roberta was black, although it was never mentioned. It was obvious. The clues were there. Morrison *says* Roberta's people "never washed their hair and they smelled funny" (Morrison 2685), a common white idea towards black people during the time this story seemed to begin (it was published in 1983, which indicates, due to the realistic approach to the story, that it was either sometime before then, or at that time). Roberta's mother is a bigger woman who is an avid churchgoer, with her Bible and cross and her Sunday dress. I imagined she even sang and hummed like I've seen in the African American churches. Roberta's mother had even brought chicken legs with when their parents came to visit and had lunch. That's a comedian's favorite joke, for Christ's sake. *Twyla's* mother had been enraged, when Roberta's mother rejected her hand, to the point where she had to exclaim, "That bitch!" (2688). It was so severely spoken that an old hatred of the white people towards the blacks seemed to rear its ugly head in the words of Twyla's mother. Also, when Roberta made a later appearance at the diner, her hair was "so big and wild [Twyla] could hardly see her face" (2689), which added to the earlier caption of their hair as never being washed, a real mess, if you will. Roberta had been furious at Twyla, as well, when it came to light that Twyla may

have kicked Maggie (a girl from the orphanage the two women befriended each other at), and Maggie may have been black, something all too common back in the 1960s and 1970s that would have offended a black person. It came to light that neither of them was sure if Maggie was black, nor if they had kicked her, but the anger displayed by Roberta remained. The signs were there. My logic held true. Twyla was white and Roberta was black. It was obvious.

Around the same time we began discussing the story, one of the students towards the front of the room believed that Twyla was black and Roberta was white. I tried not to laugh. The teacher then asked whether Twyla was black or Roberta was black, seeing the many puzzled faces before him. No one seemed to have an opinion anymore. I couldn't understand why. Wasn't it clear? Weren't the signs all pointing towards the right direction? Why did that student say Twyla was black when it was obvious she was white?

Toni Morrison had said it was essential that one of these characters be white and the other be black. It just occurred to me then she had never said which one.

Now, I am a white, twenty-year-old male who has lived in the northwest suburbs of Chicago all of my life. Both my parents are not prejudiced. They have never uttered a racist word in front of me to my knowledge. I am the same way. I consider myself a highly tolerant individual who won't care about what color someone's skin is, what gender they are, if they like men or women, what religion they follow, what have you. But when presented with "Recitatif," my immediate assumption was to follow what I may believe I know, albeit that's what most readers do, and I am no different on the surface. Even so, I am aware that most stereotypes I know in today's world are untrue, whether they're about me or about someone else. However, in reading this story, somehow I fell right into the stereotypes. Read any of the following details about Roberta that I listed earlier, and I'm sure you'll agree. Some might even go as far to call me a racist. But let's face it. A stereotype most people hear often enough in their lives is that black people like chicken. I know this isn't 100% true, but when presented with Roberta and her mother enjoying a chicken leg, I assume, much as how I imagine Morrison wanted for me to do. As I said, the clues are there.

But who's to say a white woman has never enjoyed a piece of chicken. Toni Morrison even says, "The wrong food is always with the wrong people" (2689). Or who's to say that because someone doesn't wash their hair or smells bad they need to be of a certain race? There are plenty of individuals of all shades who need a shower. It's a degrading stereotype, something Morrison seemed to want to bring attention to, and clearly she did. She made me believe it—something I always thought was ludicrous. Similarly, why can't a white woman have big hair, a black woman be offended by a white woman's comment, a white woman be an avid churchgoer (I know plenty), and why couldn't a black woman ever kick or hurt another black woman? I had to make sure I really wasn't that asinine, so I read the story again. It brought me back to a few shortcomings I may have missed earlier on. To start with, why "Twyla" and "Roberta," two suspicious names that indicate nothing and everything at the same time? From my experience (dare I dig myself into a deeper hole), I have never met a black woman named Roberta, nor have I met a white woman named Twyla, and vice versa. So how do I assume, from the start, who is who before the story is even underway? It was the stereotypes I knew, whether they were true or not, and I used them to make sense of the story, almost like a trap, and much what I expect is just what Morrison intended for her readers to do.

There were a few others. Jimi Hendrix was a more popular success with white people before he was with black people, at first. So if Roberta was indeed black, wouldn't Twyla be aware of Hendrix if I was correct in saying Twyla is white? Or is this just another stereotype? And why is it completely unclear as to who is which race when Twyla and Roberta start to picket against one another? This scene utterly confused me, because I could not distinguish race anymore between the two women. Both were protesters, neither white nor black. I had to hold tough to my stereotypes here to assume Roberta was still black.

But why should any of this matter? If there's anything I've tried to keep as a value, it's that words, including names such as Twyla and Roberta, are just words. They can have any meaning they want—it's just how the interpreter perceives them. I perceived Twyla as white and Roberta as black. It wasn't necessarily



right, but it was just a perception, how I saw things with the words presented to me. That's basically the broad meaning of a stereotype, is it not? A perception of a group of people based on a common social or physical element many within that group seem to encompass? They can be right, certainly—for example, I do enjoy mayonnaise on my sandwich—but they aren't always correct.

Toni Morrison tries to show the dangers of stereotypes in "Recitatif." She wants us to make the assumptions before the story is even over, before we even have a chance to examine the facts: that there was no issue of race. Yes, it's true; the stereotypes take over before the real message even begins. The entire story generates itself on the issue of race (mostly because we assume it is going to *be* about race) but underneath it all, we always forget the innocents that were harmed in the fight, the Maggies: the ones who are abused and can't defend themselves and can't tell another person of their troubles. And yet, she is forgotten because Twyla and Roberta are too concerned remembering whether she was black or not. They had forgotten she was a person, even if only for a short time, and wrapped themselves in the color of her skin, an issue that should have been of no concern. They should have helped Maggie and they didn't, because they each decided to *assume* she was another race and fight to defend their position, rather than help an innocent person. It's an extremely common and realistic theme that has been witnessed in the world time and time again, and Toni Morrison tries—and in my opinion succeeds—to show us what the issues of race and profiling can do in the long run to a friendship and to innocents who are harmed. And it is displayed best through the bonds of two girls of different races who grew up together as friends and then broke apart over a matter of skin color. But before you judge Twyla and Roberta or make your own assumptions, realize that, just maybe, you had also forgotten about Maggie, too.

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Evaluation: *This essay goes beyond merely illuminating Morrison's story to illuminating the nature of the reading process. With disarming openness and honesty about his own evolving response to the story, Mike takes his readers on a gripping journey of what he has discovered about the text—and about himself through the text—thereby paving the same pathway for his readers.*

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## Apollo, Dionysus, and *A Raisin in the Sun*

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John Fritzel

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Janelle Brown

Assignment: Write a research paper, eight to ten pages long, using at least five secondary sources in your paper.

*A Raisin in the Sun* is a play about overcoming obstacles. Even the play itself managed to break boundaries by becoming the first ever to be both written by an African-American and produced on Broadway (Steyn 1). Lorraine Hansberry was able to accomplish this feat by writing an artistic piece that beams with emotion and confronts profound problems. However, there is still one more obstacle that must be overcome. I will begin with a simple premise: art is strongest and most moving when viewers may form a connection with it, understanding the piece and its reason for creation. The issue that I raise is philosophical in nature, and a symbolic representation could be shown by using the Apollonian and Dionysian literary figures to contest that, in *A Raisin in the Sun*, while the Dionysian element is present (the audience is intoxicated with emotional appeals), an Apollonian element of objectivity is missing, preventing the play from reaching its full artistic potential. Without being informed about the historical and cultural happenings during the era in which *A Raisin in the Sun* was written, it is unlikely an audience will be able to comprehend the author's true intentions.

*A Raisin in the Sun* tells the story of the Youngers: a working-class, African-American family living in a cramped apartment on the South Side of Chicago. The play predominantly focuses on the family's struggles to obtain their individual dreams while dealing with racism and personal dilemmas. Taking place in the 1950s, *A Raisin in the Sun* captures all too well the severity of African-American suffering.

*A Raisin in the Sun* is often required reading in high school and college-level English courses, though by itself, it fails to provide students (or for that matter, an audience), with an adequate amount of information that is needed to comprehend the culture and history of the 1950s and 1960s. Classroom discussions that revolve around symbols like Beneatha's hair or Mama's plant can entice some students into becoming interested in the play, and thus explore the cultural history of 1950s and 1960s, but this event seems unlikely. Catherine Kodat described her story of teaching American Literature in the 1990s at a "private, historically white, liberal arts college in the Northeast" (1). While discussing a pivotal moment in the play, when Walter stands up to Lindner and proclaims the pride of his family

and their intolerance of racism, she observed her students' reactions. The students contended that Walter was a fool for not taking the money, unintentionally representing a view that "economic security is far more important than racial justice" (Kodat 161). The reason that her students were provoked to make such claims, Kodat noted, is more of a misunderstanding than a modern-day moral crisis. "My students were deeply moved by the heroism of those involved in the [civil rights] movement and just as deeply repelled by the violent efforts to maintain the South's racist status quo" (Kodat 154). Kodat noted that the contrast between the "rabid nature of 1950s and 1960s U.S. racism" and the "subtle, some might say, invisible, nature of 1990s U.S. racism" led students to believe that their position that Walter should have "put on a show for the man" and "taken Lindner's money" was non-racist (Kodat 155). The reason Walter Lee did not take the money seems to be evident in the very lines of the play. "He finally come into his manhood today, didn't he? Kind of like a rainbow after the rain . . ." (1354). A decision to take the money would be to succumb to racist forces—by not doing so, Walter, clearly the protagonist, has come into his manhood.

Although the classroom had a specific subculture, demographic issues are not entirely at work here, as an English classroom is not the only place where such misunderstandings occur. Recent presentations of *A Raisin in the Sun* have popularized the play, but are misinforming and desensitizing audiences to the severity and profundity of the issues it addresses. Sean Combs, better known as "P. Diddy," has recently taken the role of Walter Lee in a revival of *A Raisin in the Sun* on Broadway. During an important moment in the play, when Ruth tells her mother-in-law she is pregnant, and reveals with a wordless, "hysteria" (1310) that she has thoughts of aborting the child, the audience "applauded and cheered" (Steyn 34). The fact that the crowd is reacting to the play is spectacular, but unfortunately, they are not reacting as Lorraine Hansberry intended. As Mark Steyn notes, "Her dream has been deferred so often she's tired of hoping. Better to get rid of her child now than to bring him into the world to be yet another shriveled raisin in the sun" (34). Regardless of whether or not abortion is moral, the audience failed to recognize

the desperate and hopeless situation Hansberry was trying to convey. When Mama proclaims to Walter, "When the world gets ugly enough—a woman will do anything for her family" (1316), it becomes clear that the dilemma Ruth faces does not have a preferable outcome. As the show went on, the confusion in the audience continued. During perhaps the most shocking moment in the play, when Walter discovers the money he intended to invest for a liquor licence was stolen by Willy, the crowd erupted once again. This time, however, the crowd was laughing. When Walter screams, "THAT MONEY IS MADE OUT OF MY FATHER'S FLESH" (1344) it is meant to convey misery, but instead the audience "responded by laughing. Not everyone cracked up, but enough did to be audible" (Steyn 34). As Mark Steyn notes, "The moral questions that so exercise the Younger family seem to be all but beyond comprehension" (34). The misunderstanding of important moral lessons examined in *A Raisin in the Sun* is one beyond age, race, and even gender. "The authentic black man of 2004 is so estranged from the authentic black man of 1954 he's meant to be playing he might as well be doing it in burnt cork" (Steyn 34). This confusion, however, need not occur. An audience can easily be informed about the characteristics of African-American life in the 1950's and 1960's, and by being informed will be better able to grasp the play.

An explanation of the driving forces behind Hansberry's creation of *A Raisin in the Sun* would be incomplete without mentioning the Robert Taylor homes. As Hunt Bradford explains, "The Robert Taylor Homes are located firmly within the boundaries of Chicago's pre-1950 South Side 'black belt' ghetto where African Americans since the turn of the century [have] been confined by residential segregation" (1). The situation that Miss Johnson hypothesized in *A Raisin in the Sun* when she said, "NEGROES INVADE—CLYBOURNE PARK BOMBED!" (1330), was a very possible reality during this time, as "hysterical anti-integration mobs of up to 10,000 whites faced down the National Guard in city streets, and some black families required police escorts of 1,000 or more on moving day into all-white blocks or housing projects" (Gordon 123). Only three years after the Taylor Homes opened, *The Chicago Daily News* shocked readers by running a six-part series that

described horrifying conditions (Bradford 1). The article shared the stories of residents who struggled daily with “broken elevators, erratic heat, excessive vandalism, and unsettling violence” (Bradford 1). The architects who created such homes did so using untested design theories, which created “dysfunctional [and] hideous high-rises” (Bradford 1). The Robert Taylor homes became a symbolic center of failure in Chicago public housing, making Chicago’s South Side the most “densely crowded ghetto in the US” (Gordon 123). An African-American family struggling to find a home in a safe neighborhood was a common occurrence in the 1960s. “While a white family could rent a five-room apartment for \$60 a month in Cicero, for example, a black South Side family of four could pay \$56 per month to live in one half of a two-room flat, infested with rats and roaches, and even well into the 1960s, without electricity or hot water” (Gordon 125). These unfair conditions are hinted at in *A Raisin in the Sun* when Mama discusses with Ruth and Walter why she picked a house in Clybourne Park. Ruth questions Mama’s decision, telling her that there “ain’t no colored people living in Clybourne Park” (1326), and Mama responds by saying, “Them houses they put up for colored in them areas way out all seem to cost twice as much as other houses” (1326). In the era *A Raisin in the Sun* was written, African-Americans were trapped in exploitative cities, unable to move because of the way others would handle their presence.

The modern-day economic situation in the United States needs to be extrapolated to audiences, as class systems have become even more pronounced. The discrimination against African Americans continues to this day. In the year 2000, the median net worth of the average black household was only \$7,500 dollars—compare this to the median net worth of the average white household, which is \$79,400 (Domhoff Figure 3). Excluding home equity, the median net worth of black families drops to a staggering \$1,166 dollars, while the average white family earns \$22,566 (Domhoff Figure 3). Prejudice that stems from the leftovers of a historically segregated past is visible in modern times. In the year 2000, the “top 15% of income earners receive[d] 20% of all income” (Domhoff Table 6). Lorraine Hansberry’s view that “the world is political and that political power,

in one form or another, will be the ultimate key to the liberation of American Negroes and, indeed, black folk throughout the world” was never more verifiable than it is today. In 2003, the Department of Justice found that over 9% of all black males aged 26 to 29 were incarcerated, compared to 2.6% of Hispanics and 1.1% of whites (Elsner 1). These issues are not solvable over night, as Leonard Hubert explains, “If you look at the magnitude of [these] issues, we would need hundreds of millions of dollars more just to begin addressing them” (Elsner 1). The blunt reality of these statistics would force an audience, or a classroom, to become more aware of the limitations society places on African-American citizens at birth, as well as the current economic status of the United States. By connecting the play to modern times, a rebirth of its significance will occur. When *A Raisin in the Sun* was first written, Lorraine Hansberry brought “local, individual struggles of African-Americans—against segregation, ghettoization, and capitalist exploitation—to the national stage” (Gordon 121). If *A Raisin in the Sun* is to bring the individual struggles of African-Americans to the national stage again, these objective statistics must be shown to the audience.

An audience needs to be informed about Lorraine Hansberry’s unique philosophy if they are to fully embrace *A Raisin in the Sun*. Hansberry believed that art possessed a spiritual and intellectual “energy that can change things” (Gordon 123). *A Raisin in the Sun* was centered around the Youngers’ dream to move into a white neighborhood because Hansberry believed that “residential segregation, and the violence that undergird[s] it, provide[s] the backbone for racial inequality in the urban North” (Gordon 123). An important philosophical concept that an audience must understand before viewing *A Raisin in the Sun* is Hansberry’s “genuine realism.” Hansberry summarized “genuine realism” as a belief in “not only what is, but also what is possible . . . because that is part of reality too. So you get a much larger potential of what man can do” (Hansberry 228). Her philosophical notion is similar to imperative idealism: the belief that an ideal situation is not simply a naive wish if its acquisition is crucial (Gordon 122). Hansberry incorporates her philosophical notion into the play through Asagai. “It is very odd but those who see the changes—who dream,

who will not give up—are called idealists . . . and those who see only the circle—we call them realists” (1346). Hansberry chose a working-class family, rather than a middle-class family, to represent her concepts because she believed “the world’s coming freedom movements would emerge most forcefully from its laboring classes” (Gordon 125). Because of this, her play has been seen as one that shines light on both class concerns and the social construction of segregation (Gordon 125).

An audience cannot be expected to grasp the moral issues Hansberry raised if they cannot understand the culture for which they were created. When *A Raisin in the Sun* was first released, it was praised because the audience understood the culture in which it was created—after all, they were part of it! If *A Raisin in the Sun* is ever to evoke such reactions in a large audience again, Apollonian elements must be incorporated into its appearance. This is not to say that Hansberry’s play must be modified; rather, it is the audience’s foreknowledge that is in need of modification. It must become a common occurrence to provide an audience, or a classroom, with historical, as well as modern information that pertains to the issues *A Raisin in the Sun* addresses.

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Evaluation: *We spent a great deal of time in class discussing the historical context of A Raisin in the Sun, and John understood the importance of context. This paper goes beyond the assignment. John argues that this play can become relevant again by reminding modern white audiences of the Black struggle.*

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## A Tale of Two Women

Dan Gallup

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Barbara Butler

Assignment: *Write a literary research paper, incorporating eight or more secondary sources into your analysis.*

Women and gardens have been a favorite literary allegory stretching all the way from Genesis to the Cretan fertility goddesses and the 20<sup>th</sup> works like *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*. They are also present in John Steinbeck's two short stories "The Chrysanthemums" and "The White Quail," in which he introduces two strong female characters, Elisa Allen and Mary Teller. Each woman turns to gardening as an opportunity to achieve a specific desire, unique to her own environment. In these two tales, Steinbeck actually tells one common allegory about two vastly different characters who retreat to their gardens for solace, both of whom, for one reason or another, are severely isolated within their own marriages and use their gardens as a tool to reach objectives.

The two protagonists, Elisa and Mary, are very passionate gardeners. Stanley Renner says both grow flowers that "symbolize themselves, their beauty, their femininity, and their sexuality" (334). In "The Chrysanthemums," Elisa Allen is the wife of a rancher who is too engrossed in the everyday details of his ranch to see her for the beautiful woman that she is; she wishes to take on a greater responsibility on the ranch and wants her husband, Henry, not to take her for granted and to pay more attention to her. She is the only woman on the ranch, and she tries to fit in this very masculine world by tending to her flower garden with a skillful commitment. Leon Lewis describes Elisa as suffering from feelings of isolation and loneliness, and Steinbeck integrates these into the story through his description of the valley's weather and mountainous terrain (395). Steinbeck uses the early winter weather to his advantage by illustrating

the "grey-flannel fog of winter" as enveloping the whole valley, thus cutting it off from the outside world (9). He further relates this by saying the fog "sat like a lid on the mountains and made...the great valley a closed pot" (9). Elisa has no nearby neighbors, and Henry is away from the house a great deal of the time at different areas of the ranch.

This short story takes place in December, at a time between planting seasons. It is "a time of quiet and waiting" according to Steinbeck, and a time of the year that Elisa had nothing more but time to contemplate her troubles (9). Renner states that Elisa, being childless, focuses her attention on socially accepted feminine roles, like the cleaning and maintaining of the house and gardening (333). She would achieve this by spending untold hours in her garden, caring for her precious chrysanthemums and other flowers, as if she were nurturing children. For Elisa, her refuge is her garden. Steinbeck portrays her as an amalgamation of male and female characteristics:

Her face was lean and strong and her eyes were as clear as water. Her figure looked blocked and heavy in her gardening costume, a man's black hat pulled low down over her eyes, clod-hopper shoes, a figured print dress almost completely covered by a big corduroy apron with four big pockets.... She wore heavy leather gloves to protect her hands while she worked. (10)

While tending her garden, Marilyn L. Mitchell implies that Elisa uses this very masculine disguise to cover up her beauty and femininity, which simmers just below the surface (222). While she is cloaked this way, Steinbeck describes her as "handsome," which is not a very female attribute (10). It also covers up the fact that she is a woman, and it offers her protection against any wayward itinerants looking for someone weak to prey on. John Ditsky says her clothing also affects her work in the garden, as she confronts it in a "manly fashion" (245). Steinbeck points out that while wearing this outfit, "her work with the scissors was overeager, over-powerful. The chrysanthemum stems seemed too small and easy for her energy" (10). Her home is described as having a hard-swept look, and she had a knack for growing a strong crop

of chrysanthemums. The garden is her own little world. It is here that she displays her talent for growing flowers. At the same time, she seeks additional challenges for herself on the ranch. Knowing how well she excels in gardening makes her feel under-utilized on the ranch, and she would relish that challenge. Mordecai Marcus suggests that Elisa "wishes to escape from the limited domesticity of her...life to a world of wider experience" (323). She does let Henry know of her desires to branch out beyond her enclosed garden.

Early in the story, Henry approaches Elisa in her garden after completing a successful cattle deal. As usual, she is engrossed in her work and does not notice him admiring her handy work. Steinbeck writes that Henry praises her talent for planting strong, plentiful chrysanthemums and wishes she could apply this talent in the ranch's apple orchard, but he never recognizes the beauty of the chrysanthemums, which is what she truly desires (11). She quickly acknowledges his comment and replies that she could transplant her talent there because she has the gift of planters' hands and could "stick anything in the ground and make it grow" (11). Gregory J. Palmerino points out that Henry does not react to the confident reassurance in her reply and simply deflects it by enticing her with the opportunity of a night on the town to celebrate the cattle deal (164). Elisa, conflicted in her desire to expand her horizons on the ranch and knowing her proper role (at that time) as a wife, chooses not to engage Henry any further on the subject. They set a time for dinner and continued working on their daily tasks.

The Allen ranch is visited by a disoriented traveler while Elisa decisively grooms her flowers; attempting to make haste with him, she gladly gives him directions back to the highway that he needs. While visibly procrastinating, he unsuccessfully attempts to drum up some work for himself and is told she has nothing for him. Being a business man and also a student of human nature, he observes her aptitude for gardening and begins a conversation about her flowers. Steinbeck illustrates that this move cracks her masculine persona, and "the irritation and resistance melted from Elisa's face" (15). With his insincerity not detected by Elisa, he continues to talk to her about the garden, especially the chrysanthemums. He even mentions that a nearby

customer of his had often asked him to bring her some chrysanthemums if he ever happened upon some in his travels. Steinbeck writes that "Elisa's eyes grew alert and eager" (16); her husband had never expressed any personal interest in her chrysanthemums. Lewis demonstrates that here was a complete stranger exalting the handiwork of her talents and willing enough to pass them to another chrysanthemum admirer (393). She was put back by his apparent genuine diversion; he was using this tactic to soften her up and reel her in once she was hooked. Lewis adds that Elisa was excited by this foreign interest and joyfully welcomed the opportunity to spread around the knowledge and love of her favorite flower, and she invites him into the garden (393). Elisa retrieves a red flower pot as a suitable vessel to carry the cargo of sprouts and partakes in a further conversation with the traveler about the proper care of her precious shoots. She does this with both a very passionate tone and mannerisms; she even removes her big leather gloves and her hat and shakes out her hair. This is an indication of her femininity reemerging and a new Elisa appearing out from under her masculine shell.

Steinbeck deliberately wrote that Elisa chose a "big red flower pot" for its usual literary and sexual context, to convey her new-found power role and passion (16). She is feeling very powerful, sexually, at the chance to pass on some of her chrysanthemum offspring that she has grown and nurtured. To show Elisa's femininity, she has removed her hat and shaken out her hair, to symbolically unveil herself to the traveler. Elizabeth E. McMahan describes Elisa as being "entirely feminine and essentially seductive" (215). Steinbeck paints the whole moment as a sexual act between the two. Lewis suggests that as a result "Elisa feels energized and appreciated, delighted by her opportunity to share her special skill and excited by the chance to share" (393). The new Elisa is more confident of herself in her femininity and sexuality. She will be more assertive in her desire to seek a more fulfilling role on the ranch than just maintaining the house and garden and in her romantic relationship with Henry. Before the tinker leaves, to show her appreciation, she finds two pots for him to mend and pays him for his services, and she challenges him by stating she is just as able at performing the same type of work. She says, "I

could show you what a woman might do" because she is quite accomplished in sharpening scissors and mending pots and pans also, as Steinbeck points out (19). The traveler tried to glance off her remark by saying it was no job for a woman. Elisa is not swayed by his retort and proceeds to the shower, and she exerts the customary vigor she reserved for cleaning the house into scrubbing herself and preparing for her evening with Henry. Having shed her masculine gardening shell, she now exhibits a stronger, more confident, and more sexual self-image. Before leaving for dinner, Henry notices her new image and expresses his pleasure, but now it is Elisa's turn to coyly pass off one of his remarks as she playfully distracts him away from her pretty new dress.

On their way into town, Elisa's new-found confidence is crushed when she sees that the traveler has ditched her chrysanthemums on the road. She realizes that his interest in her flowers was only a ploy to solicit work, which she had originally denied having. Disgusted that she fell for his trick, she plans to drown her sadness in alcohol. Henry, seeming to be affected by Elisa's new self-image, senses that she is upset and that her mood has changed, and he tries to cheer her up by promising to get away from the ranch and out for dinner more often (23). The story abruptly ends here, only alluding to the reader that Elisa has reverted to her old self.

In a striking contrast to Elisa, Steinbeck draws the character of Mary Teller in "The White Quail" as a strong woman, one willing to use strong-arm tactics to achieve her goal of creating a backyard garden of Eden. In "The White Quail," Steinbeck offers a study of one woman's obsession. Mary Teller, the protagonist, is said to be the opposite of Elisa Allen; she is very pretty and feminine, which masks her psychological fixation. Mary has been planning a very particular garden for many years. In her mind, she has been carefully laying out the design, including the placement of the plants and flowers that will be in it. She even planned the location of a special picture window in her unbuilt house to capture the perfect view of the garden. Nothing is more important to her than this garden. For years, she painstakingly seeks out a future husband who would have the means to realize her goal. Steinbeck explains that Mary searched for a long time and "during five years, looked at every attentive man and

wondered whether he and that garden would go together? ... Would the garden like such a man?" (28).

John H. Timmerman acknowledges that Mary finds such a man in Harry Teller; "the garden seemed to like him" and since he had the money to allow it, she builds the garden of her dreams (178). Steinbeck depicts Mary exhibiting dominance and states that she will not marry Harry until "the lot was bought and the house was built" (29). Even without the perfect window in place, she could see exactly where to place the garden, because "she knew to an inch where everything should be" (29). She did not want to leave the plans to an architect or landscape designer, and she watched all the workers like a hawk, to make sure nothing deviated from her plan. Harry let her be in charge of every aspect of the venture, and to show her appreciation, Mary offered Harry the opportunity to plant anything he wished. He declined, and she was pleased that he would not end up picking something that would conflict with her plan, which she did not want to change.

When Mary's plan was completed, she showed off the garden to Harry from that special window, and she expressed to Harry her desire that the garden remain unchanged, forever. She believed that since she had "thought about it so long that it's part of me. If anything should be changed it would be like part of me being torn out" (30). At this point, Harry does mention to Mary, "I'm afraid of you...you're kind of untouchable. There's an inscrutability about you....You're kind of like your own garden fixed, and just so. I'm afraid to move around. I might disturb some of your plants" (30). To this Mary replies only "Yes, you are dear" and reminds him that he let the garden be totally hers (31).

Although Harry and Mary are married, Steinbeck makes it very clear that they sleep in separate bedrooms and they have very rarely had sex. Marilyn Mitchell recognizes that Mary has an aversion to sex and only seems obliged to indulge in it as a reward system for Harry (222). Throughout "The White Quail," Steinbeck points out that when she is happy or pleased, "she let him kiss her" as when the house was built or the garden completed (31). This is her way of thanking Harry at several points in the story. Renner adds that Mary's dislike of the physical aspect of the marital relationship includes



any conversation that may mask a sexual innuendo (334). Before they were married, Harry thought it was very cute that she had manifested every detail of the garden in her head, down to the mundane chores, like raking errant leaves. When he informed her of this idiosyncrasy and said that it made him "kind of hungry," she sent him home because she was displeased (29). After their wedding, she would just lock him out of her bedroom if he annoyed or upset her. At one point, Mary showed her contempt of Harry's business by locking him out again. Joseph Fontenrose points out that ironically, it is the income from his job that allows her garden to become a reality (62). After all, as Marilyn L. Mitchell states, she selected a husband based on who had the means to bring it to fruition, and his desirability as a husband was secondary (222). Mary obtains the dominant role in their marriage by keeping Harry at bay, physically speaking. Mitchell points out that he severely underestimated Mary as just another pretty face, without "any dimension but the physical" (222). Harry was quite surprised by the manner she handled and controlled the construction of the garden. Mitchell adds that it is his own misjudgment of Mary that allows her to achieve this dominance, for she was quite cunning in the ways she would play Harry off her "feminine frailty" and would continue to (222).

Mary was very successful at accomplishing this because it would justify her means and lead to the personification of her garden. Louis Owens writes that once her creation was completed, she turned her obsession toward keeping it from changing; Mary saw this as her garden of Eden (227). What emerges is a "floral reflection of herself," and, to maintain this perfection, Mary constantly works in her garden (227). Unlike Elisa Allen's gardening outfit, Mary's is a "bright print dress, quite long in the skirt, and sleeveless...an old-fashioned sunbonnet...good sturdy gloves" (31). Her outfit would no doubt reflect her femininity without transmitting a shred of her domineering personality underneath. Even now, she continues to manipulate those feminine frailties, especially when it comes to defending her garden from the creatures that would harm or destroy it. By using her feminine charms, she easily enlists Harry to kill all such creatures. This is the only time Harry is invited into the garden, as a hired hand.

During this intense devotion to her garden, Mary neglects her relationship with Harry, emotionally and, as usual, physically. Harry continues to find the bedroom door locked. One night, he came home to tell Mary that a neighbor was going to let him have one of their newborn puppies. Mary, of course, envisions the chaos and damage such a creature could do to her garden, and she cannot allow such an intrusion into her sanctuary. The very thought of what impact a dog may have on the garden causes her to have a debilitating headache, and, as a result, Harry finds the bedroom door locked again. Steinbeck states that although it only transpires in her imagination, Harry feels ashamed and bore the usual consequences (36-37). This comes as no surprise because Mary's garden has always been her biggest priority.

Mary spent a majority of her time in the garden to keep the outside world, her enemy, from invading it. The outside world started at the hill just beyond her fuchsias, wanting to get in, "all rough and tangled and unkempt" (32). Mary's line of fuchsias, standing on guard, are the equivalent of the chicken-wire fence around Elisa Allen's garden. Not only do these barriers protect the gardens, they protect the gardeners also. John H. Timmerman reiterates that the fuchsias' key role is to keep the wild out of the garden (179). He also suggests that locking Harry out of the bedroom symbolizes that he represents the wild and with each line of defense, she is trying to keep her garden and herself from being violated (180). Steinbeck foreshadowed this earlier in the story when Harry told Mary, "You're kind of untouchable" (20). Mary's most untouchable time of the day was the time she spent in her garden. When Harry would return home after work in the late afternoon, he knew best to leave her alone and just read his newspaper because "it made her unhappy to be disturbed" (37). This was what Mary called "the really-garden time"; to her it was the most sacred time of the day (37). Mary would retire to the tranquility of her masterpiece and be able to "really feel" her garden (37). This time, just as the sun would begin to set, was when the population of the garden was at its peak and the blooms were open to their fullest. This is the time Mary took to admire the garden all by herself, listening to the birds and breathing in the flowers' fragrance. When alone in the garden, Mary would hold conversations with herself.

At other times, she would envision herself in the house and the garden at the same time. This is but another sign of Mary's narcissism; she wants to spend every waking moment in the garden even when she is with Harry.

To this point, Steinbeck has acquainted the reader with Mary's life-long neurotic obsession with planning and building her garden. He has also shed light on her desire to keep it perfect and unchanged by devoting a majority of her time to the garden. Owens conveys that Mary feels the garden is an extension of herself and wants to keep both pure and protected (227). Steinbeck ratchets up Mary's pathological fixation when he introduces the title character, the white quail. While enjoying her garden one day, she spotted a little white quail drinking from the pond. Mary, once obsessed with just being in the garden and caring for it, is now convinced that she is the quail.

As Steinbeck describes it, at her first sight of the quail, "Mary froze"; she is stunned by its beauty and believes it to be an incarnation of herself; of the quail she says, "She's like the essence of me, an essence boiled down to utter purity"; she has immediately identified with it (38). In what John Timmerman calls "one of the most overtly sexual passages in Steinbeck's work, she experiences a surreal sexual climax" (182). Steinbeck describes it like this: "A shiver of pleasure, a bursting of pleasure swelled in Mary's breast. She held her breath" (38). Her visual enjoyment of seeing the quail is short-lived, because she notices a cat stalking the white quail, and she screams. Harry quickly appears in the garden, and she tells him about the little white quail and the cat. To protect her quail, Mary demands that Harry set out poison to kill the cat. He refuses to do that because other innocent animals could eat the poison, and he appeases her by agreeing to shoot the cat with his air gun (40). She hysterically tries to explain to Harry about the quail. Mary cries out "that white quail was me, the secret me that no one can ever get at, the me that's way inside...the cat was after me. It was going to kill me" (41). The next morning, Harry sets out to await the cat's arrival. As he waits, he is able to reflect on what Mary said the quail means to her and "in a sudden eruption of his rage and sexual frustration," he shoots the white quail and hides its body on the hill. As he has time to think about it, the bird symbolizes something different to Harry than it did to Mary. John H. Timmerman compares

Harry to the cat and if the quail represented the physical essence of Mary that he is locked out of, then he may have subconsciously thought he was the cat on the same hunt, seeking the white quail (185). Harry did not mean to kill the quail, and, as the weight of the reality that just happened sinks in, he declares, "Oh, Lord, I'm so lonely" and realizes that in addition to forever losing physical access to his wife, he has also lost access to her mind and soul (42).

In both "The Chrysanthemums" and "The White Quail," Steinbeck tell the story of different women who turn to gardening to grow flowers that symbolize themselves, as well as their beauty, femininity, and sexuality (Renner 334). Elisa Allen does so to showcase her horticultural talent, in hopes she can expand her responsibilities on the ranch, but she is worried about society's view of proper female roles. But, while doing so, she hides her femininity under the shell of a very masculine costume. She also wishes to reawaken the romantic relationship with her husband. She does rekindle lost confidence and sexuality after a brief encounter with a lost traveler looking for work. Mary Teller's devolution to gardening is due to her lifelong obsession with building the garden of her dreams and keeping it perfect and unchanged. She controls this fixation in a very masculine way while still projecting her femininity. Her desires to bring this obsession to fruition and to keep it unchanged can be described as neurotic, narcissistic, and pathological. She wishes to keep her garden and herself pure, rejecting a physical relationship with her husband. She begins to envision a secret self with whom she would have conversations and visit in the garden. Her husband's attempt to break her irrational connection with her garden and the white quail that she sees as herself only results in the death of the quail and his deepening isolation due to Mary's obsession. Elisa is a woman trying to prove to her husband, Henry, that she can do more around their ranch than just keeping a clean house and growing beautiful flowers in her garden. While doing so, she traps herself within the fenced-in confines of her garden, wearing masculine clothes that disguise her femininity and covering up her beauty from Henry. Elisa worked endlessly in her garden, tending to her brood to show Henry that she is perfectly capable of succeeding in

other areas of the ranch, like the apple orchard. To Elisa and Mary, their gardens are their own little worlds. They control and cultivate their little plots to express certain characteristics about themselves. One isolates herself within the beauty of her garden, and the other uses hers as a showcase to broader avenues of responsibility on the ranch but eventually retreats to the safety of her garden. These two short stories are Steinbeck's most memorable and most written about; in them, he has not so much written tales of two women and gardening, as he has cleverly offered insight into the marital relationship and how important it is for couples to share interests and to keep the lines of communication open so that no one suffers from feelings of isolation and loneliness.

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Evaluation: *Dan writes an insightful and evocative "tale of two women" about these two protagonists of John Steinbeck. For both of these women, "their gardens are their own little worlds."*

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# The Verisimilitude of Gentle Lying

Casey Giglio

Course: English 222 (Poetry Writing)

Instructor: Anne Davidovicz

Assignment: *For the midterm, each student was to write a take-home metacognitive essay describing and analyzing his or her writing process.*

Poetry is a living, ever-evolving organism. I have always suspected this, but it was not until I was forced to grow and experiment with my voice, fine-tuning my chosen direction, that I had truly felt its presence. As a medium, poetry is exactly like fiction and simultaneously far removed from it. Within certain parameters, it can be a wondrous story-telling device, something akin to Kinnell, but stylize it, shape it, corset it, color it, and you have a linguistic equivalent of Magritte's sculpture—an abstract evocation of human psyche in a small package.

As I continue to write, my concept of poetry evolves from a broad and boundless notion of creative expression into a more tangible idea that gels a scholastic writing construct with an instinctive awareness to produce some of the most resonating poetry. I find that I have a distinct sense of what is mine: most of my writing inherently carries a stamp of the soft, dim, ambiguous style that sometimes gets tangled within the fishing lines of diction and syntax, ultimately surfacing as somewhat verbose, yet capable of ensnaring the reader. This might seem like a true downfall, a flaw, and at times it certainly is and has been. However, I realize that to a degree this has been my voice. I rather enjoy the surreal haze of quiet mystery in poetry, which is why my own writing is often shaped by subtle details that never speak directly, but only suggest their purpose. It is also for that very reason that I find myself being especially aware of language.

Diction is a very important aspect for me: nothing manipulates the more elusive tonal qualities of writing like it. In "Workweek," for example, the last two lines of the

first stanza describe a woman's features, "bee-stung lips breaching / tiny cracks of thirst." I relished this (and a couple lines above them) more than a few times; in the end I felt this arrangement to be the most successful portrayal of this unknown individual. Her features conjured up dying beauty, systematically slaughtered youth trapped within awkward physical constraints. I could have used different word choice and referred to her lips as "full and dry," a more colloquial, sterile description. But in the final result, she never comes across as truly grotesque or morally bankrupt, and the reader never passes judgment.

In my experience of poetry, writing or reading it, there is an elemental connection to the reader that is established through figures of speech; these devices color and shade poems in ways that none other can. As a reader, there is a sense of enticement that is invoked; as a writer, shaping of the entire poem can be done by appropriate use of just the right metaphor, especially if the comparison is carried through the entirety of the piece. The use of metaphor or simile can generate a powerful tone that cannot be achieved by maneuvering around diction alone. My preference is undoubtedly toward metaphors, as they pack a more potent punch than similes, particularly when worked into the unbroken stream of imagery. In "beneath the skin of metropolis," third stanza, I use several metaphors to develop the mood and imagery: "The windows are sweating, / countless conversations hang / in tied bunches of limp balloons." While both line one and lines two to three are metaphors, the first line is simple and more direct, thereby making the figure of speech very effective without seeming overworked or inflated. The first line can also be described as transferred epithet, another understated device, as the implication is just ambiguous enough to suggest the possibility of steamy windows or hot, over-caffeinated people. Within the fourth stanza, several metaphors are used:

You smile assuringly  
but only steam exits your mouth.  
Across the street two lovers  
are cooing to each other, an incidental  
stone  
breaking waves of footed traffic.  
Sun splashes its urine-soaked rays  
On car hoods and bus benches.

The “two lovers” are compared to “an incidental stone” in a manner that parallels both against each other, where as the “sun” splashing the “urine-soaked rays” is a softer, more organic and more integrated form of comparison. I think the former figure should be utilized within the body of a poem sparingly or with a specific focus in mind, as that variety tends to draw more attention to itself. However, the latter type of metaphor is an effective device to be used for developing subtle contours of a poem: speaker, attitude towards the subject, theme.

A poem cannot be successful without proper consideration for its form. Be it external shape or inner association, form contributes to just about all other aspects of poetry. It becomes the delivery vehicle for everything else. My personal preference is free verse, although I would not be opposed to attempting some more traditional formats. I think free verse just happens to be what I am currently exploring. In addition, it is particularly appropriate for some of my inner associations, favorites of mine, fall into categories of meditative moment, narrative, descriptive, association, etc. Once again, they are favorites simply because I am investigating these avenues of connecting with the reader. I fully believe that once I have cleansed myself emotionally, I will be ready to move on to other things. At the moment, my attention has been captured within this format.

Of course, no poem is complete without addressing the element of sound. For me, it is probably the most rewarding side of poetry. I feel that sound is quite possibly one of the few, if not the only, aspect that separates poetry from fiction in the most fundamental and personal way. While sound is mostly accidental in fiction, it is very much a driving force behind poetic writing. It is the fingerprint of poetry. The sound of language reaches me first, before anything else, based upon an initial reading. When I write, I never force the sound patterns or rhythms to emerge—I play around with wording until it feels right. The rhythms and echoes tend to evolve on their own as a result of this manipulation. I realize that some pieces are more successful than others, but I can say that alliteration must be engrained in my psyche somehow, as it creeps up out of nowhere most of the time. In “beneath the skin of metropolis”: “countless conversations,” “bunches of ... balloons,” “bodiless beings... / suspended in a state...”

“grease and grime,” and so on. In “Workweek”: “smog of sedate Minsk,” “aloof assertion,” “aging Victorian artifact disguised by the archaic majesty...” If I combed through every poem I’ve ever written, I am certain I would find alliteration plentiful in all of them. I believe this might be due to English being my second language; alliteration became almost like a mnemonic device when writing. While I do like that this is so organic to me, I would really like to develop more awareness of internal rhyme and consonance. I think those elements are more restrained and portray a mature and seasoned ownership of one’s writing.

I have been reading quite a bit more of Galway Kinnell. I find that he has the strongest resemblance to what I attempt to convey in my own writing. Perhaps not always in terms of theme or subject, but there is something that echoes in me when I read his work, much the same way my own writing makes me feel; not just the finished product, but the mood in which I tend to descend when I write. I have been trying to sift out my pieces to give them a more simplistic, concise sound. I would like to eliminate the burdensome wordiness within lines and stanzas where it detracts from the other dimensions of each poem. The more I read Kinnell, the more I am struck by his nearly stark approach to some of his poems. In his “Burning the Brush Pile,” he advances the piece almost like a narrative, conveying details in a lazy river of unhurried lyricism. It is one of those poems that one might read and dismiss initially. However, I stumbled across it again and again, until I found myself rereading it daily. The most technically fascinating aspects of that poem are its diction/syntax combination and its length. In addition to the intense (and immense) imagery, he manages to convey a very tactile sensation of the passage of time. He develops not just one or two simple scenes in great detail, but somehow creates a timeline, a captured memory of small sequential events that speak to the reader with the intimacy of a diary. He does all this while preserving the gentle, if not humble, poetic voice. It is quite amazing to me. How does one do that? The entire poem rests on two pages within a tiny book that’s dwarfed by a standard sheet of printing paper.

“Burning the Brush Pile” is essentially about him

(the speaker) gathering up the brush and preparing the necessary equipment for the burning:

...two large grocery bags holding  
chainsaw chaff well soaked  
in old gasoline gone sticky— a kind  
of homemade napalm...

Yet, the last half of the poem turns the corner from its initial descriptive narrative and introduces a character (sort of): as the brush pile burns, its charred remainder, left for examination in the following day, spits out a snake that has been halved. Its surviving half is still alive, but burned and angry. There is a sense of humanizing empathy toward the snake that is so subtle and concealed so well that the introduction of this being never even breaks the flow of the meditative narrative of the entire poem:

...a small blackened snake, the rear half  
burnt away, the forepart alive. When  
I took up this poor Isaac, it flashed its  
tongue,  
then struck my hand a few times; I let it.

So while the snake is referred to as "Isaac" (no doubt a Biblical reference to God's sacrificial request), the sequential references to this creature are always as "it,"

not "he," which would have been the expected way to go. When I attempt this type of narrative, the poem turns long and overburdened. I have been trying to simplify my approach while still preserving my voice.

I must admit that I like the direction of my writing thus far. I also recognize that I really need a pair of eyes that are fine-tuned to read through my work. I am convinced this is a universal certainty for all poets, aspiring or established. I would really like to keep writing and eventually continue on with poetry as a degree. However, I realize I have a very long way to go before I can even attempt to put together a writing portfolio. I would eventually want to try more conventional forms of poetry (yes, maybe even end rhyme), which is not to say that I have never committed to haiku or blank verse. I just have not written anything in such patterns in my more recent ventures. Recognizing that I cannot really force a subject or tone or structure in my writing, I have to just wait it out until I have worked through all of my immediate curiosity and preoccupation with free verse or contemplative themes. On a closing note, I would like to add an interesting observation; I seem to address fictional subjects/speakers in my poetry with greater ease than discussing ones of an intimate or personal nature. I think I enjoy conflating my own experience with that of my illusory, language-bound counterparts, be it a cat or a harlot-spying kid.

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Evaluation: *Casey's honest self-analysis deeply probes her poetry writing process.*

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# No Peace for Padraic Pearse

Richard Guth

Course: English 101 (Composition)  
Instructor: Richard Middleton-Kaplan

Assignment: *Take a stand on Padraic Pearse's statement about bloodshed. Can it be justified ethically, morally, politically, or in some other way? If so, on what grounds, in what situations, in what historical circumstances? Or is it unjustified in any case—is it immoral, dangerous, archaic?*

Gandhi once said, "Non-violence is not a cover for cowardice, but it is the supreme virtue of the brave" (qtd. in Merton 50). Unfortunately, not every revolutionary leader shares Gandhi's ideal of non-violence. All too often, leaders of revolution take the path of violence and bloodshed, all in the name of freedom. Patrick Henry Pearse was more than just one of the leaders of the Easter Rising Rebellion of 1916. As speaker of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, he was also the voice of the Irish people. Since Pearse was a very skilled and educated writer as well as a gifted public speaker, many of his fellow Irishmen turned to him for guidance. While it is human nature to rebel against oppression, to strive for independence, and desire freedom, no one in good moral conscience should agree with Pearse's philosophy of freedom at all costs as stated in the essay "The Coming Revolution."

In 1916, Ireland had been under British rule since the Tudor re-conquest in the 16th century. With the past failure to gain independence politically through legislation, many Irish were now looking to militant groups such as the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Republican Brotherhood for guidance. As a member of both organizations, Pearse held considerable influence over many Irish minds. With his education and his ability to influence others, Pearse became the voice of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Originally, he supported the peaceful practice of attaining Ireland's freedom through "home rule" legislation, but when Parliament delayed the acceptance of the third home rule bill in 1912, he grew weary of waiting for the political

process to succeed. This change of heart appeared in an article he wrote called "The Coming Revolution," where he clearly embraced the thought of violence by stating:

We must accustom ourselves to the thought of arms, to the sight of arms, to the rise of arms. We may make mistakes in the beginning and shoot the wrong people; but bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing, and the nation which regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood. There are many things more horrible than bloodshed; and slavery is one of them. (Pearse 98-99)

Many Irishmen who were moved by this article joined the IRA and prepared for the coming rebellion already planned for Easter week 1916. This violent rebellion lasted seven days and ended with the arrest and execution of Pearse and the fourteen others involved in planning the revolt. Unfortunately, most of those killed in the violence were innocent civilians.

Pearse's view of the Irish people's position as a form of slavery to the British is also questionable. As a dominion of Great Britain, the Irish still had representation in Parliament and held many rights that the other colonies like India did not. In fact, shortly after Ireland received its independence in 1921, Northern Ireland chose to stay part of the United Kingdom and not join the Irish Free State, which shows they did not view themselves as enslaved people. Nevertheless, cries of slavery and injustice make great revolutionary propaganda and are effective when trying to get common people to act without thinking.

Pearse also makes a point of challenging his nation's manhood in his article by saying if they think of violence as horrifying, there must be something wrong with their courage: "the nation which regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood" (Pearse 99). This challenge was obviously effective as Pearse convinced many to follow his ideals. Perhaps there was something wrong with those who embraced this challenge, but it was not a problem of their manhood, it was that their logic was incorrect. It is funny how easy challenging someone's manhood can make a person lose sight of the larger moral picture. Clearly, Pearse felt it was every Irishman's duty to fight, and for any Irishman to sit back and wait for independence was an act of cowardice. Yet, there were many still actively struggling for freedom who disagreed with Pearse and felt that bloodshed and the loss of life was truly horrifying and still desired independence through

civil disobedience. Many could also argue that someone who resorts to violence is a coward to his conscience and in need of courage.

I wonder if any stopped to think about the implications of Pearse's statement, "We may make mistakes in the beginning and shoot the wrong people" (Pearse 98). Does it even matter to Pearse if these poor souls have nothing to do with the rebellion? This leads one to believe he felt that shooting the wrong person was a trivial thing, or that it was unavoidable in the pursuit of noble independence. The British, by the way, shared Pearse's narrow view on killing the wrong people. Amongst those shot during the Easter Rising was Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, a noted Irish writer and pacifist, who, when trying to prevent the looting that took place during the uprising, was killed as an insurgent. The British captain responsible for this mistake felt his actions were justified, also.

Ultimately, there is nothing worse than bloodshed; it is the worst part of our continued reliance on violence to further humanity's needs and agendas. It is the most inhumane of all our actions and in most cases unjustifiable. Pearse's belief that "bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing" is a poor attempt at justifying this violence. Many early religions believed that spilling blood was very spiritual, a belief founded when humans lived in caves and were afraid of fire. However, while the Druids of ancient times may have agreed with Pearse's beliefs on bloodshed, most people of logical mind should have seen this as a ploy to garner support from mostly an uneducated working class. Nevertheless, one would think by the nineteenth century, man would have evolved past these simple superstitions. At the very least, we should hope no one would have listened when Pearse evoked these beliefs as some unifying, holy, and purifying action. It is through this desensitizing of ourselves to the sight of violence, to the desire of carrying weapons, and worse, to the reliance of violent thoughts, that we lose the very thing that makes us human.

Sadly, revolutionary leaders easily move people to violence by playing to their emotions; this leads many people to act without thinking of the consequences. Perhaps Pearse realized this when he gave the order to surrender in an attempt to save civilian lives; and maybe "The Coming Revolution" shows his own emotions got the better of him. Throughout history, blindly following great speakers has led to many regrettable acts of violence and many failed revolutions. Ireland has been home to many rebellions and revolts; perhaps if they had embraced

civil disobedience instead of violence, freedom through legislation might have stood a chance. The Irish did eventually gain their freedom, but only after the Irish War of Independence ended in 1922. However, the violence did not stop with Ireland's freedom. The battle for Irish independence became a religious war, with Irish Catholics fighting Irish Protestants, and this still exists today. Many Irishmen in 1916 looked to Pearse for direction, and he became their voice for the Easter Rising; however, they should have instead looked to their own voice of reason for guidance.

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Evaluation: *Mr. Guth presents a clear, insistent argument that is ultimately compelling because it is strongly rooted in historical context, facts, sharp analysis, and cogent reasoning.*

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## Images of a People Divided

Kathleen Hassler

Course: English 102 (Honors Composition:  
Chicago Literature)

Instructor: Nancy L. Davis

*Assignment: Write a literary research paper.*

During the 1930s, the city of Chicago was in a state of racial turmoil. Blacks and whites throughout the city suffered from a fear, ignorance, and hatred so profound, the integrity of the human spirit was in question. Such grim truths, unacknowledged by so many, were powerfully exposed by prolific author Richard Wright. Crafted within his novel, *Native Son*, Wright's powerful, contrasting, symbolic images ultimately unearth the segregation and racial animosity of the time. According to Kenneth Kinnamon, Wright's novel confronts society with "a harsh and unpalatable truth" (18) that not only exposes the overwhelming problem consuming Chicago, but also exposes the soul-devouring crisis of the nation.

Initially viewed as the city of hopes and dreams, opportunity and freedom, 1930s Chicago quickly became a city overcome by the vicious murder of the human soul. Gushing from the veins of every black and white Chicagoan, racial segregation rapidly seeped into the city's streets and neighborhoods. Maniacal hatred tore through humanity, ultimately generating the belief of black inferiority and white supremacy. First-handedly experiencing such shocking discrimination, Richard Wright states, "And the problem of living as a Negro was cold and hard. What was it that made the hate of whites for blacks so steady, seemingly woven into the texture of things? What kind of life was possible under that hate?" (qtd. in Bakish 6). This socially manufactured hatred is immediately evident in Wright's first book of *Native Son*, "Fear," as main character Bigger Thomas cleverly corners and brutally beats an unwelcome, intrusive rat. In this

scene, "Bigger aimed and let the skillet fly with a heavy grunt. There was a shattering of wood as the box caved in....He kicked the splintered box out of the way and the flat black body of the rat lay exposed, its two long yellow tusks showing distinctly. Bigger took a shoe and pounded the rat's head, crushing it, cursing hysterically" (Wright 6). An image exploding with uncontrollable rage and fear, Wright's rat scene plunges deep into the heart of Bigger's all-consuming anguish, a symbol of the agony felt within the black community. Feelings of social confinement and constraint consume Bigger, presenting him with a future forced into the shadows of the white man. Robert Felgar examines this captive belief, writing, "The rat is also used expressionistically to objectify Bigger's own fear and fury at finding himself trapped in a white world with no escape" (Felgar 102). Similar to the rat, Bigger finds himself ensnared within a world of emotional butchery, a world in which despair reigns, a world in which there is no escape.

Additionally, Wright's rat scene also foreshadows the cornering of Bigger after his murder of white girl Mary Dalton: "He stood up. With each of her movements toward the bed his body made a movement to match hers, away from her, his feet not lifting themselves from the floor, but sliding softly and silently over the smooth deep rug, his muscles flexed so taut they ached" (Wright 86). Here, Bigger fearfully moves into the corner of Mary's room. Panicked by the consuming white world and its biased judgments, Bigger feels trapped. Later, after hours of fruitless fleeing, Bigger is forced to surrender to the police. Just as the rat is forced into a position of defeat, of ultimate submission, Bigger is also overpowered.

He was too weak and cold to hold onto the edges of the tank any longer; he simply lay atop the tank, his mouth and eyes open, listening to the stream of water whirl above him. Then the water hit him again, in the side; he felt his body sliding over the slick ice and snow. He wanted to hold on, but could not. His body teetered on the edge; his legs dangled in air. Then he was falling. He landed on the roof, on his face, in snow, dazed. (269)

Here, Wright symbolically represents the black community's submission to the white man's social

restrictions. Irving Howe states, "A blow at the white man, the novel forced him to recognize himself as an oppressor. A blow to the black man, the novel forced him to recognize the cost of his submission" (qtd in Butler 8). Bigger's submission to life's confinement reveals the harsh consequences of living within a white man's world. Dominated by white power, the black community hopelessly surrendered. Paradoxically, such an image additionally demonstrates the way by which constant submission can inevitably cause the perpetual continuation of oppression. As Bigger, the symbolic figure of the black community, gives in to the sallow world around him, the aspirant collapse of white dominance is essentially lost.

Such feelings of entrapment, submission, and inevitable loss reside deep in Bigger's soul throughout the novel. Exacerbated by the knowledge of the white community's limitless freedom, Bigger feels confused, trapped, and hostile. Such emotions are displayed through Bigger's dream-like observation of an unrestrained, looping airplane:

"Yeah," Bigger said, wistfully, "They get a chance to do everything." Noiselessly, the tiny plane looped and veered, vanishing and appearing, leaving behind a trail of white plumage... "I could fly one of them things if I had a chance," Bigger mumbled reflectively as though talking to himself. (Wright 16)

Here, Wright contrastingly illustrates the pleasurable realities known to whites and the unattainable fantasies desired by blacks. Symbolic of individual freedom, Bigger's fantasy relays the societal divide dictating the world. This silent ruler, allowing whites to control their own lives and blacks to observe at an inaccessible distance, ultimately ignites the chaos and hostility present in *Native Son*. For this reason, Bigger's surrounding "social construction and resultant retaliation were founded upon the reality that his human potential would be forever denied by white power structures" (Dunbar 355). In the end, "Bigger's dreams will never be realized because whites do not allow blacks to do or to be anything..." (Felgar 81). The social recognition of white freedom and its denial to blacks consequently formulate feelings of rejection, disappointment, and loss of identity, each

a rationalizing factor to Bigger's internal and external conflicts.

Continuously wrestling with his own as well as the world's ensuing conflicts, Bigger becomes more and more influenced by society's racially injected beliefs. While at the movie theater, Bigger views two noticeably contrasting films. The first film, *The Gay Woman*, illustrates ambience and independence as angelic white girls frolic along the beach.

He saw images of smiling, dark-haired white girls lolling on the gleaming sands of a beach. The background was a stretch of sparkling water. Palm trees stood near and far. The voice of the commentator ran with the movement of the film: *Here are the daughters of the rich taking sunbaths in the sands of Florida! This little collection of debutantes represents over four billion dollars of America's wealth and over fifty of America's leading families....* (Wright 31)

In this image of picturesque beauty and boundless freedom, Bigger is shown a world in which he does not live and cannot attain. This image, surging with wealth and luxury, "blinds Bigger to the truth about white America and its own racial heritage, for it creates in him the impression that all whites are rich, pampered, indulged capitalists" (Felgar 82). Such images further the acknowledgement of Bigger's own lifestyle devastated by poverty and oppression.

Contrastingly, Bigger's observation of the film *Trader Horn* illustrates the stereotypical images and beliefs toward the black community:

He looked at *Trader Horn* unfold and saw pictures of naked black men and women whirling in wild dances and heard drums beating and then gradually the African scene changed and was replaced by images in his own mind of white men and women dressed in black and white clothes, laughing, talking, drinking, and dancing. Those were smart people. They knew how to get hold of money, millions of it. (Wright 33)

This image, a representation of the perceived animalistic

## Images of a People Divided

tendencies of the black man, “reinforces the stereotypical image of black Africa as a locus of savagery” (Felgar 82) and generates within Bigger the belief that he, too, is uncivilized and unworthy of the white man’s comfortable lifestyle. Additionally, such images demean the black community. Bigger’s correlation between wealth and white intelligence ultimately discount any prosperity or intelligence within the black community. According to Joyce Ann Joyce,

*Native Son* depicts a physical world in which being Black means living in an impoverished milieu governed by the social and political laws of whites—laws that are manifest physically in the arrangement of entirely segregated communities—and being white means unwittingly suffering from moral deprivation in enforcing that segregation. (Joyce 29)

Such factors consequently act as segregating catalysts and disturbing influences upon the black community and Bigger’s own sense of unrelenting despair and hate.

These emotions, so consciously sensed yet masterfully aided, ultimately created the divide among races. Blacks and whites were not one people, but, instead, that of completely different categories. According to John M. Reilly,

Social power expresses itself in monopoly upon the right to define meaning. Thus, on the obsessive American topic of race, the dominant population—those who chose to call themselves white in order to distinguish their status from that of the people whose slavery and subordination were justified on the basis of skin color—have accorded themselves the right to compile the documents and relate the tales that define blackness, thereby controlling the circumstances of discussion while suppressing the humanity of the people objectified in stories and documents as “other.” (Reilly 37)

Wright powerfully explores this idea of the “other” through the contrasting images of Bigger’s back-to-back murders of white girl Mary Dalton and black girl Bessie Mears. Both murders, equally brutal, diverge in their overall

significance, greatly exemplifying the contrasting beliefs toward each race. Mary Dalton, a wealthy white girl, symbolizes the essence of youth, purity, and innocence. Embodying the soul of the white community and the supreme pedestal upon which its members stand, Mary epitomizes Bigger’s view of the white world. Her murder, though ruthless, is clean. Smothered with a cloudlike pillow and later burned, Mary’s death symbolizes the view of white purity. “His muscles flexed taut as steel and he pressed the pillow, feeling the bed give slowly, evenly, but silently. Mary’s fingers loosened. He did not feel her surging and heaving against him. Her body was still” (Wright 86). The smothering, decapitation and burning of Mary’s body ultimately preserves her identity. This recognition of identity, a sense granted solely to the white community, is conversely an abstract wish among the black community.

This intangibility is explored through Wright’s description of Bigger’s malicious murder of his girlfriend, Bessie Mears. Expertly correlated to the earlier murder of the rat, Bessie’s head is thoughtlessly smashed to a bloody pulp.

Then he took a deep breath and his hand gripped the brick and shot upward and paused a second and then plunged downward through the darkness to the accompaniment of a deep short grunt from his chest and landed with a thud. *Yes!* There was a dull gasp of surprise, then a moan. *No, that must not be!* He lifted the brick again and again, until in falling it struck a sodden mass that gave softly but stoutly to each landing blow. Soon he seemed to be striking a wet wad of cotton, of some damp substance whose only life was the jarring of the brick’s impact. (237)

Here, Wright symbolically parallels the murder of an innocent woman to that of an animal, essentially degrading her (Bessie’s) existence and discounting her humanity. Expanding upon this statement, Eve Dunbar describes “America as a nation imperiled by its refusal to admit black humanity” (Dunbar 354). This connection reflects the way by which blacks were viewed during the time. Nothing more than vicious, disease-ridden animals, blacks were seen as merely an infestation of the

pure, white community. Here, unlike wholesome Mary, Bessie is portrayed as a pitiful creature, unworthy of life. The appalling destruction of Bessie's face consequently causes Bessie to lose her identity, a symbolic illustration of the diminishment of the black community's humanity. Additionally, Bessie becomes a forgotten soul. While on trial, Bigger solely acknowledges his murder of Mary, the primary focus. Once Bessie's limp, lifeless body is wheeled in and humiliatingly displayed, Bigger remembers her life.

Bigger was crushed, helpless. His lips dropped wide apart. He felt frozen, numb. He had completely forgotten Bessie during the inquest of Mary. He understood what was being done. To offer the dead body of Bessie as evidence and proof that he had murdered Mary would make him appear a monster; it would stir up more hate against him. Bessie's death had not been mentioned during the inquest.... (Wright 330-31)

Bessie's forgotten life and Bigger's exclusive memory of Mary combine to express the immense discrepancy between the value of black life and the value of white life. Black men and women lived as mere shadows, faceless figures, and with "unclear identities" (Bakish 4); living without a feeling of hope, without a feeling of identity, they purely existed amid the surrounding "ambiguously gray, shadowy world" (4).

Living without identity, thrown into a category filled with hostile, beast-like tendencies, the black community was seen as a ferocious, blood-hungry animal. Wright relates such labels through his multiple animalistic descriptions of Bigger. Primarily evident after his gruesome murders, Bigger is seen as a monstrous killer. Both murders, having triggered a public uproar, cause newspapers to describe him as having the "abnormal physical strength" (Wright 279) of a "jungle beast" (279), and whites to exclaim their desire to "kill that black ape" (270). Once his murders enter the court room, prosecutor David Buckley perpetuates additional fear and hate among the white community by describing Bigger as a vicious serpent and "cunning beast" (413). "Every decent white man in America ought to swoon with joy for

the opportunity to crush with his heel the woolly head of this black lizard, to keep him from scuttling on his belly farther over the earth and spitting forth his venom of death!" (409). This ominous depiction portrays the white community as defenseless prey to the black community's persistent, inhumane hunt. According to Robert Felgar, "Bigger is a 'nigger', a black ape, a tiger stalking its white prey, as the stereotypical white racist notion has it" (Felgar 105). Such stereotypes cause Bigger to experience both internal and external conflicts. "Bigger's sense of himself—his pride—is in constant conflict with society's attitude toward him" (Joyce 15). Consequently, each exaggerated label acts as an identifiable collar, marking the black community's assumed aggression and violence while simultaneously strangling the life from their bodies and souls.

Finally, captured, marked, and caged, Bigger finds himself in jail. Here, Bigger is completely dehumanized as he is given a prison number and thrown behind bars. Wright's notion of imprisonment, both physically and emotionally, is seen immediately as Bigger expresses his confined feelings as a result of the white world's restrictions. "'Goddammit, look! We live here and they live there. We black and they white. They got things and we ain't. They do things and we can't. It's just like living in jail'" (Wright 20). Here, Bigger feels figuratively jailed within the white world's ruthless, societal bars that seem to gradually crush every dream and opportunity of his life. Once arrested, however, Bigger becomes literally jailed. Now caged behind the steel bars of a jail cell, Bigger experiences both physical and emotional confinement. Because "society fashioned a world in which achievement was barred" (Bakish 2), Bigger consequently suffers the physical imprisonment of a world rooted in emotional imprisonment. As "the bitter embodiment of the hate and injury imposed on black people" (Ellis 24), Bigger's entrapment ultimately symbolizes the entrapment of an entire race.

Richard Wright's *Native Son* explores the racial struggles plaguing Chicago during the 1930s. Through racially saturated images, Wright symbolically portrays a societal gash so deep, it ultimately devours the human soul. His depiction of the deep-rooted fear and vicious hatred widely consuming both black and white communities

exposes the “bloody consequences” (Binggeli 475) of segregation. A novel Irving Howe declares to unearth “the hatred, fear, and violence that have crippled and may yet destroy our culture” (Butler 8), in the end, illustrates a society consumed by superfluous stereotypes, skewed perspectives, and absolute ignorance.

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Evaluation: *Kathleen writes passionately and authoritatively about a powerfully disturbing novel; she delineates, through expert analysis and research, the complex character of Bigger Thomas and the crippling effects of racism.*

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# Breaking Family Bonds Fanatically: A Look into Hanif Kureishi's "My Son the Fanatic"

John Hauger

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Kris Piepenburg

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

"I feel as if I've lost my son" (Kureishi 639). Spouted in confused anger by Parvez, the father in Hanif Kureishi's "My Son the Fanatic," this line sums up the frustrating end of a father's journey to find the source of his son's peculiarly new lifestyle. Spoken to his best friend, a street savvy prostitute, near the end of the story, this quote finds Parvez standing at a moral crossroads of what to do about his son, Ali, who has picked up a lifestyle he has tried so hard to bury in the past. Marked by the opposition of Western versus Eastern ideologies, Kureishi's tale chronicles the events of a father and son growing apart over their individual beliefs.

"My Son the Fanatic" starts out with Parvez stealthily searching Ali's room, which is becoming progressively barren all while his (Ali's) attitude and tongue are getting progressively sharper. Initially, he is afraid of what might be happening in his son's life, but with the encouragement of Bettina, his seemingly only real friend, Parvez learns

that Ali is becoming a practicing Muslim, rather than becoming involved with drugs. After the relief of knowing his son is not on drugs wears off, Parvez sets out to find the source of Ali's newly found religion and try to persuade him that it isn't the life he has envisioned for his only child. After a succession of argumentative stalemates, the story concludes with an inebriated Parvez serving his "unreachable" son a few knuckle sandwiches, who only offers up the paradoxical question, "so who's the fanatic now?" (646). Overall, "My Son the Fanatic" symbolically portrays the struggle of Western materialism versus Eastern fundamentalism, and the ostensible truth of their inability to coexist, through its generationally divided characters of father and son. Additionally, it shows just how easily corruptible a young, fertile mind can be. It seems as if Kureishi is trying to offer his readers some insight into why some current events in the Middle East are occurring, and suggest a possible explanation as to why there's no end in sight to the violence and misunderstanding. To gain some understanding as to why Kureishi would want to do this, one must look at Kureishi himself, as a human being as well as a writer.

While growing up in England, trying to make a living and a name for himself, Hanif Kureishi "...supported himself as a writer of pornography ... and by working in the theaters...." (Cole par. 2). On the surface it may seem a rather low-grade way for a writer to earn a living; however, working in those particular industries has given Kureishi the insight and credibility not found in many of today's A-list authors. While many of his peers were just talking the talk, he was out there walking the walk: living life to the fullest extent in all of its beautiful horror and terrifying greatness. During that time, he became enlightened in a way, as to what human nature and living is really all about. Kureishi himself states, "I used to think that if I took a lot of cocaine or if I had enough sex—or if I did this or I did that—this would make me feel much better all the time. But when I stopped believing that, I realized that life will always be a struggle and quite difficult" (qtd in Sawhney par. 33). In another interview, Kureishi also expounds on his place in the world as a writer: "A writer's job, if we have any job in society, is to tell the truth as we see it, to write about the world as we observe it, and the world is a strange place and people

**Breaking Family Bonds Fanatically: A Look into  
Hanif Kureishi's "My Son the Fanatic"**

are divided, unusual, wicked and good" (qtd in Cole par. 4). His experiences lend authenticity to the creation and portrayal of the characters in his stories, as well as their reactions to the problems they are posed with. Such is the case with the characters in his short story "My Son the Fanatic." And "in depicting this struggle between father and son, Kureishi brings the conflict between modernism, fundamentalism and consumerism boldly to the center..." (Kaleta, *Storyteller*, 160).

Parvez, the protagonist of the story, grew up in Lahore, Pakistan, a town near the border of Pakistan and India. After spending his youth in Pakistan, he moved to London, England and for the past twenty years has been driving a taxi cab. While driving his cab, he has managed to provide a fairly secure life for his only son, Ali, buying him an array of material possessions along with putting him through college. He does this by driving mainly at night, where the traffic, and the money, are both better. However, when Ali starts to discard many of those possessions, Parvez becomes afraid of what his son might be getting into. He seeks counsel with his sole confidante, Bettina, who tells him the signs to look for pertaining to drug abuse as her career choice as a prostitute makes her a de facto expert on the matter. The two of them are very close, as can be seen near the beginning of the story, "He could talk to her about things he'd never be able to discuss with his own wife" (640). Eventually, it is found out that Ali is not on drugs, but rather is becoming a practicing Muslim, and this confuses and angers Parvez to no end. Part of this confusion and anger can be explained by the relationship he shares with Bettina.

Parvez has become enamored with Western materialism and is "increasingly receptive to western attitudes" (Jain par. 14). He drinks whiskey and water almost daily, and he eats bacon sandwiches for breakfast every morning. And rather than confide in his own wife of many years, he'd rather talk to a prostitute. Therein lies the clue, however. Of course he doesn't want to talk to his wife; she'd only try to persuade him that his son is doing the right thing. He doesn't want the discourse of the person he is forcing to cook him unclean pork every morning; he wants Western insight from someone who's grown up and lived in the West. He has tried to forget his own experiences with religion.

Near the middle of the story, Parvez remembers his religious teachings:

...to stop him falling asleep when he studied, the Moulvi [religious teacher] had attached a piece of string to the ceiling and tied it to Parvez's hair, so that if his head fell forward, he would instantly awake. After this indignity, Parvez had avoided all religions. (641)

To Parvez and his generation, this religious avoid-ance was not seen as a loss of moral character, but rather a casting off "...of the world of poverty and cruelty from which they [had] escaped" (Gilman 164). Along with that, Stephen Barton would concur that Pakistani immigrants would experience "...an almost total lapse of religious observance; yet migration was not perceived as a threat to their heritage. . . . The migrant lived and worked in Britain on behalf of his family..." (qtd. in Gilman 164). And rather than accept, much less enjoy, his son's new found enlightenment, he tries to persuade Ali to enjoy life without all the religious fanaticism, and by extension stop treating his father with such disdain. Bruce King boils Parvez down to "...a parent who has worked hard and sacrificed to give his child what he never had himself and now finds himself and his life treated with contempt" (par. 1). Ali, on the other hand, seems to want no more part of the Western materialism his father so relishes.

"There are more important things to be done" is the answer Parvez gets when he asks Ali why he doesn't play his guitar anymore (639). Over the past months preceding the introduction of the story, Ali seems to have "done a 180" as far as his attitude and demeanor are concerned. Shedding material possessions in search of more spiritual possessions is Ali's new mission, and he has accepted this new faith with a high degree of fervor. The parting from his British girlfriend, and other friends, and the throwing away of previously coveted items such as video games, TVs, and high-end stereos begin to demonstrate Ali's loyalty to his new-found religion. Along with the removal of any materialistic items from his life, he also begins vocalizing his abhorrence of his father's unclean lifestyle. This contempt is accentuated during a dinner between the father and son in which Ali lists off some of Parvez's apparently countless trespasses, including

his drinking, eating habits, and other violations of the Koran. The scene escalates:

Each time Parvez took a drink, the boy winced, or made a fastidious face as an accompaniment. This made Parvez drink more quickly. The waiter, wanting to please his friend, brought another glass of whiskey. Parvez knew he was getting drunk, but he couldn't stop himself. Ali had a horrible look on his face, full of disgust and censure. It was as if he hated his father.

Halfway through the meal, Parvez suddenly lost his temper and threw a plate on the floor. He had felt like ripping the cloth from the table, but the waiters and other customers were staring at him. Yet he wouldn't stand for his own son telling him the difference between right and wrong. He knew he wasn't a bad man. He had a conscience. There were a few things of which he was ashamed, but on the whole he had lived a decent life.

Finally, Parvez's problem is summed by his son: "'The problem is this,' the boy said. He leaned across the table. For the first time that night his eyes were alive. 'You are too implicated in Western civilization'" (642-643).

This recently discovered piety on Ali's part almost seems to be taking it too far. Hanif Kureishi's view is that "excessive devotion to religion is a form of narcissism, in fact, between oneself and the world, a convenient way of neglecting the individual and replacing him with God" (qtd. in Gilman 164). Kenneth Kaleta would call this being an "idealistic terrorist" ("Windows" par. 21). However, in today's society, this fundamentalism has been created out of a necessity for something good in Muslim communities. While Kureishi himself has admitted that he dislikes fundamentalists, he understands their motive because it's "...an attempt to create a purity" (qtd in MacCabe 50).

Gilman would agree with the purity part, but would remind readers that the religion needs to be taken in a specific context as far as location is concerned:

For there [Pakistan] Islam is experienced, for good or for ill, within a national, ethnic, linguistic context. All of this has vanished in London and

been replaced by an abstract, stripped-down version of a globalized, deterritorialized Islam... Ali wishes for a world that has never existed.... (par. 12)

And in all likelihood, that world will probably never exist. The question, however, begs to be asked as to why all of a sudden would Ali make this transformation? Why would a boy, who has never known anything but the materialistic West, in all its faulty glory, suddenly want to give up such an easy lifestyle for a way of life riddled with so much angst and hardship?

While the actual source of his change in attitude is never revealed, the way Ali presents his new beliefs seems to be that of someone else. When talking about his new found devotions, Ali always talks in broad, global terms. These are the kind of general statements we hear from religious zealots, Eastern neo-fundamentalists, not from a 19-year-old kid trying to find out who he is. If so inclined, one could speculate that he's fallen into the hands of someone, or a group of people who preach, or at least sympathize, with more political ideals. In the middle of the story, Ali says "My people have taken enough. If the persecution doesn't stop there will be *jihad*. I, and millions of others, will gladly give our lives for the cause" (643). Gilman puts it nicely when he says "For him [Ali] the West is a place of sin and permissiveness, and only *jihad* can cleanse one's soul for the reward of paradise, a view common among neo-fundamentalists..." (165). Ali has naively created this impassable barrier, for reasons unknown to even himself, but one that his father, of all people, will not tear down, even if it means giving up his life.

These things that Ali says to his father rake across Parvez to the point where he believes his son is now a lost cause. In the end, a frustrated Parvez has just plain had enough. He's tired of going back and forth, and one especially drunk night, he decides to take his anger out on Ali. Parvez bursts into Ali's room during his *salat* (prayer):

Parvez kicked him over. Then he dragged the boy up by his shirt and hit him. The boy fell back. Parvez hit him again. The boy's face was bloody. Parvez was panting. He knew that the boy was unreachable, but he struck him again nonetheless. (646)



## Breaking Family Bonds Fanatically: A Look into Hanif Kureishi's "My Son the Fanatic"

This reaction is all of Ali's comments and actions coming to a head inside Parvez, who just can't take it anymore. While he won't be winning any parenting awards anytime soon, one can at least sympathize with Parvez. Kenneth Kaleta concurs when he said "violence is not a solution here; it is an inevitability" (*Storyteller*, 159). Kaleta would also agree that this type of dichotomy occurring within a household would not last for very long. Something would have to give; "The dream must tear apart as it cannot go both forward and backward—forward to include western morality, consumerism, and liberalism to satisfy Parvez, and backward to retain eastern asceticism and conservative values to pacify Ali..." (*Storyteller* 158-9).

The last line of the story sees Ali saying, through the beating his father is doling out, "so who's the fanatic now?" (646) This line pretty much sums up Ali's attitude toward his father's feelings about him. Never in the story does Parvez actually call Ali a fanatic, however. It's as if he already sees himself as being a martyr. The person who has filled his young mind with a specific agenda has trained him to expect this kind of reaction. He's been told that the specific beliefs he now has taken hold of somehow make him a fanatic in the eyes of the "implicated" westerners, and that he should be prepared for this type of backlash. Gilman has it right when he says "incomprehension, not madness, reigns at the end of this story" (166).

While it is a bit sad to watch this father and son fight back and forth over what each of them believes is right, the symbolism served by both of these characters is the important part to take away from this story. Parvez, representing Western ideals, and Ali, representing Eastern beliefs, show both sides of the same frustrating conflict and how dividing their beliefs can actually be. About these conflicting ideals, Kureishi would say that "It's a conversation that we, in the Muslim community, have to carry on having. I don't know what the answer is to that, but it's a conversation we have to have. You can't block it out the way fundamentalists clearly want to do" (MacCabe 51). Unfortunately, events similar to these rip families apart in the real world every day. And when both sides "stick to their guns," the only thing you are left with is a gun fight, in which no one really wins.

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Evaluation: *This is an exacting analysis of this short story, very perceptive in its discussion of the values that cause conflict in these characters' lives. John makes intelligent use of the few critical sources available on this work; I am especially impressed with his careful use of published interviews with the author, in illuminating this work and Kureishi's views.*

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## Aristocratic Racism: Hierarchies in Ellison's "Battle Royal" and Faulkner's "Dry September"

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Andrew Jackson

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Kris Piepenburg

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*Assignment: Each student was to write a literary research paper incorporating effective use of at least seven secondary sources, comparing two short works of fiction and using a clearly defined critical approach in reading and analysis. Sociological and gender studies approaches are combined in this paper.*

The short story "Battle Royal," by Ralph Ellison, is about a recent high school graduate. At his graduation, he makes a speech and is recruited by the principal to do it again at an assemblage of the powerful white aristocrats who inhabit the town. When he gets there, he is roped in to participate in a battle royal: a 10-way free-for-all boxing match in which the contestants, all of whom are black, are blindfolded. After this, he makes his graduation speech, during which he is constantly mocked by the crowd. After he is finished with the speech, the principal gives him a scholarship to a black-only college. "Dry September," by William Faulkner, is about a middle-aged white woman named Minnie Cooper, who claims to have been raped by a black man. In a barber shop in town, a cabal led by John McLendon decides to respond to the rumor by taking an unspecified action against Will Mayes, who was not even mentioned by Minnie Cooper. "Dry September" shows us "two isolated individuals whose purpose in life depends not on themselves but upon their ability to live obtrusively in a way that others will recognize and celebrate" (Crane 419), in the form of Minnie Cooper and John McLendon. Minnie Cooper is

a manipulative opportunist who victimizes Will Mayes to regain her lost sexuality in the eyes of others as well as the attention they may have paid her in the past. John McLendon is also manipulative and opportunistic, but his motivation stems from his longing for his lost days of glory on the battlefields of France during the Great War. The main protagonist from "Battle Royal" is an unnamed and submissive young man who "gets what he wants by absorbing the white men's animosity" (German 8) or by actively conforming to what they want him to be. Overall, with respect to the hierarchal class system and the racial/gender class stratification between black men, white women, and white men in the early 1900s South, it seems that "Battle Royal" presents us with a "chain of command" of sorts wherein white men are at the top, below which are white women, and the bottom of which is inhabited by the black race, while "Dry September" illustrates these echelons more subtly and shows us how white women and white men use black people as pawns to mitigate or satiate their own insecurities.

The effectiveness of the social hierarchy that both these works suggest is quite startling in how easily it allows the upper classes to control the lower classes. The most obvious inequality portrayed in these works is that of white men over black men. "Battle Royal" portrays white men as malevolent overlords who use black men and white women as a sick form of entertainment, from the battle royal itself to the mocking of the narrator's speech near the end of the story. By far the most disturbing part of the story is the amount of control that they possess over the narrator in all aspects of his life; for example, at one point, the young narrator says: "a lucky blow to his chin and I had him going too-until I heard a loud voice yell, 'I got my money on the big boy.' Hearing this, I almost dropped my guard. I was confused: should I try to win against that voice out there?" (Ellison 229) After this quote, he gets knocked out during his brief moment of hesitation and loses the battle royal, all because he heard some guy in the crowd say he had his money on the narrator's opponent, Tatlock. What makes this so astonishing is the fact that the person in the crowd did not say anything like "you had better lose," he just said that he had his money on Tatlock. Also, the comment was not

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even directed toward the protagonist. Furthermore, the main character is a reasonably intelligent person, so he would have known that there were probably just as many people putting money on him against Tatlock, but the concept of following the white man's orders is simply so engrained in his psyche that he went and lost because of that comment. This is quite an amazing amount of control that white men possess over the narrator.

Although the main character of the "Battle Royal" is controlled, rather effectively, by white men, there is evidence in the story of a spark of rebellion. In the beginning of the story, we hear the last words of the narrator's grandfather:

"Son, after I'm gone I want you to keep up the good fight. I never told you, but our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's country, ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction. Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open." (Ellison 224)

The grandfather is telling the narrator to silently rebel against the white man while being outwardly submissive to them.

While the character is submissive to the white man, he does not silently rebel; there are times when it seems like he is rebelling, for example, after the battle royal when they are picking up coins off the electrified rug: "I feared the rug more than I did the drunk so I held on, surprising myself for a moment by trying to topple him on the rug"(Ellison 231). But this is not the kind of rebellion that his grandfather is talking about, this is rebellion because of physical danger, choosing the lesser of two evils, the rug or the white man; his grandfather wanted him to rebel against the place white people kept them in society. The white man he is toppling over does not even seem to begrudge him for this: "I tried not to be obvious, yet when I grabbed his leg, trying to tumble him out of the chair, he raised up roaring with laughter, and, looking at me with soberness dead in the eye kicked me viciously in the chest" (Ellison 231). As long as the narrator is not rebelling against the white man's place in

society, the white man does not care, because ultimately he is not a threat. Because the narrator does not harbor his grandfather's dying words even though he knows them to be true, his grandfather's last words and his image haunt him throughout the story and, probably, his life. In the end of the story, after he makes his speech and receives his scholarship, he has a dream in which his grandfather appears, in which they are watching a circus with clowns, during which the grandfather "refused to laugh at the clowns no matter what they did" (Ellison 233). He then opens a briefcase where he finds an envelope, and in that another envelope, and in that another, until finally he finds an official document which he reads to his grandfather: "'To Whom It May Concern,' I intoned. 'Keep This Nigger Boy Running'"(Ellison 233). Discussing this dream, literary critic Liz Brent says:

At the end of the dream, the grandfather has given the narrator a note that implies that white society will continue to make a clown of him, and that, by association, even the college scholarship is merely another gesture by white society meant to enforce the subservience and "humility" of black people.

Throughout this story, we see a main character actively controlled by the powers that be, unheard of outside George Orwell's *1984*.

Most of the other black characters in "Battle Royal" and "Dry September" are not nearly as submissive as the narrator of "Battle Royal" was; it seems that the narrator was an exception to the rule in that he actively tried to conform to how the white man wanted him to be, while most of his peers seemed to just fear them on a cause and effect anticipatory level. The control that the white men have over black men is clear in "Dry September," when the white men pick up Mayes, in the night, to go lynch him: "They pushed at him. He ceased to struggle and got in and sat quietly as the others took their places. He sat between the barber and the soldier, drawing his limbs in so as not to touch them, his eyes going swiftly and constantly from face to face" (Faulkner 343). In this quote, Mayes' submission is in response to the actions of a white man. He knows to submit to their restraining, and he also draws his limbs in out of fear of the white men. If Mayes were not to submit to them, they would probably have

beat him badly on the spot. Contrast this with the narrator of "Battle Royal" in the situation mentioned earlier when he dropped his guard and hesitated, during the boxing match, after he heard a man in the crowd saying he had his money on his opponent. This contrast is exactly like that of a corporate "yes man" who goes out of his way to suck up to his boss so that the boss will think more highly of him and consider him for a promotion, as opposed to a normal person, who simply does their job and listens to what their manager tells them. In this case, the narrator of "Battle Royal" sucks up to the white men at every turn in order to make them happy so that he can advance in the black culture, which is managed by the whites. In the end of the story, it pays off for the narrator, or so he thinks: "'Open it and see what's inside,' I was told. My fingers a-tremble, I complied, smelling the fresh leather and finding an official looking document inside. It was a scholarship to the state college for Negroes. My eyes filled with tears and I ran awkwardly away from the floor" (Ellison 233). On the end of the story, Liz Brent says: ". . . the narrator realizes that, even his success as a high school student, and subsequent award of a scholarship to college, is simply further training for him to serve a role of subservience for the 'entertainment' of white people" (5). The reality of his reward is that it is useless. To the white men in the crowd, a scholarship to a black-only college has no value. The narrator is only reaping minor benefits allocated to him by the white men who still control every aspect of his destiny. The only winners in this relationship are the white aristocracy.

The white aristocracy in the early 1900s South not only maintained an impressive amount of control over black people, but also of white women. In "Battle Royal," the only female character shown is the stripper whom the blacks are exposed to upon entering the ring. She dances naked in front of them, which makes them very uncomfortable. On this topic, Brent says: "This is an especially intimidating situation for these young African-American men, because they have been strictly taught by a racist Southern culture not to regard white women in a sexual way" (5). The consequences of seeing women in a "sexual way" are draconian in this culture; I would bring up the example of Emmett Till who only whistled at a white woman as a joke and ended up getting killed

because of it. The white aristocrats get just as much amusement out of seeing the suffering of the black men trying to repress their sexual desire toward the stripper as they do from the stripper herself. During this scene it says: "Some threatened us if we looked and others if we did not" (Ellison 226). Since some of the men are threatening them if they do not, it would appear that they do not actually care about protecting the white woman, as we see many characters claim to do in "Dry September," but are instead more enamored by the suffering of the black men. Upon leaving the building, the stripper is mobbed by a group of drunken white men: "They caught her just as she reached a door, raised her from the floor, and tossed her as college boys are tossed at a hazing, and above her red, fixed smiling lips 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" (Ellison 226). This example is, admittedly, somewhat shallow seeing as how she depends on these men for her salary, but "Dry September" offers a much better example of white men's control over white women, going deeper than economic control. "Dry September" shows Minnie Cooper unable to find any meaning in her life because she was of a lower class and never got married. Before the main events of the story, Cooper had had an affair with a widower who worked as a cashier at a bank in town. It was a very scandalous affair that had everyone in town talking about it, and she loved every minute of it. Eventually the cashier left town, but he returns once a year at Christmas for a party at a hunting lodge. Cooper's friends report in on his activities to her and tell her how he looks and such. This suggests that after the affair, Minnie spends all this time thinking about him, while he probably never does. This shows us in a subtle way that women need men to define themselves in the world, while men can go out and find meaning in their lives without a woman. Eventually, as Cooper gets older, men stop even seeing her as a sexual possibility, and she becomes so alarmed by this that she ends up allegedly starting the rumor that she was raped by Mayes so that men would look at her in a sexual way again. When she appears on the town square after her rumor has resulted in the killing of Mayes, her plan appears to work: "Then the drug store where even the young men lounging in the doorway tipped their hats and followed with their eyes the

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motion of her hips and legs when she passed. They went on, passing the lifted hats of gentlemen, the suddenly ceased voices deferent, protective" (Faulkner 344). On Cooper's diabolical scheme, critic Karen Andrews says: "Faulkner implies that Minnie Cooper merely plays into the only script available which would dramatically reestablish herself as a sexual female and reclaimed 'pure' white woman in the eyes of the white community" (5). Cooper gets men to notice her again, but at the cost of Will Mayes' life. This idea brings up another interesting theme from the stories: white women's power over black men.

Although white women in these stories are controlled by white men, they still retain power over black men. This is entirely due to the control that white men have over white women. For example; in "Battle Royal," when the group enters the ring and are confronted with the naked white stripper:

Another boy began to plead to go home. He was the largest of the group, wearing dark red fighting trunks much too small to conceal the erection which projected from him as though in answer to the insinuating low-registered moaning of the clarinet. He tried to hide himself with his boxing gloves. And all the while the blonde continued dancing, smiling faintly at the big shots who watched her with fascination, and faintly smiling at our fear. (Ellison 226).

Here, we see the biggest black man of the group cowering in fear over a naked woman. In a primitive setting, this would make no sense because in such a setting the biggest and strongest are always dominant—this is the origin of sexism—but because of the society that they are in, the white woman is dominant over the black man. The reason that she is dominant is because her power is backed by white men; for example, Carolyn Bryant would have had no power over Emmett Till if it had not been for her husband and half-brother.

All of the social inequalities portrayed in both of these works come back to the white men, who sit at the top of the food chain in Southern society during the time period. The stories portray their motivations for keeping this society unfair differently, though. In Cynthia A.

Bily's critique of "Battle Royal," she says: "Ellison had found that American writers 'seldom conceive Negro characters possessing the full, complex ambiguity of the human. Too often what is presented as the American Negro (a most complex example of a Western man) emerges an oversimplified clown, a beast or an angel'" (8). Perhaps he is right; in "Dry September," the character Will Mayes does appear to be quite one-dimensional. But to be honest, Ellison portrays white people as hedonistic sadists, and they can basically be summed up in one cliché: they are evil. Perhaps it is because that is the side of the fence he grew up on. "Dry September" may portray Will Mayes as an "oversimplified clown," but I think that it really goes more deep into the mindsets of the white antagonists, especially John McLendon. Literary critic Paul Rogalus agrees: "We sympathize so strongly with Will Mayes in large part because Faulkner gives us only a very brief glance at the terrified victim. Faulkner instead focuses upon the subtly grotesque natures of the brutal whites" (6). "Dry September" shows us white antagonists who are either stupid and insecure or act as opportunists manipulating the situation to their advantage, or both. To McLendon, black people are nothing more than pawns to satiate his insecurities, similar to Minnie Cooper and how she uses Mayes to get men to notice her again. The entire story shows McLendon crusading to protect his women against black people, but in the end we get a brief yet revealing look into his personal life:

"Didn't I tell you?" He went toward her. She looked up then. He caught her shoulder. She stood passive looking at him.

"Don't John. I couldn't sleep...The heat; something. Please, John. You're hurting me."

"Didn't I tell you?" He released her and half struck, half flung her across the chair, and she lay there and watched him quietly as he left the room. (Faulkner 345)

Even though he crusades to bring "justice" for Cooper in the beginning of the story, at the end, he is seen at home, beating his wife in a gross display of hypocrisy. Examples much like this are seen all the time in real life; for example, Larry Craig consistently voted against legislation expanding rights for homosexuals, yet he

was arrested for homosexual lewd conduct in a men's restroom back in 2007. People who partake in an action which is demonized by society but remain in the closet about it tend to assert this demonization on others just for the sake of showing everyone, including themselves, that they are decent people; this is true for both Larry Craig and John McLendon.

Another white man who accompanies McLendon to the lynching provides another interesting motivation, from his seat in the barber chair in the beginning of the story, as the mob takes shape. He addresses a man who doubts the truth of the rumor:

"You're a fine white man," the client said. "Ain't you?" in his frothing beard he looked like a desert rat in the moving pictures. "You tell them, Jack" he said to the youth. "If there ain't any white men in this town you can count on me, even if I ain't only a drummer and a stranger." (Faulkner 339)

A drummer is a traveling salesman. This salesman apparently just arrived in town and is looking to sell his goods. This passage, while it doesn't say this clearly, suggests that the only reason he is taking part in this is to earn brownie points with the town so he can sell his wares more easily. He is taking advantage of the situation to promote his own self-interests. To him, black people are just pawns on a chessboard.

Both "Dry September" and "Battle Royal" present a similar scenario of the early 1900s South. It is a disturbing scenario riddled with racism, injustice, social stratification, ignorance, and hypocrisy. It is also a scenario where black men are a part of "a myth" that presents them as embodiments of "the animalistic elements, including sexual lust" (Sutton 10). Throughout history, literature has been a driving force for social and political change: from Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* to George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Works such as "Dry September" and "Battle Royal" certainly influenced many people and helped gain momentum for the civil rights movement that would go on for most of the 20th century. Looking back on these works, it is surreal to imagine environments such as the ones they describe, where people are simply killed because they were born the wrong skin color. Hopefully, when people look back on these works, they will realize

the true nightmare that was racism and strive to ensure that such a world never again exists.

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Evaluation: Andrew's writing in this research paper is informed, economical, and passionate, and the secondary sources are well used. This paper is satisfying to read and truly inspiring.

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# Multicultural Interpreting Issues

Cathynn Joseph

Course: Interpreting 101  
(Introduction to Interpreting)

Instructor: Joan T. Fiske

*Assignment: Students were to view a videotape about multicultural interpreting issues and then write a paper reflecting on what they may have gained from watching the video.*

As a member of many cultural minorities—black, female, lesbian, and Caribbean—I assumed that the only new information I would gain from the video called *Multicultural Interpreting Issues* would be additional terminology that correlates to my personal cultural experiences. However, deaf culture is not included in my list of cultures. Naturally, I was shocked to find that I am a member of a “privileged” hearing majority, and that I, who have grown up experiencing—and continue to experience—the oppression of being a minority, am an oppressor of the deaf community. How can I be an oppressor, so closed-minded, when I view the deaf community as a melting pot of cultures, including Caucasian, Hispanic, Asian, and even alternative lifestyles? After watching this video, I began to realize that my so-called cultural awareness merely touched the surface of understanding.

According to a 1986 survey conducted by Marie Phillip, when it comes to working with members of the deaf community, I have the right attitude and willingness to learn that deaf people value in an interpreter. Yet, as a member of the hearing culture, my belief remains that improving my sign skills are of the utmost importance. This video showed opinions of people in the deaf community who mirrored the views noted in Phillip’s study. I quickly realized that my signing skills don’t bear as much weight as my cultural understanding and that I have a long way to go toward reaching it. After watching

the video, I hoped to gain that understanding of what the deaf culture expects of me as an interpreter. I also hoped to increase my knowledge of deaf culture while alleviating my internal anxiety of feeling that I must walk on eggshells to reduce the possibility of doing something inappropriate or oppressive while interacting in the deaf community.

The video highlights different subcultures within the deaf community. The host, Dr. Angel Ramos, a deaf counselor and teacher, talked about his experiences when working with an interpreter in the deaf Cuban-American community. Dr. Howard Busby, a deaf counselor at Gallaudet University, discussed the Native American perspective when dealing with interpreters. Finally, Martin Hiraga, a deaf Asian-American, explained his view as a member of the deaf culture and interacting with unskilled hearing colleagues. The participants offered personal preferences when working with interpreters, conflicts that arise during interpreter assignments, and shared situations in which lack of cultural understanding has turned an innocent mistake of one individual into an insult to many in an entire audience. These presenters’ views and experiences were instrumental in changing my preconceived notions on working as an interpreter.

Initially, it was important to drill myself constantly with vocabulary, syntax, and grammar, making sure that I am signing more in American Sign Language than English. Though these are important skills, they are not the only skills that are required for the field of interpreting. Hiraga notes the importance of cultural awareness when he talks about the value of certain colors in Asian culture. When attending an Asian funeral, the mourning family wears white while guests of the family wear black or dark colors. An interpreter hired for the funeral arrived in red pants, and Hiraga quickly redirected the interpreter on the conflict of the color red, which represents joy and new beginnings, at an event that represented tragedy and loss. Further insult was added when the interpreter initially brushed off his comments by noting that he would be too hot if he covered his pants with a blanket. Another example of the importance of cultural awareness was represented when Busby explained how disrespectful it is to pick up a feather that has fallen from the costume of someone participating in a pow-wow. When the interpreter stepped away from her role of interpreting the

performance and into the role of a bystander, she gave the children watching the wrong information by telling them it was fine to collect the fallen feather that had dropped by her side. This example shows the negative impact that can be made by the interpreter and that culture's values by a simple act of picking up a feather.

Both of these situations impacted my views on working as an interpreter. Before watching these stories of interpreter faux pas, I was under the impression that an interpreter was informed on the type of assignment and made a decision whether to accept or deny the assignment based on the parameters given (location, type of assignment, time frame, language mode, etc.) through the agency providing the assignment. I also thought that arriving early enough to the assignment so that you could interact with the consumers would help you pick up on necessary cues to complete the assignment. I now see that it takes more than a 15-minute conversation with a consumer prior to an event to grasp some of the fine details of a culture. It may mean taking time to research the culture or event, not with the intention to know everything, but as a way to reduce the possibility of having an embarrassing faux pas myself. Getting additional information on my own would act as a resource to help alleviate the pressure of various assignments and allow me to keep accepting any assignment with the knowledge that I have access to meet the ever-changing demands of the field of interpreting.

All the information discussed in the video was helpful toward helping me broaden my cultural awareness. Most specifically was when Ramos retold the story of a deaf Cuban man being arrested by the police after the police officer tried to communicate with the man in ASL rather than understanding that he needed someone who could use his native Cuban signed language. Ramos' story points out how the multitude of Hispanic cultures, including Mexican, Spanish, Puerto Rican, Dominican, and so on, are all blanketed under the heading of Latin American without even considering the various cultures and spoken and signed languages of each country. Busby also pointed out that there are over 500 nations in Native American culture and over 250 languages. So, imagine the various signed languages that culture holds and the limited amount of interpreters available to meet the cultural equivalence. When Ramos mentioned that a Cuban sign language

interpreter was doing the work that the ASL interpreter could not complete and was denied payment due to her lack of certification, I was appalled. I thought how unjust the system could be even when there is a demand for her skills. I agree that showing you are qualified is important, but I felt so strongly about the situation, that if I were the interpreter in that situation, I would have taken her information and mailed her the check I received from that assignment myself.

I began to look at my views of multicultural diversity of the deaf community and how they have changed since watching the video. The video was an eye opener to me being closed-minded toward deaf culture. Though I feel that I am aware of many cultures within the hearing community, I unintentionally looked at the deaf community as mainly Caucasian-American, using only languages within the pendulum of ASL to various signed English systems. I could blame my ignorance on my limited encounter with the deaf community where I have mainly come across deaf Caucasian-Americans. Somehow, my mind equated the majority as the only culture represented, even though I am very aware of the difference in hearing culture. I looked at what would make me think this way. It could be my hearing privilege that makes me look at deafness under one umbrella, or maybe if I had been caught up on my reading of chapter 3 in the class textbook for class, I would have already had insight and not been so surprised by the variety of cultures within Native American culture alone. Nevertheless, I have a new awareness of the variety of cultures within the deaf community, and I believe this awareness will help me maintain the ability to work with the diversity of deaf cultures.

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*Evaluation: As required, Cathyann summarized key points clearly and highlighted cultural missteps presented in the videos. Far beyond that, she critically examined her own beliefs, cross-cultural behavior, and biases. Cathyann's work is concise, thoughtful, and always holds my interest. What the student took away from this assignment was more than what she expected at the onset and in the end more than I ever anticipated.*



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## The Importance of Tradition or Fashion in “Everyday Use”: A Patchwork Quilt

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*Tiffany Kahn*

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Barbara Butler

Assignment: *Write a literary research paper.  
Incorporate eight or more secondary sources in your  
analysis.*

The story “Everyday Use” by Alice Walker reflects the importance of tradition within a family and whether fashion should overpower tradition. Tradition is more important than fashion; tradition honors culture in a family and can be fashionable all at once. This story expresses the importance of using items to their full potential, which has been a major goal in past history as well as in the present society. The main idea of “Everyday Use” is centered around a quilt that could be used as a fashionable decoration or as a bedspread. Quilts are works of art that are made from pieces of fabric; these pieces are sewn together into one big sheet or piece of fabric. Alice Walker constructed “Everyday Use” as if she were constructing a quilt, by piecing four aspects of literature together as though she were stitching a quilt. She incorporates or uses these aspects to build and develop the story. The story itself as a whole could symbolize a quilt. Alice Walker combines the aspects of setting, symbolism, character, and irony to show the importance or significance of art as a daily heirloom; quilts represent tradition and are meant to be used.

The first aspect, setting, is in the South at a simple home, and this setting affects the story. The yard was very

simple, not extravagant, and very plain. Mama explains, “A yard like this is more comfortable than most people know. It is not just a yard. It is like an extended living room. When the hard clay is swept clean as a floor and the fine sand around the edges lined with tiny, irregular grooves, anyone can come and sit and look up into the elm tree and wait for the breezes that never come inside the house” (455). This demonstrates the simplicity of the yard, that it was very dull and bare. It reflects the family’s lack of desire to be fancy and extravagant. They like it the way it is and don’t care how it looks. David Cowart feels that the yard gave an idea of the atmosphere, the desire to honor culture and tradition and live a simple life (24–25). The yard was explained to be very simple and plain, and the mother liked it. She did not complain about it because the simplicity of the yard showed that she did not have a desire to worry about fanciness or how it might look to others. She cared more about her culture and tradition in her family than being fashionable. The mother was not ashamed or embarrassed by her yard. Houston A. Baker Jr. and Charlotte Pierce-Baker point out that Dee, Mama’s older daughter, doesn’t want to see everything, just what she wants; she is embarrassed by her family’s home (161). This idea provides support to the yard not being fancy or very attractive to the eye. Dee liked fancy things and attractive things; she cared only about fashion. Mama expresses, “No doubt when Dee sees it she will want to tear it down” (457). As Cowart describes, in general the yard shows the simple life or non-extravagant life of the South; it represents the desire to honor culture and tradition, not the need to be fashionable (24–25). Cowart says, “In its stark vacuity the yard evokes the minimalist lives of poor people; yet the author describes that emptiness in terms suggestive of spiritual wealth” (25).

The house is also said to be very simple. Mama describes the house: “It is three rooms, just like the one that burned, except the roof is tin; they don’t make shingle roofs any more. There are no windows, just some holes cut in the sides, like the port holes in a ship, but not round and not square, with rawhide holding the shutters up on the outside. This house is in a pasture, too, like the other one” (457). The fact that the house had only three rooms showed that it was very small, reflecting its simplicity.

The windows being cut out of the walls and the fact that they weren't round or even show that the family did not have a lot of money; this description is not the normal house. It makes it sound as if they made or constructed it by hand due to the rawhide holding the shutters together. This reflects the fact that when slaves were finally freed, they did not have much money. This explanation of the home leads to the idea that the story took place during the period in which African-Americans were gaining their footing and trying to establish lives of their own. Many freed slaves could not afford to move North or to move into a home that was properly built. Many also did not want to leave their relatives or friends they had made. They had to learn how to read and write in order to get jobs, and the transition from slavery to freedom took several years. Mama's statement about snuff at the end of the story gives a sense of the culture in which the story took place. This culture was very simple and not into beauty; Mama and Maggie don't want to be fashion statements. Mama says, "After we watched the car dust settle I asked Maggie to bring me a dip of snuff" (461).

The setting draws attention to the symbolism that plays a part in the story "Everyday Use," providing extra meaning and detail. There are four distinct symbols, including the yard, the Polaroid picture, Dee's action of putting her sunglasses on, and the quilts. Cowart explains that the yard symbolizes a simple way of living life, not a fancy or extravagant life (24-25). The aspect of symbol is expressed when Dee takes a Polaroid picture of her mother and sister when she first arrives. The Bakers explain that the Polaroid picture represents Dee's limited vision (161). Dee wants to see only certain things. She likes art and takes the picture to frame as art work. Since a photograph captures only a part of what is seen, it represents her limited vision. The Bakers state, "Her goals include the appropriation of exactly what *she* needs to remain fashionable in the eyes of the world of pretended wholeness, a world of banal television shows, framed and institutionalized art, and Polaroid cameras—devices that instantly process and record experience as 'framed' photograph" (161).

The third symbol in "Everyday Use" is the action of Dee putting on her sunglasses. At the end of the story, Mama explains, "She put on some sunglasses that hid everything

above the tip of her nose and her chin" (461). The critics Houston A. Baker Jr. and Charlotte Pierce-Baker express that Dee's action of putting on her sunglasses represents Dee's point of view of how she looked at things, through obscured vision (315). She only wanted to see what she wanted; Dee did not want to accept certain things because they embarrassed her. She didn't see things as clearly, or she saw things differently. The last symbols are the quilts themselves. The Bakers' idea is that quilts represent or symbolize a history/story of the person who made them (156). When African-Americans made quilts, the pieces of fabric they used contained a story about their lives or experiences. The pieces of a quilt are like pieces of a person's life put together to describe them. The pieces tell a story. Walker describes that Grandma Dee's dresses, Grandpa Jarrell's shirts, and a tiny piece of Great Grandpa Ezra's uniform from the Civil War were contained in the quilts (460).

The third aspect of literature that is significant in "Everyday Use" is character, which is expressed through four characters who are quite different; the mother is bold, round, and dynamic; Maggie is shy, flat, and dynamic; and Dee is greedy, round, and static. The mother, a major character, is strong and bold because she does masculine chores. She is not glitzy and glamorous but is matter of fact and plain. Mama states, "In real life I am a large, big-boned woman with rough man-working hands. In winter I wear flannel nightgowns to bed and overalls during the day" (456). She also states, "I was always better at a man's job" (457). The mother is explained in great detail by Walker. Walker expresses Mama's feelings, her physical appearance, and her abilities. The mother describes her dream to be on a TV show. Mama exclaims, "Sometimes I dream a dream in which in which Dee and I are suddenly brought together on a TV program of this sort" (456). The mother is dynamic because at first she does not stand up to Dee and tell her that she is not going to get the quilts. Later, she finally stands up to Dee, and she gives the quilts to Maggie. In the end, she sticks to her wishes. The mother says, "I promised to give them quilts to Maggie, for when she marries John Thomas" (460). Towards the end, Mama explains, "I did something I never had done before: hugged Maggie to me, then dragged her on into the room, snatched the quilts out of Miss Wangero's hands and dumped them into Maggie's lap" (461). The

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fact that the mother calls Dee Miss Wangero, when she had been calling her Dee, shows that she feels that Dee is not the same. Dee had changed and no longer was Mama going to give Dee her way. Anne Z. Mickelson is a critic that feels the mother has a cheerful, happy personality by saying: “There is a delightful insight into the common sense and humor of black country people in ‘Everyday Use,’ in which the mother makes a choice concerning her concept of ‘tradition’” (406).

Another major character is Maggie, the daughter who is shy and has a personality that makes her stand back and hide. She is unattractive because of the burns she received in a house fire. Her thoughts and feelings aren’t greatly expressed so she is a flat character that is dynamic; she sticks to supporting her tradition and heritage but transforms to a happy, unhidden person at the end. Marianne Hirsch explains, “The transformation Maggie undergoes in the story—from the frightened attempt to hide, to her inarticulate angry sucking in of the breath, to her short concession speech and finally her *real* smile—charts her competitive relationship with her sister, as well as her own relationship to her past and her mother” (205). Mama says, “Maggie smiled; maybe at the sunglasses. But a real smile, not scared” (461). Maggie is similar to the mother in two ways. She is uneducated like the mother, and they both honor tradition and don’t fuss over fashion and beauty. Houston A. Baker Jr. and Charlotte Pierce-Baker give the idea that the mother and Maggie are similar in that they are characters that show the fact that Southern African-American women worked with and made do with what they had, surviving the Jim Crow period (158). Their simplistic qualities matched the qualities that former slaves possessed due to the circumstances they were under. They did not have much, and they made do with what they did have. Slaves had survived through hard work. The Bakers suggest the work of former slaves:

The Johnson women who populate the generations represented in Walker’s short story “Everyday Use,” are inhabitants of southern cabins who have always worked with “scraps” and succession of mothers and daughters surviving the ignominies of Jim Crow life and passing on ancestral blessings to descendents. (158)

There is a definite difference in Maggie’s opinion of heritage and Dee’s. Marianne Hirsch exclaims,

For her, heritage is something to be displayed on the coffee table and on the wall; for her sister Maggie, on the other hand, who had been promised the quilts made by her grandmother and aunt out of pieces of old clothing, the past is a living reality in which she participates both by planning to use the quilts on her bed, and by learning how to quilt herself. (202–03)

Dee looks at heritage as fashion or artwork that should be on display, while Maggie honors the significance of the history contained in the quilts and looks at heritage as something that can be expressed through the art of quilt making. She feels these quilts should be used.

Another major character is Dee, the other daughter, who is the direct opposite of Maggie. She is into fashion and art for the beauty and aesthetics. She does not like the idea that Maggie would use the quilts as a bedspread; she feels that they should be hung as pieces of art on the wall. Dee is greedy because she wants everything that she finds to be a piece of art. She comes to visit and wants the churn, dasher, and two quilts. Dee is round because her feelings of why she should have the quilts are expressed and quite a bit of information is given about her. However, she is static because she does not change her philosophy that fashion is more important than tradition. Maria Lauret, a critic, says that Dee’s character reflects the actual movement of some African-Americans who migrated North looking for a better life. Dee goes to school, leaving home, and comes back not wanting to be part of or recognized as African-American (17–18). She even changes her name from Dee to Wangero. She says that the family oppressed her. Dee exclaims, “I couldn’t bear it any longer, being named after the people who oppress me” (458).

The only thing Dee cares about is fashion; as Barabra Christian says, “She has returned to her black roots because now they are fashionable” (44). The mother’s relationship or feeling toward her two daughters is both the same and different. Obviously, Mama is the mother to Maggie as well as Dee, and she shows her love for both of them. Alice Hall Petry explains that the mother’s love for Dee is shown when she calls her by her new name

Wangero (37). She would not have called her by her new name unless she truly loved her; Dee's changing of her name was a type of insult, not only to Mama but to their entire family. Petry also explains that Mama's love for Maggie is expressed in her ability to reject and decline Dee's request for the quilts. She stood up to her selfish greediness and followed her promise to Maggie. As stated by Petry, "It is her love for her daughter Dee that enables Mama to call her 'Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo' in acknowledgment of her new Afro identity, but her equally strong love for her other child, the passive Maggie, which enables her to resist Dee/Wangero's demand for old quilts (Maggie's wedding present) to decorate her apartment" (37). However, Mama expresses anger toward Dee. When Mama imagines a TV show, she fears that Dee and she would have an angry confrontation. Marianne Hirsch says, "As she fantasizes this happy reconciliation, the mother immediately adds an alternate, much angrier version in parentheses: '(A pleasant surprise of course: what would they do if parent and child came on the show only to curse out and insult each other?)'" (204). Hirsch also explains that Mama was angry at Maggie's qualities. Hirsch says, "For if the mother has been angry with the powerful Dee all along, she has also been enraged at the powerless pathetic Maggie, calling her a 'lame animal,' describing her 'dopey hangdog look'" (205–06). More anger towards Dee is expressed when Mama says, "I did something I never had done before: hugged Maggie to me, then dragged her into the room, snatched the quilts out of Miss Wangero's hands and dumped them into Maggie's lap" (461).

The irony in the story connects to the character of Dee; irony is found in Dee's contradictions. There are two different points of irony, and both have to do with Dee. David Cowart points out that Dee does not want to be similar or compared to African-Americans, which is her nationality, but she fights and argues that she wants and admires the quilts, which hold a lot of African-American history (21–22). She is contradicting herself. The quilts contain her family's history, and her family is African-American, yet she does not want to be associated with African-Americans. Mel Watkins says that irony exists in the fact that Dee leaves when she claims that her mother and sister don't understand their heritage due to their desire to use the quilts; Dee is the one who doesn't

understand her heritage (403). Their heritage was one that made quilts which were meant to be used instead of hung as artwork. Quilts can serve both purposes if they are used as bedspreads because they decorate rooms with their patterns. Barbara Christian points out that there is irony in the fact that Dee changed her name to Wangero yet still wants the quilts (44). Her whole name change was to get rid of her tie or history with the African-American culture, yet she admires the quilts that contained so much of their history. She did not realize or want to recognize that the quilts were more than a piece of art that serves for aesthetics, that they contained African-American history. Christian also gives the idea that there is irony in Dee's last statement in which she does not understand the idea of heritage being passed on (45). Dee tells Maggie, "You ought to try to make something of yourself, too, Maggie" (461). However, Maggie has chosen to follow her heritage and honor the tradition of her family. She did make something of herself.

In contrast to all the irony connected to Dee, Marianne Hirsch points out that there was irony in the mother's beliefs versus her daughter's (Dee). The mother was very calm about waiting for Dee's arrival in the yard, which Mama had liked; however, she talks about aggressiveness and seems somewhat angry with Dee. Hirsch explains the existence of irony:

Contrary to her own self-assessment, the mother-narrator has succeeded in establishing, through subtle manipulation of imagery and irony, the quality of the rift between her world and her daughter's and has suggested that under the serene surface of the yard, lurks anger and shimmering violence. References to slaughtered pigs, burned-down houses, hurtful looks, and violent alien words paint feelings and gestures of mutual aggression, even as the mother calmly sits and waits for her daughter's return. (205)

Hirsch is describing a hidden irony. The mother acts calm and seems to be happy about seeing her daughter Dee, but in her descriptions of thoughts, she is showing anger toward Dee. Hirsch also states, "Through irony she is able to modulate her reactions and communicate to the reader/herself, the distance she insists on maintaining from Dee's reality, without visibly rejecting her" (203).

## The Importance of Tradition or Fashion in "Everyday Use": A Patchwork Quilt

The story "Everyday Use" is likened to "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens." Alice Walker was interested in the craft of quilt making, and she used it as a topic for these two pieces of literature. Barbara Christian exclaims the link between these two works:

Walker is drawn to the integral and economical process of quilt-making as a model for her own craft. For through it, one can create out of seemingly disparate everyday materials patterns of clarity, imagination, and beauty. Two of her works especially emphasize the idea of this process: her classic essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" and her short story "Everyday Use." Each piece complements the other and articulates the precise meaning of the quilt as idea and process for this writer. (43)

Walker liked to express the uses of everyday materials and their significance, which she demonstrates through her writing and different stories. Gail Keating also explains that there is a link between Walker's "Everyday Use" and "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens." Keating says, "In 'In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens,' Walker gives several examples of the types of creativity these women used to express their inner selves. One is a quilt that hangs in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C." (103). Keating suggests, "The message Walker wishes to convey to us is women have always expressed themselves, whether it be through quilting, sewing, cooking, canning, or gardening" (105). These critics are proving the relationship between Walker's different works and her main idea in writing.

In conclusion, Alice Walker uses her ideas of the ways women express themselves as a basis for her stories, especially her short story "Everyday Use." She took the concept of quilt-making and defines it and the idea that tradition is important. She argues that heritage is expressed in tradition and that heritage can be represented by the art of quilt making. She did not say that art was not fashionable and important, but the quilts as an expression of heritage are meant to be used and tradition passed down. Quilts can be works of art and at the same time useful items; they can be decorative while they are being used. She took the process of quilt making and related it to the construction of "Everyday Use." The literary aspects such as setting, symbolism, character, and irony can be linked or connected to form a story just as a quilt

is made of many different pieces that are sewn together to form a finished product. For Alice Walker, the finished product is her short story "Everyday Use," which teaches the importance of tradition. Greediness, selfishness, and wanting everything for the wrong reasons should be thought about. Her story teaches that having everything and only wanting something for aesthetics is not a good way of life. "Everyday Use" is a patchwork quilt.

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Evaluation: *Using "the integral and economical process of quilt-making as a model for her own craft," Tiffany writes a research paper graced by "clarity, imagination, and beauty."*

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# On the Importance of Art

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Shannon Kipferl

Course: Spanish 205

(Spanish Intensive Oral Practice)

Instructor: Antonio Iacopino

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*Assignment: Students were asked to choose a topic and write in Spanish about it, in response to a number of questions. Shannon chose to write about the importance of art, addressing such questions as whether art is important; whether it should help to improve society; and whether the conception of art is evolving over time.*

Creo que el arte es importante porque es una forma de expresión, comunicación, exploración, imaginación, entendimiento cultural e histórico. Es una forma de proveer belleza, color y luz a nuestros pensamientos y lo que necesitamos expresar. Nos permite ver a través de los ojos de un artista incluso lugares donde nunca hemos estado. Captura un sentimiento o momento en el tiempo, y lo expresa cuando las palabras no son suficientes. El arte es una forma de expresar vida, puede hacer del mundo en el que vivimos un mejor lugar, sacando nuestra creatividad y explorando nuestra imaginación al igual que eleva nuestro espíritu. El arte no tiene límites ni margen de error. Es una forma de expresar nuestros pensamientos o visiones más allá de la capacidad de las palabras.

Siento que todos participamos de alguna forma en actividades artísticas porque el arte está en todas partes. Algunos se expresan con música, baile, movimientos, esculturas, pintura, dibujos, poesía y hasta la cocina. Como vemos, el arte puede venir en una infinidad de formas y podemos participar en él incluso como la parte receptora. Puede ser usado para demostrar tus sentimientos, ya sea amor, odio, felicidad o tristeza, puede animar a alguien o todo lo contrario. Podemos encontrar arte en todas partes y cada uno puede interpretarlo a su manera. El arte es parte de nuestras vidas, desde nuestra más tierna infancia, empezamos a aprender a través de nuestro sentido de diseño, colores, texturas y sonidos. Estamos rodeados de todo eso.

En el pasado, la escritura no era usada por las primeras civilizaciones porque no tenían un método, sin embargo, eran capaces de comunicarse y expresarse con otros medios o tipos de arte que han venido cambiando a lo largo de los siglos, siempre evolucionando con todos los avances que ha tenido la humanidad. En la antigüedad sólo era considerado arte lo que la sociedad elitista decidía. Considero que el arte ha evolucionado porque ahora los artistas pueden expresar o exponer sus obras de alguna u otra forma y llegar a las personas que aprecian lo que ellos expresan sin importar que estén en contra del gobierno o que presenten una protesta ante la sociedad. Las críticas al sistema ayudan a mejorar la sociedad si se toman constructivamente, como considero que toda expresión de arte debería ser tomada. Muchas veces encuentras en una canción lo que te había estado molestando, o te hace ver algunas cosas que no habías tomado en cuenta. Es ahí donde recae la importancia de la

## On the Importance of Art

música que es una forma de expresión artística con tanta difusión en el mundo.

El arte proporciona una de las mayores oportunidades para expresar nuestra inconformidad con las cosas que el gobierno y la sociedad hacen, es una forma de levantar la voz. Es decir, no toda la belleza que envuelve una expresión artística sirve para hablar de las cosas lindas de la vida, si no para poder hacerle llegar a todo el mundo nuestra forma de pensar que muchas veces es compartida por muchos que no encuentran la forma de decirlo o plasmarlo.

Un mundo sin arte sería un mundo sin música, colores, vestidos, fotos, imaginación, sin creatividad. Todos seríamos iguales y todo se vería igual; un mundo donde nadie tendría nada que decir ni expresar, donde todos pasaríamos sin dejar huella o una enseñanza para las generaciones futuras. Un mundo donde nadie apreciaría la belleza de la tierra y la humanidad.

La tierra es el trabajo artístico de dios, la forma en que las hojas cuelgan de los árboles es arte, las nubes que vuelan en el cielo y las flores que nos regalan sus colores, la música de las olas rompiendo en la orilla y el olor de la lluvia son una demostración de arte, así como las sombras de las puestas de sol, todo nuestro entorno es una forma de arte. No hay forma de vivir sin ello, ya que la vida misma es un arte.

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*Evaluation: Ms. Kipferl manifests in her response an impressive command of Spanish. Her analysis of art and its societal implications is profound and elegant in both language and content.*

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# Does True Love Really Conquer All?

Noelle LeBlanc

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Kris Piepenburg

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

“True Love. Is it really necessary?” Wislawa Szymborska asked the ultimate question in her poem “True Love” (27). So, is it? A more pertinent question may even be, is it real? For centuries, people have based life-altering decisions on true love or used it as an excuse for any irresponsible thing they may have done. It is what people strive for, what they want more than anything else, but why? Why is it that we cannot, as humans, seem to be happy while being independent? It may be nice to have someone with us to keep us company, but why are we so reliant on that? Why is it that love is all that matters? Many people with amazing dreams for themselves will throw it all away for their “true love.” Many a path has been thrown off course by just the mere prospect of someone finding the love of their life. If it really is so important, why does it come along so rarely? Not only do we not know when it will show up, but we do not even know what form it will be in when we are finally presented with it, if we are presented with it at all. With such low odds of success, it is a wonder why people continue to put their time and energy into the search for that one true love. Yet, for an unknown reason, we cannot allow ourselves to give up.

In “The Love of My Life,” by T. Coraghessan Boyle, two young people deal with—or do not deal with, as the case may be—the results of their actions when they fall in love. The two characters, China and Jeremy, are a young couple just graduating from high school and finally moving into the adult world. They believe that they are responsible enough to make their own decisions; yet, when they do, things go horribly wrong. They get pregnant, but

refuse to handle it. They do not tell anyone and do not get the help they need, inevitably waiting until the last second, and then killing the child by wrapping it in plastic and throwing it into the dumpster of the motel that they are at. The baby, made out of their supposed love, was not worth enough to them to actually live. Even if the two of them did not want to or could not take care of the child on their own, they could not even give their love the chance to survive. They get caught, of course, as irresponsible teenagers are wont to do, and when their love is put to the real test, everything goes wrong, as should have been expected from the beginning. “The Love of My Life” is a brutally honest, demonstrative story that shows the inner workings of the minds of teenagers who, through thinking they are all grown up, show the world just how much they are not. China is a book-smart, naïve person who lives entirely in a world of ideals that are set by her fantasies, but does not realize how unlike real life they actually are, while Jeremy is a lonely, attention-deprived teenager who has obvious abandonment issues that he tries to move past by focusing entirely on China. “The Love of My Life” seems to be sending the message that love can be very destructive when approached with immaturity and is often an excuse for all illogical behaviors.

Boyle based his short story, “The Love of My Life,” on the real-life case of Amy Grossberg and Brian Peterson. About coming up with the story, Boyle stated:

When I write stories, they just sort of happen, and I read this newspaper article, I think I only had one article, I don't even know where I saw it, probably the *L.A. Times*, I know it was reported much more widely on the East coast than out West where I live. I stuck it away and then I reread it a couple times and just thought about it, and the story began. (qtd. in “Comments” par. 3)

In the real-life event, high school students Amy and Brian met through mutual friends in their sophomore years and started dating soon after. For the remainder of their high school years, they stayed together, going to dances and being the couple that everyone knew around school. They were always together and seemed as though they were the perfect couple. That is, until they became pregnant and their whole lives changed. Going off to college, the



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pregnancy, the birth, the discovery; every moment led right up to the next where something worse happened when they did not think it could. They went through everything together: the birth, the trial, the sentencing, etc. All of the love that they had for one another just did not seem to be enough.

In the story, China is the honor student: that overachiever trying to be the best, but just behind the only two people who do better than she does. She is obviously very focused on school and doing well. She is an extremely intelligent girl, yet her intelligence is very centered on academics. She does not have any intelligence when it comes to the real world, nor any street smarts to speak of. A good example of this is near the beginning of the story, when she thinks about their relationship and how they have “been having sex ever since they started going together at the end of their junior year, but it was always sex in the car or sex on a blanket or the lawn, hurried sex, nothing like she wanted it to be. She kept thinking of the way it was in the movies.... That was how it was supposed to be” (Boyle 529). She is obviously very idealistic, even when it makes no sense. She is so focused on how everything “should” be that she completely misses the reality. This is a common problem among young people, but seeing as she believes herself to be very mature and responsible, it is just ironic. Their whole relationship, in just this moment, seems like it has pending disaster written all over it with expectations like this. A huge part of their relationship revolves around:

... the sex. They were careful, always careful—I will never be like those breeders that bring their puffed-up squalling little red-faced babies to class, she told him, and he agreed . . . the breeders overpopulating an overpopulated world and ruining their own lives in the process—but she had forgotten to pack her pills and he had only two condoms with him, and it wasn't as if there were a drugstore around the corner. (532)

With everything that they both think about their relationship, especially with all of China's expectations for perfect sex, you would think they would be more responsible. Yes, everyone forgets things from time to time, but these are things of vital importance. It is like

forgetting the medication that keeps you alive and, therefore, you die. It seems drastic, but that seems to be the exact result: death. Just going off to college seemed like such a mature experience for her:

On the day they'd left—and no, she didn't want her parents driving her up there, she was an adult and she could take care of herself—Jeremy followed her as far as the Bear Mountain Bridge and they pulled off the road and held each other till the sun fell down into the trees . . . She was pregnant. Pregnant, they figured, since the camping trip, and it was their secret. (532)

Secrets never turn out well. No matter what reason you have for keeping them, they either come out in the end or eat away at you until you cannot handle it anymore: especially this kind of secret, where something, an actual human being, will result from it. China is so caught up with being mature, that she becomes more and more immature by the moment, with every decision she makes, and worst of all, she does not even seem to realize it.

Jeremy is the typical teenager, into himself, his friends, and his girlfriend. He has a very small amount of insight about the rest of the world. He just could not seem to get past all of the views of himself. His girlfriend was pregnant with his baby, and all he could think about was the fact that “He couldn't have a life. Couldn't be a freshman. Couldn't wake up in the morning and tumble into the slow steady current of the world. All he could think of was her. Or not simply her—her and him, and what had come between them” (533). Through the entire beginning of the story, they are constantly thinking about how important their relationship is and how in love they are. If they were so in love, would it not be logical to assume that a product of their immense love, as they see it, would be welcome? They may be young, but they created something special, but they cannot view anything beyond themselves and how their lives will change. Though, while you may think that the pregnancy would force them into maturity, he still thinks only of himself: ““And what am I supposed to do?” he demanded in a high, childish whine, as if he were the one who'd been knocked up, and she didn't want to hear it, she didn't” (Boyle 534). Even though she is not much better, she is the one going

through the pregnancy with her body changing and all of the raging hormones. She almost has an excuse. That is the problem with the immaturity; people just cannot view beyond themselves and think about someone else for a second. Even with them being in love, they cannot just think about the other person for a few seconds. He had the logical decision, though he did not present it in a comforting way, not thinking of her feelings, as he constantly advised her to act:

"You've got to get rid of it," he told her in the motel room that had become a prison. "Go to a clinic," he told her for the hundredth time, and outside it was raining—or, no, it was clear and cold that night, a foretaste of winter. "I'll find the money—you know I will." . . . "I can't," she murmured . . . "I don't want anyone to know," she said. (533)

Abortion would have been the more humane thing to do, the more responsible thing, but he was just pressuring her. She was not able to look past the pressure and see that he was making a good point. She was not thinking about keeping the baby or giving it up for adoption, but she was just in complete denial about it, and he needed to make her take it seriously instead of just living in the fantasy world that she is a permanent resident of. Jeremy is just too immature to think beyond himself and make a real decision in a way that everyone can be happy with.

China and Jeremy, as a couple, epitomize the immature love scenario. Nathaniel Branden, in his essay, "Immature Love," states "So their relationships tend to be dependent and manipulative . . . the encounter of two incomplete beings who look to love to solve the problem of their internal deficiencies, to finish magically the unfinished business of childhood, to fill up the holes in their personality, to make of 'love' a substitute for evolution to maturity and self-responsibility" (872). China is the manipulative one in the relationship. She does whatever she can to get what she wants. Jeremy is the one with the problems in his childhood. His father passed away when he was young, and his mother dealt with it by spending mass amounts of time with her many boyfriends and not spending near enough time with her son or giving him the attention that he needs. How little time he's spent with his parents is shown when Boyle

writes about Jeremy's thoughts when talking to his mother on the phone: "He tried to picture her, but he couldn't. He even closed his eyes a minute, to concentrate, but there was nothing there" (529), not even an image in his head. Another interaction that shows their roles is when they are at the motel in the middle of the story and "She said one thing then, one thing only, her voice as pinched and hollow as the sound of the wind in the gutters: 'Get it out of me.' . . . And then her voice, the first intelligible thing she'd said in an hour: 'Get rid of it. Just get rid of it'" (535). She is the one in control of the operation, telling him what to do and taking the initiative, for once. Then, like a puppy, he does whatever she says and does not even think about it. He wants to please her because she is the one person who actually gives him the attention and love that he never got as a child, that he would do anything for her. He was only thinking of her, and it is much later when he is thinking back, "Only then did he think of that thing in the garbage sack and the sound it had made—its body had made—when he flung it into the Dumpster like a sack of flour and the lid slammed down on it" (536). They both live entirely in the moment. They do not do it in a way that is healthy and fun, taking advantage of life, but in the way where they do not think about the consequences of their actions. Their whole relationship is just the here and now. They seem to think that they will be together forever, but they are not thinking about how that can work with everything they do. China and Jeremy are in their own world and do not think of anyone else but themselves and their reputations.

I find it amazing how, even after only reading one article, Boyle seemed to get these characters right on in his story. He even stated, "I don't know anything about the real people or the real events except from having read this one newspaper article. That's it" (qtd. in "Comments" par. 6). China and Jeremy are so much like Amy and Brian, respectively, with the way they act and the way they think, it is surreal. The two of them staying together through everything seems like a good example of Toufexis' statement that "the continued presence of a partner gradually steps up production in the brain of endorphins. . . these are soothing substances. Natural painkillers, they give lovers a sense of security, peace, and calm" (3). Going through all of the legal proceedings

that Amy Grossberg and Brian Peterson went through, it must have been really helpful to know someone was on their side. Having been away from each other in their separate confinements, “after having spent two months in tiny cells, Amy surrounded by women and Brian by men, they almost jumped into each other’s arms once back home in Wyckoff” (Most 211). Even during time apart while waiting upon trials for a crime they committed together, their feelings for each other never wavered. No matter what, at the end of the day, they wanted to see one another more than they wanted to see anyone else.

A baby is a symbol of love. Yet, in “The Love of My Life,” Jeremy thinks to himself:

And what had he done to deserve it? He still couldn’t understand. That thing in the Dumpster—and he refused to call it human, let alone a baby—was nobody’s business but his and China’s. . . . *I didn’t do anything wrong.* . . . There was no baby. There was nothing but a mistake. . . . Another unwanted child in an overpopulated world? They should have given him a medal. (539)

The two of them had all of their opinions about young people having babies and bringing them to class and ruining everyone’s lives, and that was all they could think about. They never thought about the baby and how it was a life. Even though it should have represented their love, and maybe it did, they just killed it off because it did not suit them, and in the worst way possible. At the end of the day, they still did not even understand how what they did was wrong. Their love was supposed to mean everything and save them from everything, but Jeremy’s lawyer got word that China and her family were saying, “Jeremy’s the one that threw it in the Dumpster, and they’re saying he acted alone. She took a polygraph test day before yesterday . . . she’s going to testify against him” (540). Their love had often been their excuse, and now it had caused them to start to point blame. The two of them acted together, and while a case could be made as to why it was the fault of one or the other more, the true fact is that they are both entirely responsible. And still, after everything, with everything in mind, China cannot move out of her fantasy world, still thinking “He was Jeremy. He was the love of her life. And she closed her eyes and clung to him

as if that were all that mattered” (541). After the trial, after the blame, after the accusations, she just cannot move past it. She lives in the past, the only place she was truly happy because she did not have to be in the real world. Once she was forced into the real world, she refused it and reverted back to her old way of thinking. Jeremy may have grown up, starting to realize how destructive everything was, but China is completely absorbed in her own world, with neither of them ever truly thinking about the baby that they brought into and out of the world, but just how everything hurt them.

The story, “The Love of My Life,” is left mostly unresolved. The audience is left wondering how it would turn out and what really happened. The real-life case, however, had a real-life ending for Amy and Brian. They were both “charged with two counts of first-degree murder. One carries the death penalty; the other, life in prison without chance of release” (“College Couple Reunite in Courtroom” par. 3). The charges were eventually reduced to second-degree murder, and both pled guilty to manslaughter. According to one article, “Peterson was sentenced to 2 years in prison. Grossberg received 2½ years” (“Prosecutors Oppose Shorter Prison Term for Peterson” par. 2). Their lawyers tried to plead to get their sentences reduced on account of good behavior, but were denied. Amy and Brian only ended up serving time of 2 and 1½ years, respectively. Those years may have been tough on them, but it looks like a cakewalk compared to what Melissa Drexler got. Robert Hanley, in his article “Woman Gets 15 Years in Death of Newborn at Prom,” reports on a case of infanticide similar to the Grossberg/Peterson case. He states that “both cases of infanticide [involved] New Jersey teen-agers” (Hanley par. 3). Why did Melissa get a much harsher sentence than Amy and Brian? Ms. Drexler pled “guilty to aggravated manslaughter, which is a more serious charge than the manslaughter counts Miss Grossberg and Mr. Peterson accepted” (Hanley par. 5). It seems like a huge difference in sentencing, between two and fifteen years. According to “The ‘Lectric Law Library’s Lexicon on Manslaughter,” manslaughter is defined as “the unlawful killing of a human being without malice or premeditation, either express or implied” (par. 1). Aggravated manslaughter, on the other hand, is when a person “recklessly causes the

death of another person under circumstances manifesting extreme indifference to human life" ("Aggravated Manslaughter" par. 1). Furthermore, to be found guilty of aggravated manslaughter, the prosecution must prove, beyond a reasonable doubt:

. . . that the defendant acted recklessly. A person who causes another's death does so recklessly when he/she is aware of and consciously disregards a substantial and unjustifiable risk that death will result from his/her conduct. The risk must be of such a nature and degree that, considering the nature and purpose of defendant's conduct and the circumstances known to defendant, his/her disregard of that risk is a gross deviation from the standard of conduct that a reasonable person would follow in the same situation. (par. 1)

Regardless of the punishments, why have there been so many cases of infanticide, or, in these cases specifically, neonaticide? As stated by Jon'a Meyer, "neonaticide will refer to the killing of a newborn on the day of its birth" (294). All throughout history, and even still in many cultures, newborns have been killed for many reasons. Whether they just wanted to get rid of the baby or if there was an actual ritual involved, it has been going on for centuries. Interestingly, most "contemporary neonaticides are rarely committed by men; they are most often committed by unmarried teenage mothers, who were in denial regarding or who concealed their pregnancies" (Meyer 295) such as in Ms. Drexler's case. That is one thing that makes the Grossberg/Peterson case so unique: the fact that Brian was involved the whole way through. A lot of cases of neonaticide coincide with a form of pregnancy denial. But, as Fox accurately observes, "[Amy]'s not denying that she's pregnant. She's acknowledging she's pregnant and saying it's the worst thing that could happen to her" (qtd. in Most 193). Her motives may have fallen in line with some of the contemplation in the article, "Infanticide and Neonaticide," such as:

. . . motives [ranging] from fear of their parents' reactions to their pregnancies to fear of desertion by their paramours to shame or negative social affects such as fear of curtailed educational attainment

resulting from an illegitimate birth. Typically, they have no prior criminal convictions. (Meyer 295)

Amy Grossberg and Brian Peterson are so alike the classic cases and so different that their case on its own is unique.

Even in the worst of times, there is always a bright side lurking near, if someone knows just the way to look for it. It may seem as though it would be unnecessary if people did not kill their newborn babies in the first place, but out of these cases of infanticide and neonaticide have come safety laws known as the Infant Safe Haven Laws. The Child Welfare Information Gateway has made sure that everyone knows that these laws exist and that they "generally allow the parent, or an agent of the parent, to remain anonymous and to be shielded from prosecution for abandonment or neglect in exchange for surrendering the baby to a safe haven. . . . To date, approximately 47 States and Puerto Rico have enacted safe haven legislation" (par. 1-2). With that many states in participation, it should be a simple choice to give the child up safely. With that in mind, most of the states also protect the anonymity of those individuals who give the child up safely. A few even allow a time period with which a parent can get the child back, having become cleared of the temporary insanity caused by the actual birthing process. With access this convenient, and with many states allowing for drop-off at many places, including hospitals, fire departments, police stations, and even churches, we can only hope that people will make at least one responsible decision and save the lives of these innocent children who have done nothing wrong.

"The Love of My Life" is an eye-opening story. Going through the relationship of China and Jeremy and showing how everything turned horribly against them shows how really anything could happen. This is especially true considering that it was based on a very real case. No one really realizes how every decision made, big or small, can vitally change everything. A seemingly small decision such as having sex with the person they love can have drastic consequences. Not wanting to deal with a problem will never come out well. Dealing with a problem in the wrong way can be just as bad. Wislawa Szymborska had the right idea, asking in her poem, "True Love," "What does the world get from two people who

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exist in a world of their own?" (lines 3-4). The story clearly answers her by showing readers how immature love can be and possibly how focusing so hard on love and nothing else can be destructive, not only to the two people involved, but to many other surrounding people. Maybe true love is something that people who are irresponsible focus on. Maybe with maturity, we grow and realize how real life is and how fake love is. What is certain in this story is that love really does not conquer all.

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Evaluation: *This is an unusual research paper that combines in-depth analysis of a contemporary short story and comparison with its real-life source. With this paper, Noelle has created quite an enlightening synthesis of materials.*

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## Shopping For More Than Just Goods?

Brittany Manning

Course: English 101 (Composition)

Instructor: Anthony Wisniewski

Assignment: *Write an essay, five pages long and incorporating five of the sources about shopping malls, in which you argue some interpretation or analysis about the role of the mall in American life, by comparing and contrasting the positions and arguments of your sources.*

*Your purpose must be to come to some interpretive position of your own regarding the role of the mall in American life, whether that position agrees with one or more of the sources, or comprises some original position of your own.*

At the mall, one can observe lifeless mannequins dressed in the latest fashions, extravagant window displays decked out with lace and jewels, a diverse group of rushing shoppers scattered throughout. But could the mall have more layers than what one just observes, or does the saying, "What you see is what you get," apply to the mall as well? Certain individuals examine the mall to a deeper degree and believe that the mall, indeed, has more layers than what one just observes. They believe malls can serve as civic and cultural centers, places to shop for American culture, prisons, refuges, or sacred spaces. However, malls can only become what the shoppers and mall management make them out to be. And considering most individuals are *only* there to shop for goods, or at least that is all they intend to get out of the experience, and mall management is primarily concerned with making a profit and not individuals' needs, most of the arguments exaggerate the extent to which malls can resemble certain places. Undoubtedly, all the assertions of what a mall can be do have some validity and logic, and malls do display some of the characteristics of each assertion, but they do it only to a limited extent.

Malls have the potential of becoming civic and cultural centers, but only to the degree that shoppers and mall management let them become as such. Spending a day at the mall, individuals may be getting their Christmas shopping done or treating themselves by buying a new pair of shoes after a day of hard work. But could the mall also help them satisfy their community needs? Victor Gruen, writer of "The Mall as Civic/Cultural Center," believes so: malls could "provide the needed place and opportunity for participation in modern community life" (279), and in the process, they could fulfill an individual's "civic, cultural, and social community needs" by including civic and educational facilities, such as meeting rooms and music schools (280). However, his vision has not thus far become much of a reality. Although malls bring together lots of individuals into one environment, the meaning of community has not been heavily fulfilled. According to the writer of "The Mall as Refuge," George Lewis, "these groups seldom share the common ties and engage in the sort of social interactions necessary to forge a sense of 'we-ness'—of community" (305). David Guterson, writer of "The Mall as Prison," also

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agrees, "It is facile to believe, from this vantage point, that the endless circumambulations of tens of thousands of strangers . . . resemble anything akin to community" (292). Many individuals are just intent on their shopping, not on connecting with other individuals.

In addition to what shoppers let malls become, mall managers and developers also play a role. They lure more shoppers in by creating an *illusion* that malls encourage community ties. On the contrary, they quietly work against a community developing because they do not want to attract non-shoppers. However, undeniably, some communities comprised of elders and teenagers have formed: "among the very sorts of persons the managers and developers do not want to see attracted to the mall—the non-shoppers—have arisen fledgling forms of community, characterized by primary ties, face to face interactions, daily meeting and the development of social networks" (Lewis 306). Hence, Gruen's vision does have some validity, as can be seen by the communities formed by elders and teenagers. In spite of this, the malls can become community centers only to the extent that it is allowed by customers and mall management, and since many individuals have not formed this "community," or at least are not looking to, Gruen overestimates the extent to which malls could become civic and cultural centers.

Malls have also been thought of culturally in the sense of helping an individual supposedly understand culture. "If we want to understand American culture," says James J. Farrell, writer of "Shopping for American Culture," "we must study life at America's shopping malls, for malls express our consumer culture, revealing us to ourselves." He believes that shopping is "an act of desire that is shaped individually and culturally" (268) and that individuals go to malls "to buy more important things—an identity, a secure sense of self, a set of social relationships, a deeper sense of community" (271). However, it is not definite that the majority of people in the mall go to buy those things. Maybe they are *just* going to the mall to look for that needed coat for the winter. Still, Farrell thinks individuals should think seriously about shopping centers. Nevertheless, since some people do not care about studying the culture expressed at malls, this "shopping for American culture" is not going to happen. While most of the points Farrell makes in his interpretation make sense if individuals *actually want to* understand the culture expressed at shopping malls, they

do not make complete sense due to some individuals not appreciating the potential culture that is offered within the malls.

Some also view malls as prisons or refuges, but these claims are exaggerated. One can notice in most malls that there are hardly any windows or clocks. Malls make people feel as though they are in a secluded "real world." David Guterson, writer of "The Mall as Prison," claims that "Getting lost, feeling lost, being lost—these states of mind are intentional features of the mall's psychological terrain" (288). He adds, "Malls will project a separate and distinct reality in which an 'outdoor café' is not outdoors" (Guterson 292). They will "be planets unto themselves, closed off from this world in the manner of space stations or of science fiction's underground cities" (Guterson 292). In similar fashion, inmates in prisons are segregated from the rest of the world. While Guterson's argument has some obvious logic, since in a way some people do feel secluded from the outside world when they are in the mall, it also has much exaggeration. When one is in the mall, the seclusion is not as heavy as Guterson asserts. Many times, just walking a few feet outside the mall can lead one near busy roads and other stores. So to say that malls are secluded and take people away from reality as prisons do is an overstatement. Additionally, there is a supposition by George Lewis that malls can serve as refuges, especially for teenagers and elders. Teenagers go there to hang out with friends and get away from home: "The mall is one of the few places teenagers can go in this society where they are...allowed to stay without being asked to leave" (Lewis 309). Elders go to the mall to keep themselves occupied and feel a sense of belonging. They can "find meaning in the construction and maintenance of networks, of personal relationships with others like themselves" (Lewis 308). For these reasons, particular individuals feel comfortable with the malls and routinely come to them. Although malls can serve as refuges for those groups, malls do not necessarily serve as that for everyone in those groups. Therefore, Lewis's explanation is overstated.

There has also been the embellished assertion that malls are sacred places. Malls incorporate symbols of sacredness into their design: "For within the labyrinth of the typical mall, we experience water, light, trees, words, food, music, and bodies, the combined effect of which is to make us feel entranced, dazed, disoriented, and,

finally, lacking something," says Jon Pahl in his article, "The Mall as Sacred Space" (295). With the continuous stimuli of all these symbols, individuals may feel as though they are missing something in their lives that only a mall can provide, which in turn leads people to become influenced and buy unnecessary commodities. James J. Farrell also believes that malls were similar to sacred spaces: "Like churches, they are places where we decide what is ultimately valuable and how we value it" (270). Undoubtedly, malls have deceived shoppers by offering promises of devotion, unity, love, and happiness. As Pahl explains, "clothed in such promises . . . the naked reality of the mall as a place to turn a profit is concealed, and we are enticed to partake in the sacred rites" (297). While that may be true, Pahl goes too far when he said, "Malls have become sacred places because traditional churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques have failed" (298). It is not apparent that most people experience the mall in the way he interprets. How can one be sure that people go to the mall to seek happiness or unity since churches have supposedly failed to do so? Maybe people are just *truly* there to buy a birthday present because they have to. Pahl presents a strong argument in saying how malls make individuals feel as though they are lacking something, but he overstated his assertion about malls serving as sacred spaces.

There are individuals that analyze the mall in more complex ways than just the top layer; they see malls as civic and cultural centers, places to shop for American culture, prisons, refuges, or sacred spaces. The assertions individuals express about what the mall is or could become do have some legitimacy and logic, but they all exaggerate the extent to which malls are as such. Malls have the potential to become what shoppers and mall management allow them to be. Since most individuals are *only* there to shop and think nothing more about it, and mall management mainly cares *just* about making money, malls are not the entirety of the types of places some suppose. While there is no skepticism that malls do reveal some of the features of each contention, they do it only to some degree. Overall, though, the layer is a little more than just those lifeless mannequins, extravagant window displays, and rushing shoppers.

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Evaluation: *Manning's essay nicely uses her own observations and experiences to understand and criticize the ideas and arguments of her sources. In so doing, she fashions a nuanced view of the mall in American life.*

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# Hector Berlioz: Original Romanticism

## Analysis of Le Carnaval Romain op. 9

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*Bergen Maurstad*

Course: Music 120

(Introduction to Music Literature)

Instructor: Barbara Bowker

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*Assignment: Write a 5- to 10-page paper about a composer covered in class. At least half of the paper should be in-depth coverage of a single composition.*

One of the most daring and philosophical French composers of the nineteenth century was a man who had no boundaries, one who chose to write music solely for the purpose of creating art. He endured criticism, but was a hopeless lover, and he will always remain a cultural icon. Hector Berlioz didn't just compose music, he truly lived it. In his writings, there is a sense of a man that is not only educated, but also passionate about his art form. He was also a man who was cultured and inspired by his century's new and unique sounds. He became friends and colleagues with many other famous composers and musicians in his time. Berlioz learned from but also critiqued his peers and predecessors on their arrangements and ideals within their orchestrations. But Berlioz was always keen on pointing out pure genius with his upfront critiques.

During his long and arduous life, Berlioz did not receive positive responses to most of his works; but today, now that society has caught up with Berlioz's radicalism, his pieces are celebrated worldwide, and he is considered a true French Nationalist. This paper will provide background information about this fantastically artistic character, as well as an overview analysis of one of his finest pieces, Le Carnaval Romain op.9

Hector Berlioz was born on December 11, 1803,

to the famous French doctor Louis Berlioz, and Hector spent his youth studying with his father at their French home in La Côte Saint-André. As a child, Hector was very fond of learning about different cultures and their fanciful customs. He also found himself enjoying reading many of the creative literary books of his time. He states, in his autobiography, "...a feeling for the true beauties of poetry began to awake in me and my sea dreams took second place" (Berlioz 34). Later, though, at age 12, young Hector began to become interested in love, art, and especially music. His father, along with his regular education, began to teach Hector about music composition. From then on, Hector dedicated himself to rigorous practicing and tutoring sessions to quickly become a talented performer. His eagerness as a child showed: "... I wanted to compose. I arranged two-part pieces for three and four parts without any idea how to achieve satisfactory basses and chords" (Berlioz 40). Incredibly, Berlioz was never a proficient piano player. His ears had always been drawn to wind instruments, and one of his teachers gave him a flute to learn. Later on in his life, he became a proficient guitar player, which gave him the ability to develop his knowledge of chords.

Hector's passion for art grew as he did. In 1822, Berlioz moved to Paris to attend medical school, but he could not agree with his father's chosen profession, so he decided to disobey Dr. Berlioz and study composition. It's a great thing for us that Berlioz had the courage to follow his heart and work to make a profession out of what he truly loved to do. Though most of Berlioz's earlier works did not receive much praise when released, he remained diverse in his repertoire and very colorful and inventive in his orchestrations. Since he didn't have much box office success, Berlioz decided to use his writing talents by critiquing many works and publishing many articles about conducting. Berlioz is a true visionary. In his published work on instrumentation, he stated that

Music appears to be the most exacting of all the arts, the most difficult to cultivate, and that of which the productions are most rarely presented in a condition which permits an appreciation of their real value, a clear view of their physiognomy, or discernment of their real meaning and true character. (qtd. in Kolodin 206)

Berlioz wrote about the performances he would see on his travels, which gives insight into what exactly Hector admired most about his favorite composers. In his writings on a Bach Passion that he had heard in Berlin in 1841-2, he talks about the fact that he would prefer a piano's smooth timbre to the short and prickly sound of the harpsichord. Since in Bach's time they did not have the appropriate technology to create the modern pianoforte, they notated a harpsichord. But Berlioz makes an argument that since there are many vocalists in this work, that the original score should be changed so that the more fitting sound is used. This might seem like he's being over the top by suggesting to change an original Bach score. However, he gives much praise to Bach's artistry by saying that the admiration from the German peoples, while listening to Bach's creations, reveals Bach's music to be truly inspirational. This is an idea that only a true artist can observe and understand. In describing an audience of Germans listening to Bach, Berlioz stated,

...they are listening to a sermon, hearing the gospel sung; they are attending in silence, not a concert but a divine service. And it is really thus that this music ought to be listened to. The Germans adore Bach, and believe in him, without supposing for an instant that his divinity can ever be questioned; ...Bach is Bach, as God is God. (qtd. in Kolodin 112)

In early September of 1838, Berlioz premiered his new opera *Benvenuto Cellini* at the Paris Opera. To say it plainly, it was not the most well-received opera of Berlioz's career. After a couple more performances of the show, the opera lost funding, and Berlioz was unable to keep the curtains open. More than five years later, Berlioz still couldn't get the many beautiful melodies from his failed opera out of his head. Berlioz decided that he did not want his themes to go to waste. He compiled them into three overtures that he put under the concert title *Ouverture Caractéristique pur Grand Orchestre* (Warrack ii). The second overture of this series is the one that we will be discussing. *Le Carnaval Romain* is a very fun and exciting piece that incorporated two themes from the *Benvenuto Cellini* opera. The first is a very pleasing relaxed rural melody that is brilliantly exchanged between

the clarinet, cor anglais, and the strings. The second melody is the one that inspired the name of the selection. This quick saltarello paints a picture of the Roman streets being littered with festive ribbons and an exciting and lively description of the carnival's festivities.

The first performance of this grand piece was at the Salle Herz in Paris, directed by Berlioz himself in 1844. Berlioz was not originally asked to direct his work, but during the rehearsals, Berlioz did not think that the hired conductor was appropriate for the job. He could not achieve the appropriate tempo for the quick and boisterous carnival theme. Other bits of musical drama came about on the opening day of his showcase. All of his wind players were to be shipped out for their National Guard duties the morning of the performance; this meant that they would not be able to rehearse the day of the show. Cool-headed Berlioz is seen calming his musicians and trusting in his arrangement:

Indeed, when I arrived in the orchestra, all the wind players crowded round me, appalled at the thought of giving a public performance of an overture that was completely unknown to them. "Don't worry," I said. "The parts are correct, and you are all excellent players. Watch my stick as often as you can, count your rests carefully, and everything will be all right." (Berlioz 244)

That night, the Salle Herz exploded with enthusiasm and demanded Berlioz play two encores of the selection. What a proud moment for this fine conductor!

*Le Carnaval Romain* was written for orchestra, and in this discussion of it, the score of I am referring to indicates parts for two flutes, two oboes, an English horn (also known as the cor anglais), two clarinets in A, four bassoons, first and second coronets in C, and third and fourth coronets in E, two trumpets in D, two flugelhorns in A, three trombones, cymbals, large and small tambourines, triangle, timpani tuned in perfect fifths, fifteen first and second violins, ten violas, twelve cellos, and nine contra basses (Warrack). The sound recording for time reference numbers is by the London Symphony.

The tempo mark at the top of this overture is marked *Allegro assai con fuoco*, which means, "very quick and lively with fire!" (M.M. dotted quarter note = 156). As

Le Carnaval Romain starts off, it sets the mood for the many exciting motives that flourish throughout the piece. The first chord struck by the strings is followed by a rising, then falling stepwise pattern, that is mirrored by layering the woodwinds on top in a canonic fashion, and then finishing together before the second beat of the sixth measure or 0:09 seconds in this duple compound opening fanfare. The brasses are used to simply give more fullness to the middle of the section. The presence of the carnival is immediately set in the listener's mind. Then, a rush of strings crescendo out of a *dim piano*. Berlioz increases the dynamic by adding more strings from top to bottom as the crescendo grows into a downbeat on the dominant chord. The spirit is lifted as the trumpets and coronets blaze on, with staccato eighth notes in 6/8 marked *fortissimo*, all the way until the fermata at measure 18. Simultaneously, the woodwinds switch into a duple simple time at bar 14, without the rest of the orchestra, and play a trill-like pattern all the way until the fermata in measure 18 or at 0:14 seconds. At measure 15, the strings join the woodwinds, with the simple duple time, and accompany the hectic cadence with a descending eighth-note pattern throughout its last four bars until the fermata. The eighth notes are syncopated throughout the string section. This opening section is truly a creative form that breaks away from the classical approach and shows that Berlioz was truly an innovator for his day.

Measure twenty-one marks the first phrase and 0:26 seconds on the recording. This section is marked *Andante sostenuto*, which means "a graceful moderate tempo with a full even sustain throughout the melodic lines" (M.M. quarter note = 52). The English horn has the melody of this section, which was originally Cellini's aria to Teresa in Berlioz's opera *Benvenuto Cellini*: " 'O Teresa, vous que j'aime,' from the Duo and Trio in Act 1, set in the house of her father, the Papal Treasurer Balducci: to his sad declaration of love she replies, with equal sadness and to the same melody, that they must part" (Warrack). Pizzicato strings accompany the emotionally powered rising-action melody by playing on the off beats. A flute duet accompanies the rising passing tones in the English horn solo as it moves on into the falling action of this first melody. I believe the melody from measure 21 to 28 is Balducci's repentance, and the falling action from

measure 28 to 33 is Teresa's weeping, realizing she needs to leave Balducci. The strings that are accompanying Teresa's descending melody do not play the same pizzicato off-beat rhythms, but rather Berlioz has them play quick sixteenths in this triple simple phrase. Berlioz's best features of this section are the nonharmonic tones that add beautiful color and complexity to the melody line in the English horn. This aria section keeps adding textures, with the flutes and clarinets joining on the dominant at measure 34 or 1:12. This closing section uses the end of the English horn solo to modulate the new key of E major, which is the mediant of the current section. This ends out the section nicely and goes into a freer flowing aria form.

The next section is in the new key of E major, at measure 37 or 1:26, and introduces the coronets and flugel horns into the accompaniment. The flutes soar overhead with the countermelody as the violas play on the same rising and falling action melody as the English horn previously, before the key change. Berlioz seems to be using an intricate theme and variations form, because the previous English horn melody that is now played in the violas is accompanied by the countermelody in the flutes. Its simplicity and off-beat contour parallel the main melody perfectly. It is evident from this that Berlioz was well-studied on the subject of counterpoint. Also, the flugel horns have a nice suspension-based countermelody that thickens up this slowly progressing themed section. At measure 45, or 1:54, the falling action plays again in the violas as it did previously in the English horn. This time through, the melody in the accompaniment switches its rhythmic properties exactly, because now the winds are playing the off-beat pizzicatos instead of the strings playing straight sixteenth-note patterns, as in the last statement of the somber melody. Also, the falling actions of Teresa's cries are accompanied by a stepwise descending motive, with doubly dotted sixteenth- and thirty-second-note rhythms, in the English horn. Once again, the melody leads the accompaniment into another cadence, where they will end up modulating into the original key of the introduction of A major. I believe that Berlioz is using a fully diminished seventh chord in measure 51 to create tension on the cadence and to easily flow into the new key of A major with the movement in the violas and cellos.

The last statement of the original melody in this succession starts at measure 53 or 2:25, where it modulates into A major. This section uses the whole orchestra except for the cymbals and trombones. This section is accompanied by an ostinato rhythm, four eighth notes plus four thirty-second notes and two sixteenths, played by the second flutes, clarinets, coronets, trumpets, and flugel horns with percussion. All of the other voices, except the pedal tone in the contrabass, are playing the previous melody under discussion as a canon; answering this melody back-and-forth is very pleasing as it builds up interest into what is next to come. I believe that Berlioz uses new ways of introducing this same melody many times so that it gives the impression that the listener is becoming closer and closer to the carnival that is in progress. This danceable ostinato rhythm of this final repeat of the main melody suggests that we are approaching the festival with rapidly growing anticipation.

At measure 61, or 2:52 on the recording, we are entering a closing theme that uses a variation of the aria melody in the woodwinds and flugel horn with contrabass. But the main driving melody is in the first violin part. With its anticipations and suspensions, the motives keep the motion and feel going. The cello plays the same melody as the first violin but starts it a measure after the latter. This motion creates diversity in the arrangement. My favorite element of all the great melodic lines from measures 61-66 are the sextuplets that are played in the first violin and cello melodies at the beginning of their entrances. This creates an unevenness that appears to distort the tempo going into this closing section. I believe that it puts a separation between this intermediate section and the main repeated melodies before it. This is a necessary device that tells the listener immediately that something new is going to happen, but at the same time, it does not interrupt the gracefulness of the piece. At measure 66, or 3:21, the cello plays a beautiful closing theme solo that is later accompanied by the violins on the dominant chord. When the woodwinds enter, the violin and cello motion is moved to the predominant. This section is marked *dolce*, which means "sweetly." It continues on the predominant to a solid chord at measure 71, or 3:33. The cellos and violins still carry a back-and-forth melody that descends back to the dominant chord. Stepwise motion in the strings

lead to three large chromatic runs, up and down the scale, in the woodwinds, using thirty-second notes in measure 75, or 3:49. This section is marked *poco animato*, which means "lightly animated with life and spirit." These grand virtuosic runs lead into our new themed section.

The next section is one of my favorites. Before we get into the full grand carnival fanfare, Berlioz takes us on a quick melodic journey that is littered with melodic and rhythmic flairs. At measure 78, or 3:56, the violins start up our new transitional section with a light compound-based joyous melody. This melody is accompanied by spaced-out short glissandos into quarter notes, in the lower string. The violin melody plays a call and response game with the flutes three times. The first two times these melodies go back and forth, they are relatively the same, but they are based on different chords. But starting at measure 94, or 4:08, the glissandos in the lower woodwinds are played on both beats in the measure. Instead of the woodwinds returning on the repeated melody, the violins pass through a descending phrase that is ended with a four-bar off-beat accompaniment in the woodwinds that attractively ends with a unison pitch and rhythm.

The violas and cellos then carry on the sustaining eighth-note compound rhythm into the next phrase. This is another variation on the lighthearted transitional melody that we just heard in the previous section. This passage that starts at measure 120, or 4:29, is played by the string section, with the contrabass holding the section together with its dominant-to-tonic motion on beats one and two on the fourth bar of the phrase. This reoccurring melody is embellished with a quick, bright, descending solo line in the flutes and oboes. This repeats with the melody moving up a major third. This is followed by an eight-bar phrase that is very rhythmic, featuring quick rhythms played on the tambourine to hold the entire phrase together. The strings get to rest during this passage, and the winds and coronets take over the melody. Finally, with the compound eighth-note lead, using the brasses' noble timbre, Berlioz introduces and brings us into the carnival fanfare theme that is used as the main theme for the rest of the piece at measure 136 or 4:35. It surely has been a great journey, but we have finally made it to the carnival. With this entire intro section, it is obvious that Berlioz admires the compositions of Beethoven. Both of these

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composers use their talents to keep the listener moving forward, and to always be ready for their main themes to appear. They like to take you over the boundaries and glorify the transitional sections that they use to bring you to a new and previously unfamiliar environment.

The new shift into the first statement of the carnival theme is treated very regularly and repeated four times. All of the woodwinds and first violins play the melody in these sections. At the end of the first and second times the theme is played, the alternate string parts play a descending eighth-note passage that catches the listener off guard. This is because Berlioz uses a three-note group that is displaced by the first pickup note on count one of the bar. The flugel horns and the rest of the brasses join in at the end of the second statement to help build tension into the sustained tonic chord. The third time through the passage, the driving melody ends up modulating to the relative key on the sixth scale degree on F sharp. On the fourth and final statement of this theme, the brasses end up taking the melody over as the progression moves into the final resting chord, and the trombones and coronets take all of the leading force into the dominant chord of the written key of A.

At measure 160, or 5:00, a variations section starts that uses many artistic devices to develop the previous carnival melody. For four measures, the woodwinds carry a back-and-forth five-to-one scale melody, as the percussion adds variety by playing off-beat, syncopated hits. The contrabasses keep this section moving with its glissando-style downbeats. After these four bars, the percussion stops, and the basses carry on a descending-thirds steady quarter-note motion, which leads the feel for this new phrase. The coronets leave their sustained notes and join the basses in their rhythm. The melody in the flutes jumps a fifth lower and then moves passing tones to the note on the next downbeat that ends up being a whole step down from the original top note. Percussion and strings interrupt the descending passage and play a quick three-bar rhythm and melody that is reminiscent of the joyous feeling of the carnival theme. This nicely separates this upcoming variation section of the carnival theme before the full original theme returns. Starting at measure 170, a six-bar phrase starts, with the woodwinds playing third leaps back and forth with the strings and lower brasses.

This section is played with a strong *fortissimo* in all parts. Suddenly, a *pianissimo* dynamic marking appears in the woodwinds and first violins, where the woodwinds take over the next variation upon the carnival theme. They basically play the melody unaccompanied until the lower strings come in at measure 180, with an “and 1” rhythm moving the line into the next variation section. At measure 184, or 5:18, the most energetic variation starts. The percussion leads this section during its total eight bars in length. The woodwinds and strings carry through by holding down their eighth-note melody, whereas the brasses are playing accents on the “ands” and backing up the rhythms played in the percussion.

Finally, we come to the final variation separating the two big and bold carnival sections. Berlioz sure has given us much variety while nicely breaking up the similar themes that drive the piece. This is truly no easy task, but Berlioz has executed it very smoothly. This section feels much more open. At measure 94, or 5:25, with the ostinato notes in the viola, and the rushed bass line in the contrabass, the time in between the melodies being played seems to be much more vast and freeing. The bassoons, oboes, and first violins carry the melody as the flutes and clarinets decorate it by wildly playing quickly moving arch forms over the top. This tradeoff section repeats five times. Each time this section is played, it starts off with a *piano* hit from the tambourine, which sets off the sections very well. To be able to make it back into the right feel of the Carnival theme, this last variation plays its last seven bars as if it had gone into double time. A two-bar melody in the woodwinds is played with the ostinato in the strings and the tambourine coming in with complete precision at the beginning and end of each phrase, which is thrown back and forth between the strings and woodwinds. The carnival theme returns with its original full glory. This section is repeated exactly like it was before all of these artistically creative variations started.

The carnival theme is not going away completely, though. This second statement of the royal theme is ended by a stepwise rising motion in the brasses, leading us into another transitional theme at measure 257, or 6:15. This melody in the woodwinds and E coronet is also led by the beats that are held strong in the strings. Then, in a Beethoven style, there is more back-and-forth tension

that is created by having the strings and winds play quick eighth notes. And once again, the bass leads this section as it modulates, and the bass rises by half steps on its long dotted quarter rhythm. This goes back-and-forth for eleven bars. The section is finally ended with a rush of unison rhythm, including percussion, at measure 74. This measure is also changed back to cut time, which I believe gives the section a more definite ending because its harshness is obvious from the start. As I said before, it is clear in Berlioz's writing that he was fond of Beethoven's passion to build up a section to the highest extreme before coming down and resolving it. This is truly brilliant romanticism.

At measure 276, or 6:30, a new themed section is starting. The time signature goes back to being duple compound, and the woodwinds have a galloping neighboring motion followed by the same charter line played in the upper strings. The violins and violas carry out the line by using a downward stepwise movement to walk down and introduce the second statement of the original *sombreros* Cellini melody. The clarinet counterpoint is extremely pleasing at measure 286, or 6:38. At measure 300, or 6:50, the second violins pick up the duple-compound rhythm that was associated with the carnival ostinato pattern. But instead of the carnival melody being heard, Berlioz introduces the original lighthearted love melody that was in the beginning of the piece, in the bassoons. Then, the first violins come in and play a variation of the first rising action section of the melody that was originally the males' aria; meanwhile, the cellos help the ostinato rhythm, as the trombones take over the three-note melodic theme. At measure 321, most of the entire orchestra is in and is either playing a variation upon the melody, or they are holding the ostinato rhythms and the tonal characteristics. This is extended all the way until measure 340, when they achieve the dominant chord, and the trombone's triplets force the ears to anticipate the return of the carnival section. Once again, Berlioz shows his love for Beethoven by pushing this section to the complete limit. Although it might seem a bit obnoxious, it is not perceived as that at all. This section is just telling the listener that the new section is going to come, but the fantastic thing is that only at the very last second can you tell exactly where you are going to end up.

The carnival theme is played twice, with a fantastic glissando in the flutes leading into the start of the second statement, but the fanfare is cut short on the second hearing and is led by a solo in the cello. This section starts at bar 345 and goes to 355, or 7:26 to 7:35. Then, a quick restatement of the ascending male vocal melody is again repeated in a round-type fashion. The entire string section builds on top of one another, until the downbeat of measure 364. This is a quick little four-bar interlude that starts off the next variation of the first vocalist three-note melody. This section is led by a bass line that hasn't yet been heard in this overture. With the sustained pedal notes in the woodwinds and the melody in the trombones, this section reminds me of one of Berlioz's other influences, Wagner. With this extremely powerful section and method of building tension with the upper woodwinds performing a stressful atmosphere, one can think of the many operas that Wagner masterfully crafted. I officially call this section of the piece the Wagner section, reinstating the three-note melody heard in the beginning of the piece. Then, miraculously, at measure 387, or 8:01, a downbeat is hit by the orchestra that starts off the next call and response between the woodwinds and percussion with strings. This section does not modulate like the others; rather, it stays upon the tonic, using a fancy neighboring motion in the melody. This goes back and forth several times, until measure 397, or 8:08, where a dominant fanfare is used to extend the feeling of unrest for six bars until measure 403, where one of the most interesting things happens in the entire piece. Berlioz uses his knowledge of modulations and chromatic chords in this seven-bar simple duple section. I have never heard any composer write a section of a symphony in this fashion. It is wild, unique, and in your face, and it's extraordinary that all of these strange types of chords can be combined and still result in something that sounds decent. This section shows more than any other in the piece that Berlioz was truly a revolutionary in composition during the romantic period.

The stylized section ends with a quick fanfare back in 6/8, and the timpani leads the orchestra into the next and final section of the piece, the ending. Starting at 8:22, the flutes and strings play a rising action modulating passage from measures 414-420. This is accompanied

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by a syncopated melody that is held in the brasses. This is an especially nice effect. At measure 421, the accompaniment starts to descend into the downbeat of measure 424, and at this section, the brass melody aligns with the other parts to create a clean transition into the next closing theme. The next section trades off rhythms between the entire orchestra all the way until the glorified brass plays their strong cadence chords at measure 428. The percussion backs the woodwinds and strings to help set up this powerful section. Finally, the triplet rhythms lead us into the dominant chord and down beat of measure 436, and the scale runs in the string section to build up until our cadential five-to-one motion frantically begins at measure 440. This lasts a standard length of four bars and is played absolutely as heroically as possible and finally ends on the tonic. And just to throw the listener off guard, Berlioz has a 7-to-1 motion at the very end of the cadence so that he can ensure that he kept his audience on their feet all the way until the very last note of his miraculous piece.

Hector Berlioz is a truly innovative performer and writer of some of the most interesting music in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. With his unconventional ways of composing music, Berlioz did not always receive positive critiques. But now that we are in the modern era, we can fully appreciate his music, from critical analysis to just plain hearing it for the first time. He was a Frenchman who loved to travel and learn about new cultures and styles, but he would always leave a lasting impression on the French peoples with his wild but tasteful compositions.

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**Evaluation:** *Bergen's paper reflects not only his musical expertise, but also his deep musical passion and engagement with this piece.*

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# Social Disorder

Ewelina Mazur

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Kris Piepenburg

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

“The terms are strict and absolute; there may not even be a kind word spoken to the child” (Le Guin 1511). As the narrator of the story, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” by Ursula K. Le Guin, presents the dreadful image of a child being denied any human kindness and basic rights within that particular society, one may wonder about the morality of people who allow such unnecessary suffering to happen. In a similar story, “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson, one of the characters is condemned to death for ritual purposes; a selected person is to be stoned to death by friends and family for no particular reason other than to follow tradition. In both cases, kindness and compassion was not allowed for the suffering human beings who do not misbehave nor do anything wrong, other than find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. People living in Omelas form a strange and horrid society, able to sacrifice one human life and its significance in exchange for the happiness of the remaining population. Villagers from “The Lottery” are unable to see the flaws of the system they live in and continue to follow mad traditions and rules that are aimless and harmful. Overall, with respect to human nature and social behavior, it seems that “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” presents people who are incapable to oppose existing cruelty, and “The Lottery” shows that for some, values and traditions have more meaning than decent human conduct.

An individual human being is defined by character, a set of values and morals that develops within a particular social group. Similarly, society can be judged by its structural development and ability to maintain peace and order, as well as by its way of conduct. In reference to the city of Omelas, one may note that the system people live by is quite different and, in a sense, unique from any

known system developed; no real repression or difference is present among its citizens, who coexist peacefully. They have done well enough without any form of power within their borders, as the narrator states: “There was no king. They did not use swords, or keep slaves. They were not barbarians. I do not know the rules and laws of their society, but I suspect that they were singularly few” (Le Guin 1508). The utopian condition of general solitude that exists in Omelas is desired by many, yet in reality it seems almost impossible to be attained; social disorder among people exists worldwide, and without any government to regulate their way of life, people would engage in wars and live in a life of ambiguous panic. Yet Omelas is perfectly satisfied without any sort of government or people who would try to demolish the existing order. Furthermore, Omelas consisted of people who not only share common wealth equally, but also are minimalists without material desires. According to the author:

Happiness is based on a just discrimination of what is necessary, what is neither necessary nor destructive, and what is destructive. In the middle category, however – that of the unnecessary but unrestrictive, that of comfort, luxury, exuberance etc. – they could perfectly well have central heating, subway trains, washing machines....Or they could have none of that; it doesn't matter. (Le Guin 1508)

People of that city do not value material goods as their primary goal in life, but rather view them as tools necessary for survival. Their philosophy is based on just determination of the necessary over unnecessary items that could create destruction and those that were safe. Their fulfillment of life comes from the ability of selective judgment of human achievements unspoiled by materialism or greed.

However idealistic it may seem, Omelas does not create equal opportunities for all of its citizens. To maintain its general order, one condition must be maintained—to imprison a child by removing it from society, locking it in a cellar, and offering no kindness or pity. As the author describes it: “The room is about three paces long and two wide: a mere broom closet or disused tool room. In the room the child is sitting. It could be a boy or a girl. It looks about six, but actually is nearly ten. It is feeble-



minded. Perhaps it was born defective, or perhaps it has become imbecile through fear, malnutrition, and neglect" (1510). Although there is overall happiness and prosperity in the town, an individual being is neglected its human rights and lives in appalling conditions. The child has been imprisoned for quite some time, lost its appealing appearance and perhaps become sick-minded, eventually losing the ability to maintain itself. This indicates that societies in general cannot support themselves without oppressing others to gain benefit—even the near-perfect city of Omelas, where no political power, religious representatives, or army is necessary to maintain life within its borders, is not able to do so.

Le Guin's story is in a way a representation of the United States society and its unwillingness to sacrifice personal gain for someone else's benefit. Jerre Collins at the beginning of her essay states: "Ursula Le Guin's short story 'The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas,' ... is a critique of American moral life" (par. 1). People do not tend to think of themselves as oppressors simply because they have a higher standard of life than others—rather, they accept the situation without deeper analysis. Le Guin forces readers to feel ashamed and morally unstable by allowing them to become a part of the community and create their own Utopia and then overshadow it with the distress of a suffering child. One then can compare his own life, stable and financially secure, to that of the people of Omelas—an analogy of the most powerful country and the almost perfect place to live, by interpreting the child's suffering as the disadvantages of the other nations due to the well-being of the United States. Jerre Collins adds, "Le Guin's story has...become rather obviously an allegory of Western hegemony that the narrator can proceed to say, with a little more bite to her words, 'Now do you believe them [the people of Omelas]? Are they not more creditable?' Indeed they are; they look a lot like us" (par. 22). The United States society faces a similar dilemma to that of Omelas. They can give up their wealth, capitalism, and democracy all together, but in the bigger picture, they would not only hurt themselves but other nations who depend on the United States economy as well. Thus, morality in this sense seems to be a rhetorical question or even a tragic conflict, without a right solution.

While some are being judged by their decisions and

ways of conduct, others resort to rules and traditions as their only source of morality. Villagers in "The Lottery" have a simple mindset that does not allow any form of innovation to modify their simplistic lifestyle, claiming that the "old ideas" have been working for years, thus change is not required. At the beginning of the story, an image of Mr. Summers' attempts for change is presented:

Every year, after the lottery, Mr. Summers began talking again about a new box, but every year the subject was allowed to fade off without anything's being done. The black box grew shabbier each year; by now it was no longer completely black but splintered badly along one side to show the original wood color, and in some places faded or stained. (Jackson 839)

There is no surprise that Mr. Summers' effort at replacing a box that indeed needed some repair had no real effect. People view the old box as a symbol of something greater than themselves—a piece of tradition that their parents were able to see probably even generations before that. With reference to the lottery that has been conducted in each village in the local area, at some point in the story, as the Adams family informs Old Man Warner that some villages decided to quit lotteries, he replies: "'Listening to the young folks, nothing's good enough for *them*. Next thing you know, they'll be wanting to go back to living in caves, nobody work anymore, live *that* way for a while. Used to be a saying about 'Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon.'... there's *always* been a lottery'" (Jackson 841). Those words symbolize attachment to tradition, roots and values, however wrong they may appear to others. Older generations do not welcome change or the progress that younger people may find beneficial and appealing; they try to maintain the existing order, following the rules that sometimes may not apply anymore and creating an illusion that "old is better."

That sort of behavior and belief may have a deeper underlying basis than attachment and sentimental values: a fear that a change may distort existing balance. As Danielle Schaub suggests, "The villagers' fear of changing either the course of the lottery or the ritualistic objects discloses to what extent they are caught in the web of tradition" (par. 8). From their outlook, a slight change

could cause dramatic outcomes that could lead even to the abandonment of the lottery, something unthinkable for many of them. By looking underneath the reasons for the lottery in the first place, one must note the belief that people share in its “importance” for harvest. Amy Griffin believes that “A good harvest has always been vital to civilizations. After the fields have been prepared and the seeds sown, the farmer can only wait and hope that the proper balance of rain and sun will ensure a good harvest. From this hope springs ritual” (44), and as the ritual continues in years to come, newer generations adapt to it and as they carry on with it, it becomes a ritual. Villagers are caught up in a cycle that originates from simple hope, and, associated with fear, bonds them to continue the “necessary” actions to live in harmony and to assure the well-being of the harvest season.

The willingness to follow rules and traditions makes the villagers unable to see the flaws within their social layout, yet it offers some social advantages. Participation in the lottery seems to be something natural to human nature, although the “main price,” and allows the villagers to feel a part of a group, becoming members of an important social event. The lottery unites people under the same goal, however cruel and inhumane, and gives villagers a sense of an allegiance to their unwritten law of perseverance. In doing so, a single human life has no significance to the overall continuance of the traditional custom. Geoffrey Wolff observes, “A sense of community is won at a price, and communal guilt and fear are seen as more binding than communal love” (qtd. in Hicks par. 1) It is easily noticeable that one of the dominant feelings that villagers share is actually the fear of being a “winner” in this unusual lottery, where winning becomes a death sentence, and love and friendship turn into rage and cruelty.

People who participate in the lottery do so out of habit, yet truly none of them desires to win. An evident example is Tessie’s reaction: “People began to look around to see the Hutchinsons. Bill Hutchinson was standing quiet, staring down at the paper in his hand. Suddenly, Tessie Hutchinson shouted to Mr. Summers, ‘You didn’t give him time enough to take any paper he wanted. I saw you. It wasn’t fair!’” (Jackson 842). Tessie, like many others, feels confident that she would participate in

stoning someone, yet when her family name is drawn, she panics. She would play along with the rules like anyone else when there was a chance to avoid a brutal death but refrain from it when the possibility of it arose. Jay Yarmove summarizes her actions by saying, “Good-natured Tessie actually desires to come to the lottery, going so far as to run to it, although the rest of the townspeople are subdued, even nervous....However, to Tessie the lottery seems to be one great lark....But when Tessie’s family is chosen, she becomes a woman transformed” (244). Indeed, the transformation is quite evident. She goes to the measure of calling on other people to join her family for the second drawing to increase her own chances of survival. A. R. Coulthard comments that “Tessie desperately tries to improve her odds for survival by defying tradition and adding her married daughter to the killing pool” (227). Overall, her double-sided nature is just a glimpse of the entire value system that the village shares—the horrifying willingness of human sacrifice and foolishness of rules that are not truly evaluated, yet still followed.

The villagers’ social behavior, based upon rules, results in human sacrifice of an innocent being. Society intentionally supports the lottery and singling out an individual, who is then condemned to death. Even though Tessie fears the upcoming destination, the rest of the community accepts it as a natural outcome of the drawing: “‘Be a good sport Tessie,’ Mrs. Delacroix called, and Mrs. Graves said, ‘All of us took the same chance’” (Jackson 842). Those who notice Tessie’s fear try to encourage her to follow along without making a scene while her husband, who is concerned about maintaining an honorable position in the existing circumstances, rebukes her: “‘Shut up, Tessie,’” (Jackson 842). He knows that if he and his family would try to avoid the rules and step away from the lottery, they would face the discrimination and repression of the villagers, and as the head of the family, he cannot allow it. The norm of the society is more important than any personal preferences, no matter how barbarian the social standards might seem.

One must acknowledge that beyond customs, the villagers actually take some sort of pleasure in stoning one of their own, engaging in a social event that kept them thriving and gave expression to their murderous side. That is why these villagers encourage Tessie in

such a vivid manner to follow the lottery regulations, so that their scapegoat would not run away and leave them without entertainment they prepared for. A. R. Coulthard says, "It is not that the ancient custom of human sacrifice makes the villagers behave cruelly, but that their thinly veiled cruelty keeps the custom alive" (226). Villagers evidently take pleasure in the ritual as many of them gather early, awaiting that "special day" for months and even running to it. Coulthard adds, "The last line of the story, 'then they were upon her,' suggests enthusiasm rather than reluctance to murder a member of their community" (227). Once again, people in a village who grew up with the process of killing one of their own became assimilated into it and at some point began to enjoy the process, probably believing that since the murder is necessary, it can at least bring some "positive" feeling such as excitement and satisfaction. Coulthard further states, "Her [Jackson's] simple villagers are not brainwashed victims but bloodthirsty victimizers" (228) because they are fully aware of the harm and do so willingly. At an individual level, singling out and stoning someone would be viewed as a murder and rightfully so, yet "On the group level people classify their heinous act simply as 'ritual'" (Griffin 44). Thus, it is somehow explained and viewed as acceptable. Sadism and lack of morality is disturbing to the average reader, yet Shirley Jackson skillfully depicts the evil human nature so well that after publishing her story, "People... wrote to express their disgust...some also called to see where the town was so that the could go and watch the lottery" (Hicks par. 1).

Younger generations of villagers in "The Lottery" began to understand errors within the system they have lived by. By the end of the story, when Tessie's daughter is about to draw her chance, the narrator describes: "The crowd was quiet. A girl whispered, 'I hope it's not Nancy,' and the sound of the whisper reached the edges of the crowd. 'It's not the way it used to be,' Old Man Warner said clearly. 'People ain't the way they used to be'" (Jackson 843). Newer generations did not await the lottery with the same emotions as their parents and grandparents; they were scared for each other and hoped that somehow nothing wrong would occur. This angered Old Man Warner, who saw this as a misbehavior against the rules of a lottery and disloyalty to long-lived traditions. People his age were pro human sacrifice, saw it as a

necessary factor of their existence, while the upcoming generations were able to see a flaw in the system; unable to change the existing conditions now, they hopefully will take charge in the future and rule themselves differently, learning from their fathers' mistakes.

In Le Guin's utopia, the people of Omelas accepted existing discrimination knowingly, in exchange for the social "benefit" of the rest of the community. When an image of an imprisoned child is described, the narrator mentions: "But as time goes on they begin to realize that even if the child could be released, it would not get much good of its freedom: a little vague pleasure of warmth and food, no doubt, but little more. It is too degraded and imbecile to know any real joy. It has been afraid too long ever to be free of fear" (1511). The people of Omelas, in order to decrease their sense of guilt, began to believe that even if help was given to the child, it could not make any good use of it anyway. In their eyes, it would be highly immoral to allow their utopia to vanish by helping a child, which after all could not coexist in a society that rejected it and caused it to suffer in the first place. The suffering of one individual is to compensate for the well being of the entire population of Omelas, its happiness and peacefulness. Underlying all the achievements of the city is a dignified human being with no rights. People allow such conditions to happen willingly, believing that they are doing their best—for them it is a price worth paying for the peacefulness of everyday life.

What adds to the disturbing image of the child is that no clear explanation of its condition is stated other than without its humiliation, order would vanish. Bruce E. Brandt claims that "The child's behavior is not altruistic... the torment and abuse are simply imposed, and the child has no understanding of why," and neither does the reader (par. 10). Possibly, Le Guin left that piece of information unfilled to draw readers' attention to the problem and imply that there might not be a reason for the child's languishing at all: that its torment is pointless all together and the abuse is a conflict between powerful adults and a weak child. Without the missing information of why the suffering is necessary and what purpose it serves, the child is unable to improve its condition due to lack of knowledge of what could be done to overcome existing circumstances. Brandt further adds, "The suffering of the child in 'Omelas' is not redemptive. The citizens

of Omelas benefit from their exploitation of the child's suffering, but they are not made morally better by it" (par. 10). Although the society is prosperous, the people are left with a moral dilemma and distorted value system. It almost seems that values and morals do not exist because one cannot call himself a decent human being knowing that his indifference causes the distress of an innocent creature, especially a child. If instead an adult were locked in a cellar, it might seem more acceptable because assumptions that the person has done something that deserved such punishment could be made, yet what crime could be done by a child that earned such a punishment? This is why the moral dilemma intensifies. The innocent child is being punished for something that definitely did not deserve such abuse, and it is evident that it should be released, yet it cannot be done because others would suffer the consequences of this action. Brandt summarizes, "'Omelas' is not ultimately about the child per se, but about the choice that confronts each of the city's residents" (par. 11), the choice between the agony of one human being or the disadvantage of the whole community, which is able to sustain itself only by benefiting from the deprived child.

However, some of the citizens of Omelas were unable to accept the difficult conditions of the child. All they could do was to walk away from it:

At times one of the adolescent girls or boys who go to see the child does not go home to weep or rage, does not, in fact, go home at all. Sometimes also a man or woman much older falls silent for a day or two, and then leaves home. These people go out into the street, and walk down the street alone. They keep walking, and walk straight out of the city of Omelas through the beautiful gates. (1511)

Different individuals' understanding of morality found it unacceptable to continue life in such a place. They do not try to help the child, though. Rather, they simply try not to be the ones who destroy the order of Omelas, and by walking away, they express their position on the issue. Societies tend to harm others, benefit from their suffering, and thrive; yet for some, morality overcomes greed and selfishness, and they, just like some people of Omelas, walk away from it.

Although refusing the benefits that Omelas has

to offer and walking away, such behavior has no real significance in resolving the existing problem:

Le Guin's ending, in which some individuals leave Omelas for a place 'even less imaginable to most of us,' points out finally that the dilemma of the scapegoat for the American people has in no way been resolved. The ones who walk away are not thanked for their decency or concern or commitment to social justice, nor does their absence even seem to be noticed. (Sobeloff par. 12)

Those who walk away are not heroes but rather cowards who run from the problem instead of facing it. Comparably, the United States society tends to avoid facing problems and disputes directly when possible, allowing them to be resolved by others. Instead of discussing issues, people allow courts to decide for them, suing and refusing to take blame. In most cases, those who are aware of any moral dilemmas, the disadvantages of different nations, and people of less privileged classes shrug their arms doubtfully, saying "What can I do?" and forgetting about the matter thereafter. Logan Hill understood that American society does little to nothing to bring a change to the disadvantage of others by saying, "Le Guin, by forcing each reader to conjure her own Omelas, has forced them to consciously relate the story to their own personal experience...she forces us to understand that while we do not live in ideal worlds, we live with ideals every day of our lives, and that even by not walking away, we support the ideals and the society we live in" (par. 14). Both accepting the child's unfair circumstances and walking away from it lead to the same outcome for the degraded human being, and only facing the issue could result in actual change. Within American society, some go to such measures as protesting and fighting for what they believe is rightful and morally right by forming groups, associations, and any form of humanitarian help for those in need, but until the majority of the society realizes that such action is necessary to dignify the quality of morals and values, significant change will not be possible.

Social behavior is one of the most difficult traits of human existence to overcome. One is able to change his or her eating habits or sleeping schedule quite easily, compared with behavior that originates from traditions,

religion, and rules lived by every day. Those norms that regulate human conduct could easily turn citizens into emotionless creatures and create a social disorder, harmful to the weakest. Possibly, human nature is evil—designed to hurt others and benefit from their suffering; or maybe it is the other way around—to overcome the inequality in order to modify and improve life conditions by seeing the flaws from within. Whichever the case, humanity strives for their best, guided by its own perception, which in many cases could be wrong, especially to the outsider. The truth is, there is no golden rule of human conduct or absolute right or wrong. Thus, people are left to figure out their own way to coexist, in the best way they can agree on and live by.

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Evaluation: *Ewelina writes clearly and uses research carefully to analyze and illuminate these two provocative short stories.*

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# The Proof is in the Pudding: Why Barack Obama Deserves the Nobel Peace Prize

Michael Medsker

Course: English 101 (Composition)  
Instructor: Richard Middleton-Kaplan

Assignment: *President Barack Obama received the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize. Explore the arguments for and against Obama receiving this award, and render a judgment in favor of or against the Nobel Foundation's decision.*

"The Norwegian Nobel Committee has decided that the Nobel Peace Prize for 2009 is to be awarded to President Barack Obama for his extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples" ("The Nobel Peace Prize 2009" 1). This statement by the chairman of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, Thorbjørn Jagland, surprised, appalled, bewildered, and pleased people across the globe. Some, such as Kofi Annan, expressed elation at the choice of Mr. Obama, saying, "It was an unexpected but inspired choice. In an increasingly challenging and volatile world, President Obama has given a sense of hope and optimism to millions around the world" (qtd. in Levy 2). Others disputed the award on the grounds that there were no concrete peaceful changes brought about, such as treaties signed or armies reduced. There are few people on either side of the argument that would disagree with this statement. However, I find this to be somewhat of an insignificant claim. It is clear, based

on the criteria provided by Alfred Nobel himself, that President Obama met the requirements for the reception of the Nobel Peace Prize.

In establishing the Peace Prize, Nobel declared that it should be given to the person who has "[in the preceding year] done the most or the best work for fraternity among nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses" (Nobel). The Nobel Committee, in announcing the award, noted that with his election to the Presidency of the United States, Barack Obama ushered in a new era in American foreign policy. Unlike past presidents, Obama made an effort to work as a member of the world community to resolve conflicts through peaceful negotiation. He spoke of his vision of this new age in his inaugural address, saying:

On this day, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord. On this day, we come to proclaim an end to the petty grievances and false promises. . . [and return to] the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness. (Obama 8)

Mr. Obama immediately began to act on these promises. The first phone call he made was to the Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, assuring him that he was going to work with both Palestinian and Israeli sides to bring peace to the Middle East. He has also promised to negotiate a new treaty with Russia to further progress towards nuclear disarmament (Blair 1). He took steps towards lowering ground troops in Iraq, including setting a timetable for complete withdrawal. He pledged to close the prison at Guantanamo Bay by January 22, 2010 (Obama, "Executive Order," Sec. 3). In addition, he has made a commitment to addressing the issue of climate change and making America a leader in this movement. In short, he promised a new attitude from the United States—one of cooperation and hope.

When reading the reactions to the awarding of the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize to Barack Obama, it is apparent that not everyone agreed that he deserved it. Supporters of Obama generally concurred with the committee's decision, while his detractors disapproved. Many world

## The Proof is in the Pudding: Why Barack Obama Deserves the Nobel Peace Prize

leaders spoke very positively of the change that Mr. Obama's election has brought to world politics and of the hope for even greater things to come. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, himself a recipient of the prize in 1984, noted,

What wonderful recognition of someone who has already made such an impact on our planet with regards to the Muslim world, nuclear disarmament, climate change and, to some extent, the Middle East. . . . It is an award that speaks to the promise of President Obama's message of hope. (qtd. in Levy 8)

Nicolas Sarkozy stated that the prize "confirmed . . . America's return to the hearts of the people of the world" (qtd. in Levy 4).

However, there was plenty of negative feedback on the announcement, including that from Republican National Committee chairman Michael Steele, who commented, "What has President Obama actually accomplished? It is unfortunate that the president's star power has outshined tireless advocates who have made real achievements" (qtd. in Davis 2). Other detractors included the top human rights official in Hugo Chavez's government, members of the Islamic Jihad in Gaza, (Otterman, 30, 32) and spokesmen for Hamas and the Taliban (Levy, 10, 12). Like Mr. Steele, each of these expressed dismay that Mr. Obama had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in spite of the fact that he did not have any real accomplishments.

In the past, the Nobel Peace Prize has been given to someone in anticipation of what their ideas and proposals will do for peace in the world. For example, Oscar Arias Sanchez received the award for a peace accord signed just two months before the announcement of the prize in 1987 (Lundestad). Mr. Obama's prize is another example of the Nobel Committee rewarding vision rather than results. It is irrelevant whether or not the policies Obama is working for come to fruition. In a world where conflict and warfare are everyday concepts, it can be difficult to introduce peaceful resolutions. To have the courage to even attempt these means of conflict resolution is deserving of such an award. This shows the pettiness of the argument regarding Obama's lack of concrete achievements. He is

taking the world in a new direction, a peaceful one, and not in a comparatively simple domestic situation but at an international level where he is exposed, and it is more difficult than ever to succeed in international agreements. Obama is a beacon of hope for the United States and in turn for the world.

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Evaluation: *This is a well-researched, thoroughly documented, carefully constructed essay.*

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## Frankenstein and Women's Roles in the Nineteenth Century

Rachel Mosberg

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Teresa Chung

Assignment: Write a research paper in which you offer a thesis about a theme in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, supporting it with textual analysis of the novel and situating your own analysis against other, already existing, analyses.

So monstrous and repulsive was the creature in the novel *Frankenstein* that he was ruthlessly rejected from society and forcefully isolated from interaction with his self-proclaimed superiors. Disgustingly similar, women in Mary Shelley's era had always been heartlessly cut off from the public society and had little say in their inevitable fates. There is an undeniable parallel between the happenings in Shelley's 1831 novel, *Frankenstein*, and the occurrences that she and the women before her had to experience. Shelley's book was incredibly unique for its time, especially considering that its author was a woman. It deals with a man, Victor Frankenstein, who temporarily abandons his family in the pursuit of science. Victor toils to construct a man out of the remains of various corpses and then succeeds in bringing the creature to life, not realizing the havoc and destruction that would ensue. It is a very complex plot, throughout which several themes are woven, one being the treatment and low positioning of women in society. There are few female characters in Shelley's book, but each plays a significant role in conveying Shelley's message that the low regard for women and the limited room for their growth are detrimental to everyone. Shelley's mother was an ardent feminist who likely inspired her to create characters that would display the negative effects of gender roles.

Some of the novel's characters support Shelley's theme very clearly because they concisely fit into their assigned gender role and suffer because of that. For instance, in the novel, there is the motherly figure Caroline Beaufort, who winds up dying due to her firm dedication to her motherly duties. There is also the ever-important character Elizabeth Lavenza, who displays traits such as compassion, patience, and silence that every woman was supposed to possess. However, these ever-important characteristics also lead Elizabeth to meet her end. Justine Moritz also represents a proper woman because she is submissive even under excruciating circumstances, and it is her unrelenting submission that guides her straight to the gallows. Moving along, some of the aspects of the book do not immediately appear to support its theme, but after careful analysis it becomes clear that Shelley is utilizing these aspects to show society the negative effects of constricting women. For instance, the book delves into the gender roles that were prevalent in Shelley's day, and she includes the character Agatha to demonstrate how unsatisfying they were. Also, courtships and marital processes were included in the book, such as the marriage between the characters Safie and Felix, so that Shelley could show her readers how oppressive those practices are and what women need to do if they want to be happy. All of these situations are written about in the book in a fairly manifest way; however, less obvious is the way Shelley conveys feminist ideas across to the reader in the form of the creature. While he is a male creature, he still exemplifies many of the heartaches that women had to experience and offers them strategies toward a more fair society.

Consider first, that this is not the first essay to be concerned about feminism in *Frankenstein*. For instance, Nancy Yousef has offered her interpretation of the novel, and she considers the lack of a female figure in the creature's life to be very important. She explains that Shelley writes the creature into utter seclusion in order to exemplify the ways in which contemporary theories of human development are insufficient or are not complete because they do not recognize that without social influence in the creature's life, he is unable to develop. Yousef's argument is well made; however, it is definitely not Shelley's main intention for her novel. Instead, it is



*Frankenstein and Women's Roles  
in the Nineteenth Century*

apparent that she does not focus on the creature's inability to develop; rather, she emphasizes the inability of women to develop within society because of its oppressive restrictions. Also dissimilar to Yousef's thesis is the one constructed by Marjean D. Purinton in the essay "Mary Shelley's Science Fiction Short Stories and the Legacy of Wollstonecraft's Feminism." Purinton feels it is clear that Shelley chose to write her story in the science fiction genre because while science fiction novels were typically interpreted as masculine, Shelley actually utilizes the genre to break down gender norms and to support both her mother's and her own feminist ideas. Purinton's hypothesis makes good sense; however, Shelley presents her feminist ideas even more clearly in the story lines of her female characters. Another person to consider the female characters portrayed in *Frankenstein* is Margit Stange in her essay "'You Must Create a Female': Republican Order and its Natural Base in *Frankenstein*." Her thesis is much more congruent with that of this essay. She supports that

...it is women, Shelley emphasizes, who endure the punishments that the republican order...inflicts on its natural base. Shelley depicts the punishment meted out to those who, by virtue of their republic assignment to the domain of family, feeling, and passion, are recruited into the republican scheme and made to suffer for its failures. (Stange 314).

Like this essay, she uses the fates of characters like Caroline, Elizabeth, and Justine to show how the ideals of the republican order set down by society are cruel and wind up making women suffer. This essay will extend Stange's thesis by also considering the ways that the book's characters liberate themselves from society's boundaries. There is another scholarly writer whose thesis I would like to make a note of because it is similar to one of the messages incorporated in Shelley's book. This scholar is Carole Pateman, and her thesis is embedded in the essay "Self-Ownership and Property in the Person: Democratization and a Tale of Two Concepts." Here, she writes that if America wants to progress into a more libertarian existence, then self-ownership is necessary. The lack of rights over oneself is portrayed negatively in the novel. Therefore, Shelley would likely have agreed with Pateman's thesis.

Before leaping into the story of *Frankenstein*, it

is necessary to reflect on the time period that the book was composed in as well as understand a little bit about Shelley's background. In the nineteenth century when *Frankenstein* was published, women had very few liberties in comparison to men. They were not able to own possessions, including their own bodies and their children. Everything they had, even inheritances, belonged to the man in their lives: either their father or their husband. They were very oppressive circumstances under which to try to live. This is what drove Shelley's mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, in 1792 to write her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*; it was a very radical book whose influence did not simply pass by Shelley, who was born five years later (Hindle xiv). Her father, too, was a radical, so it is no surprise that Shelley would continue their famous endeavors by writing *Frankenstein*, a novel dealing with the second-class status of women.

One of the very first female characters that the book introduces to readers is Caroline. She is the daughter of Beaufort, and after his death, she marries his business partner, Alphonse Frankenstein. Her importance in the book is her role as a mother to Victor and to her adopted daughter, Elizabeth. She is a caring woman whose motherly instinct constantly seeps through. When in Italy, she sees the beautiful Elizabeth living with a family of peasant foster parents, and her heart sings for her to take the girl in. She loves Elizabeth dearly, and so when the young girl falls ill with scarlet fever, Caroline ignores everyone's concerns and does not leave Elizabeth's bedside. "She attended her sickbed;--her watchful attentions triumphed over the malignity of the distemper, --Elizabeth was saved, but the consequences of this imprudence were fatal to her preserver" (Shelley 44). Because Caroline so dedicatedly stuck by her daughter's bed, she was able to cure Elizabeth, but in turn she contracted the disease and passed away. She was an admirable mother, but because she was so consumed by her role as a mother to Elizabeth, she died. This is an instance of a woman who perished because she was so constricted to her proper role as a woman as defined by society at that time. Had she had more liberties like a man, maybe she would not have spent so much time at Elizabeth's bedside, so she herself would not have gotten sick.

After Caroline's death, Elizabeth survives to fulfill another important role in the novel and in Shelley's theme. Elizabeth shows the ideal characteristics for a woman in that era; she is compassionate but not outspoken by any

means. At the time the book was written, women were viewed as objects; not surprisingly, Elizabeth is viewed as an object to possess by Victor. Before Elizabeth's arrival in the Frankenstein household, Victor is told, "I have a pretty present for you my Victor—tomorrow he shall have it" (Shelley 37). Once Elizabeth is delivered to him, he recollected, "I, with childish seriousness, interpreted her words literally and looked upon Elizabeth as mine....All praises bestowed on her I received as made to a possession of my own" (Shelley 37). Elizabeth is regarded not as another human but as a possession, and Victor feels he can claim her as well as anything she owns. Sickeningly, this was the real-life situation for women in Shelley's time and for the women who had long come before her. Aside from displaying how women were regarded as objects, Elizabeth is present to show how women were viewed in terms of their demeanor. In volume I, chapter II, Shelley spends almost an entire page describing the natures of Victor, his friend Henry Clerval, and Elizabeth. The author oozes about the zealous nature of the two boys and how passionate and lively they were in their own ways. On the contrary, when it comes time to describe Elizabeth, Shelley's tone clams to a gentle discussion on the girl's peaceful nature:

The saintly soul of Elizabeth shone like a shrine-dedicated lamp in our peaceful home. Her sympathy was ours; her smile, her soft voice, the sweet glance of her celestial eyes, were ever there to bless and animate us. She was the living spirit of love to soften and attract; I might have become sullen in my study, rough through the ardour of my nature, but that she was there to subdue me to a semblance of her own gentleness. (Shelley 40)

As women were expected to be, Elizabeth is sweet and softened. Men were allowed to be loud and driven, whereas a woman had to embody a quiet manner that would not draw attention to herself in an outright way. It was stressed to girls that they were supposed to be quiet and unnoticed, and therefore they knew their opinions were not cared about. Elizabeth fulfills this ideal because even when she deeply wants Victor to stay with her, she does not stand in the way of his journey. "She longed to bid me [Victor] hasten my return—a thousand conflicting emotions rendered her mute, as she bade me a tearful, silent farewell" (Shelley 158). She is aware

that she is not allotted say in Victor's actions, so she does her society-approved duty and remains quiet about her feelings. Throughout the entire book, Elizabeth remains passive: she does not try to persuade Victor from going to Ingolstadt for school, she does not force him to marry her in the event that he has found a different girl to love, and she consistently waits for him to do what he pleases even if it means that she has to wait alone. Her passive actions are what lead her to be alone on her and Victor's wedding night. When Victor wanders out of the room, she is left alone and unguarded and is murdered because of it. If Elizabeth had been able to voice her opinions and make some decisions for herself and for Victor, especially now that they were a couple, she may have been able to stop Victor from constructing the creature or from leaving her to build and then destroy the companion creature or from leaving their honeymoon bed. Obviously, being the passive, silent woman that society demands did not bode well for Elizabeth or the women whom Shelley modeled her after.

Another woman who dies because she follows society's rules for women is Justine. She is framed for the murder of Victor's younger brother. If a man had been framed for the murder, he would have been able to publicly and openly state his side of the story and stand stalwartly by it. Justine, on the other hand, is viewed as a defenseless and easily coerced girl, so the authorities rail into her until she eventually crumples and confesses to an atrocious crime that she did not commit:

"I did confess; but I confessed a lie....Ever since I was condemned, my confessor has besieged me; he threatened and menaced, until I almost began to think that I was the monster that he said I was. He threatened excommunication and hell fire in my last moments if I continued obdurate. Dear lady, I had none to support me." (Shelley 88)

Because Justine was raised as the typical defenseless woman who had to rely on a man, she found herself unable to stand her ground and facing bleak options. Justine's submissive nature leads her straight to the gallows to hang, in Shelley's eyes, as an example of what society's standards can do to women.

Some characters do not readily appear to support Shelley's theme. For instance, some may argue that Agatha counters it because she does not die like the other

characters. However, after closer analysis of the text, it is clear that Agatha does suffer from having to take on her gender role. Aside from societal expectations focused on being motherly, quiet, and submissive, there were also restrictions of women to certain tasks, and Agatha is used to exhibit how lackluster and unsatisfying they were. For instance, men were able to take on physical jobs and were allowed to work in public as well. The creature makes note of Felix's duties in the household: "Presently, I saw the young man again, with some tools in his hand, cross the field behind the cottage" (Shelley 110). While the boy conducts work outside of the home, Agatha—a girl—is confined to the home and to womanly duties such as cleaning, cooking, or tending to the garden. "[T]he girl was also busied, sometimes in the house and sometimes in the yard...She seemed pleased, and went into the garden for some roots and plants, which she placed in water, and then upon the fire" (Shelley 110, 111). Agatha is condemned to a life with few opportunities. She is not able to leave the house often like Felix is, when he works on a neighboring farm. She does not have the same freedoms because she is only a female. At one point, it is noted that she had "ranked with ladies of the highest distinction" (Shelley 124), but she is only even compared to other women as opposed to just being ranked with "people of the highest distinction" because men and women were regarded separately and not as equals. Not only does Agatha suffer because of the lack of opportunities given to her but also because she lacks control of her life. Felix is given full command of decisions that will inevitably affect her, too. This is displayed when Felix loses all of the De Lacey family's wealth. Because of the choices that he makes, Agatha is forced into a dismal setting marked with constant work and hunger. Agatha does not meet her demise in the book, but Shelley utilizes this character to display the limited sphere that women were entitled to and the detrimental affects they had to endure because they were not given control over their own lives.

The De Lacey household, the home of Felix and Agatha, is also the setting for other traditional practices that demean women. Marital practices were considerably unjust in Shelley's era. Back then, women were not able to legally exist without a man to claim them. Instead, a woman had to always bear the name of a male who had control of her possessions and brought upon himself the results of her actions, good or bad. This was known as

feme-covert, because a female was always covered by the name of a male, either her father or her husband (DuBois and Dumenil). Because a father had control over his daughter, he was at liberty to give her to whomever he pleased. This is the case with Safie and her father, an imprisoned Turk. The father exchanged his daughter's hand in marriage, to Felix, for help in getting out of jail. "[T]he youth could not help owning to his own mind that the captive possessed a treasure which would fully reward his toil and treasure" (Shelley 126). Again, the girl is viewed as an object, and Felix does not think that he needs to win over the girl; rather, he strives to win over the father so that he will give Safie to him. Safie, too, is aware that she is not entitled to any say in the matter; she likely learned at a young age that the value of having a daughter was earned by marrying her off. In this case, Safie's father is giving her away so that he can be a free man and so that she will be wed into Felix's wealthy family. Knowing that she has no influence in her engagement, Safie decides to instead pretend to be happy with the situation by writing Felix sweet letters: "She thanked him in the most ardent terms for his intended service towards her parent; and at the same time she gently deplored her own fate" (Shelley 126). She does not want to marry Felix, but as a woman at that time, her feelings were irrelevant. Later, the creature states that Safie eventually came to embrace her marital fate and even fell in love with Felix. However, her newfound satisfaction was swiftly taken away once Felix lost his fortune and the father broke off the engagement. Once again Safie's emotions are callously disregarded, and decisions about her life are made without consideration of what will make her happy: "[T]he merchant commanded his daughter to think no more of her lover [and] she attempted to expostulate with her father, but he left her angrily, reiterating his tyrannical mandate" (Shelley 129). Shelley makes powerful word choices in this passage. She uses the word "command" because it resembles the relationship between a master and servant, which is not entirely far off from the relationship between women and their owners back then. Shelley also chooses the term "tyrannical mandate" to denote a ruler-subject relationship again. Like the other female characters in the novel, Safie has a small role, but it is a critical one. Safie not only presents the despicable marital practices of Shelley's time, but she also shows the emotional roller-coaster that women were subject to because of men's rule over them.

Moreover, the character Safie does more than demonstrate the negative affects of having to succumb to gender norms. Shelley also uses Safie to show women how to molt their oppressive expectations in order to achieve happiness. Safie is one of the only characters to choose to defy gender standards. She chooses to run away from her father and flees to live with Felix, her lover. Society would have considered it inconceivable for a woman to take her life into her own hands, defy her father's command, and then run off to be with her peasant lover. Yet, Safie does do this, and she winds up happy because of it and even receives an education out of her decision. Shelley uses Safie to show how unhappy women are when they have to obey society's rules for them and how women are capable of turning their miserable circumstances around if they choose to make their own decisions.

Furthermore, not only did Shelley use the female characters to show how restricted and oppressive women's roles were in society, but the author also wove her theme into the story of the creature. Even though he is a male character, there is still a distinct parallel between his social status and that of women in Shelley's time. The creature was rejected from society because of his exterior; it did not matter that he had become well educated or that he had a compassionate soul. Similarly, women were ostracized from the "public sphere" because of their physical form; it did not matter if they had intelligent thoughts or ideas (DuBois and Dumenil). Both were seen as unworthy of being accepted based solely on their appearance.

Other parallels are also drawn up between the creature and nineteenth-century women. For instance, neither had any possessions: "And what was I? Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant, but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property.... I was not even of the same nature as man" (Shelley 123). Even at the end of this passage, the creature states that he too lacks equality with man, and though he is referring to mankind, Shelley seems to purposely choose to say "man" rather than "people" or "the rest of them." The creature speaks this quote, but it could just as appropriately have come from the lips of any of the women in Shelley's time. Continuing, while the creature is observing the De Lacey family, he says,

"I admired virtue and good feelings and loved the gentle manners and amiable qualities of my cottagers, but I was shut out from intercourse with

them, except through means which I obtained by stealth, when I was unseen and unknown, and which rather increased than satisfied the desire I had of becoming one among my fellows." (Shelley 123)

Here the creature refers to the family as "my cottagers." He does not say "those cottagers," which would indicate distance between him and them; instead, he says "my cottagers." This shows how he feels that he is the same as them, plus at the end he says, "among my fellows." Again this shows how he perceives himself as being alike to them, yet he is still isolated from them. Similarly, women are practically just like men, yet women were forced to remove themselves from settings that involved men. The creature tells readers that if he wanted to be near the cottagers, he had to be quiet and not let them know that he was there. This situation is strikingly similar to that of women. Women were not allowed to be in the presence of a group of men, and if they found themselves under those circumstances, then they had to make sure their presence was fairly undetected (DuBois and Dumenil).

Another way that the creature promotes the feminist agenda is in his demand for a companion who is equal to him. All along, the creature is viewed as different from mankind because of his physical form (just as women were), and now he is asking for another creature that is willing to view him as an equal (just as women wanted men, their companions, to view them as equals). While the creature is interacting with Victor, he demands, "I am alone, and miserable; man will not associate with me; but one as deformed and horrible as myself would not deny herself to me. My companion must be of the same species, and have the same defects. This being you must create" (Shelley 146). Shelley has her readers sympathize with the creature and root for him to be accepted and have an equal counterpart. She writes the creature to be a protagonist because the creature represents women and their yearning for a counterpart who will accept them. Shelley has the creature say, "This being you must create" for a clear reason. The creature represents women, and so Victor represents men. Therefore, this statement shows how it is in man's power to be a more accepting counterpart. Throughout the creature's story, readers are told of the adverse effects of being treated like a second-class citizen, and he also says, "My sufferings were augmented also by the oppressive sense of the injustice and ingratitude of their infliction" (Shelley 143). On the

other hand, the creature also describes the positive things that *could* occur if he were able to be viewed more as an equal by his counterpart: "my virtues will necessarily arise when I live in communion with an equal. I shall feel the affections of a sensitive being, and become linked to the chain of existence and events, from which I am now excluded" (Shelley 150). Unquestionably, this refers to the longing women have to be a part of the world and its movement instead of being condemned to a mere kitchen. After careful analysis, it is clear that Shelley's main character, the creature, is meant to represent women not only in Shelley's era but also every era that came before her.

Considering all of this evidence, it is unmistakable that *Frankenstein* shows us that the oppressive roles forced upon women are dangerous, not only to the women who are shackled to these roles but also to society—as displayed by what happened to society once the creature had had enough of the oppression. The theme is most dramatically woven into the experiences of the creature; therefore, it makes sense that Shelley also included her point in the creature's story. It is not likely that Shelley was suggesting a violent gender overhaul to achieve equality. Instead, she offers less drastic means of improving the status of women: education. The first instance of a woman receiving an education comes after Safie has escaped her gender roles and sought liberty with the De Laceys. This shows an association between freedom from oppression and education. Furthermore, the creature is not given an opportunity to education, and neither were women. The creature took it upon himself to self-educate. He took small steps, but he eventually taught himself to understand the cottagers, then to speak, then to read, and eventually to think critically and to articulate masterfully. Once he had done that, he was able to recognize the oppressive situation he was in and took steps to rectify it. Shelley may be encouraging women to educate themselves, since women's studies were not taken seriously then.

Evidently, Shelley was as passionate about feminism as her mother was, which is why the author chose to inscribe feminist points in her novel, *Frankenstein*. She took time to include numerous characters that would serve as examples of society-approved women. First, Shelley introduced Caroline, the dedicated mother who lies on her deathbed after tending to her diseased daughter's sickbed.

Next, there is Elizabeth, who survives only to amount to a quiet, gentle young woman who is strangled to death because she waited for a man to rescue her. Then, there is poor Justine, whose training as an appropriate woman led her to submit to the interrogation of the authorities and perish for a crime that she would never have committed. Shelley also uses her book to display the limited domestic roles of women as well as the oppressive marital practices of the day. This is also where Shelley attempts to motivate women to take action to change their circumstances. The most complex way that Shelley creates an image and more importantly a voice for feminists is through the actions of the creature. All of this culminates to fully support Shelley's theme that women who just submit to the oppressive roles that society forces on them will only suffer. Therefore, Shelley wanted women of her time to find ways to educate themselves and begin to strive for more just opportunities.

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Evaluation: *In her well-marshaled and historically informed argument, Rachel helps us see how devastating a critique Shelley's novel offers of the roles assigned to women in a patriarchal society.*

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## Dancing to a New Tune

Brittney Mulé

Course: English 101 (Composition)

Instructor: Andrew Wilson

*Assignment: Students were asked to write a personal experience essay, the first longer writing assignment of the semester. Students were required to somehow weave in a thought or idea or quote from one of the readings we'd covered to that point.*

I was nine years old with an attitude to die for! I was angry. I knew I didn't fit in with everyone else at my school. I knew I was different, with a special quality in me that no one else had. I knew I had it . . . but I certainly didn't know what *it* was. I had a really hard time learning everything. I had a hard time reading and remembering what I read. I could read the words, but they didn't make sense in my head. I couldn't remember who I read about, what the person did, or even the exciting parts of the story. I tried everything. My mom read aloud to me, for example, but I couldn't remember. I got books on tape to listen to the stories, but I couldn't focus. I stopped after every sentence and tried to say the main idea. I couldn't. My mom and dad were worried. They had reason to worry. Since I was adopted, my parents knew my background all too well. My birth mother was a drug addict, and my parents knew that the drugs could cause learning disabilities. Because I wasn't learning as fast as they thought I should, because I had poor grades, and because I felt bad about myself, they had me tested at the school. There was a memory test to see how much I could remember. There was a math test to see if I knew my basic facts. There was a reading test to see if I could remember what I read. The nurse tested my eyes and my hearing. My parents had to tell the school everything about me—from my birth mother, my first words, my interactions with my sister and others, and everything else I didn't want the school to know about. The results showed that I had learning disabilities that made me different from many others in the classroom. And since I was pulled out of class for reading help and math help and social work, I was out of the class more

than I was in it. No wonder I had bad grades! I wasn't in any classroom long enough to learn what the students were supposed to know.

My mom looked for help. She got a directory of tutors from the school district. She and I sat down to choose one. I didn't want my kindergarten teacher; after all, I was now a fourth grader! I didn't want a man! I never had a man for a teacher and I didn't want to start now. I picked a lady named Dr. Nancy Fritz, who lived near the school and near my house. I picked a name, but I didn't know anything about her. Since she was a doctor, I figured she must know everything. I hoped that she could help.

My mom and I walked up to a big white house. It was two stories and seemed like it was going to eat me alive! I was scared. "What did I get myself into? Who cares if she is a doctor? What if she doesn't like me? What if she can't help me? What if I don't like her? Why do I need to do even more homework when I don't understand what the school is giving me already? This is going to be a disaster!" I walked very slowly up the driveway, trailing behind my mom, who was encouraging me to move a little bit faster. Mom rang the bell.

The door opened. There she was, Dr. Fritz. She was a tall, skinny lady with really long brown hair in a braid down her back. She had a smile on her face and said, "Hello." I didn't run away, yet. I stood behind my mom, peeking out shyly, wondering even more who this lady was. We went into the kitchen and sat down at the kitchen table. She started to speak to us. "Hello, again. You must be Brittney. I am Mrs. Fritz. Your mom told me that you would like some help with your schoolwork. Is that right?"

"Yes," I said very quietly.

"What subjects do you need help in? Reading? Math? English? You tell me, because that way we can set goals for you and me to work on. You see, as your tutor, you become my boss. We set goals for you and me to work on. When we meet those goals, then we talk again with your mom and see if we need to set new goals or if you can fire me."

I couldn't believe the power she was giving me. She was treating me as a person who knew what I needed. She made me feel in control of my learning. She made

me believe I could be like the others in my classroom because she believed in me and my ability to succeed.

We set our first goals for math. I needed to learn my math facts, and I couldn't believe it! She pulled out games to play. We played a dice game that she had invented to teach math facts. She had different versions for addition, subtraction, and multiplication. We played to see who would reach a goal score first. She always played to win, which made me know that I could beat her at the game. Because she didn't make it easy for me, I knew she had confidence in my ability to figure the facts out for myself. She was patient and let me work through the problem in my head. I got to use paper if I needed it; she even let me use my fingers if I needed to. She told me that there were many ways to get to the answer, and we just needed to figure out which way worked best for me. She taught me how to group numbers to do the math faster. She taught me how to use math tricks to solve the problems faster. She gave me strategies to be successful. We also played Math Smart, a game of dominoes with math facts. We started where she had two-thirds of the deck of cards and I had one-third of the deck. Then, we raced to get rid of all of our cards. By fifth grade, we each had half the deck, and I even beat her sometimes! We also played with tangrams to learn patterns. We used math books from Borders to help me understand the concepts. The crazy thing was that my reward for doing a good job at the tutoring session was that she would teach me a trick to do math faster! It was hard to believe that I wanted to be rewarded with more math!

When I met my math goal of learning my facts, Mrs. Fritz and my mom and I met as a group again. At that first meeting, Mrs. Fritz had said we would have this follow-up meeting and decide if we would set new goals or if she would get fired. She lived up to her word, something many adults don't do very often. So, in addition to learning how to set a goal and succeed, I also learned that I could trust a teacher. Mom and I had talked before the meeting. She asked me what I wanted. I couldn't believe it, but I told her I wanted to keep on going to tutoring. I wanted to improve my reading skills.

My next goals involved reading comprehension. I read too fast to remember what I needed to talk about. When I was in school, I was embarrassed if I was the last

one still reading in the classroom. I was embarrassed to read out loud in front of anyone. I did not feel comfortable about my reading ability. My test scores were usually bad, so I felt bad, too. Mrs. Fritz had me read out loud to her with no one else listening. She said she had to hear me read to figure out what was going on in my brain. So, I did it, for her. She told me to slow down to 10-miles-per-hour speed rather than the 60 miles per hour I was doing. When I slowed down my reading, I was able to explain the events or the facts in the reading passages. Dr. Fritz taught me strategies to be successful in reading. She said the strategies were like the math facts. Once I tried them, I would be successful in reading just as I had become successful in math. She taught me how to read the questions first and to look for the facts. I learned how to summarize each paragraph, then each page, then each chapter. I am a better reader silently than I am aloud. I am always afraid that the people listening to me read aloud will make fun of me. Dr. Fritz helped me learn more and more words and to put them into my everyday vocabulary. She even had a game for that! By learning the new words, I was able to read them aloud without fear. She showed me that I already knew these words in my listening vocabulary; I just hadn't seen the words in print before. By showing me the words that I already knew, I gained confidence in my reading ability. It is funny that I still like to be read to, because I do know many words in my listening vocabulary. Hearing the books on tape or being read to me helps me read along and understand. Again, she taught me to believe in myself by giving me strategies that I could do to improve and meet my goals. She helped me get these strategies into my accommodations for school, which helped me be successful through junior high and high school, and which continue to help me now, in college. She believed in me like no one except my parents had ever done before.

That first year of tutoring was a turning point for me. It changed the way I looked at homework. In the past, I was never able to do it. It was too hard, took too long, and made me feel stupid. Working with Dr. Fritz went by too quickly because it was fun. She made me believe that I am smart and that I can do these things. I just do it in a different way and at a different pace. But, as she tells me every time she sees me, "I know you can do it, Britt. You

are a smart girl!" Just as in the essay, "Beauty: When the Other Dancer is the Self," by Alice Walker, I too learned to dance with the child I used to be. I was unsure of myself and knew I was different. Just as Alice Walker's daughter saw the world in Alice's (supposedly) damaged eye, my tutor saw the world opening up in my eyes as I learned to believe in myself rather than to judge myself according to the views and abilities of others around me. Alice Walker knew, "The other dancer has obviously come through all right, as I have done" (441). Likewise, I learned to have confidence in myself and dance with the person I used to be. I know that I work harder than many other people to learn the facts I need to know. But, that's okay, because I do it my way and can still have fun when I learn new facts, new methods, new subjects, and new ideas. My tutor taught me that when one has fun and enjoys learning, the world becomes mine. I dance to new music, joining the old me and the new me.

Incidentally, I still haven't fired this woman. Ten years later, she is like a second mom to me. I can talk to her about my problems. She understands. She does everything in her power to help me succeed. She believes in me. She taught me to believe in myself.

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Evaluation: *Among other things, this is an essay on the power of education and the amazing efforts of a great teacher. In my conversations with her, Brittny seems to worry that such teachers often go unnoticed. This paper might be her attempt to rectify that.*



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# The War of Deception

Brian Neistein

Course: English 101 (Composition)

Instructor: Kris Piepenburg

*Assignment: After completing a group research project on a controversial issue, each student was to write an essay defending a claim of policy, value, or truth related to the issue.*

While officials have continuously claimed, since the war's launch, that invading Iraq was an essential step in fighting terrorism and increasing international peace, many now argue that invading Iraq has caused the exact opposite. It is argued that by entering and staying in Iraq, new tensions have been built between America and terrorist groups that would make another attack on the U.S. much more likely. And because invading Iraq diverted attention away from the fight in Afghanistan against Osama bin Laden, the possibility exists that the entrance into Iraq allowed Osama bin Laden, the actual individual who supposedly was responsible for the attack on America on September 11<sup>th</sup>, to escape U.S. military heat, regroup with al Qaeda, and plan further attacks against America. By invading Iraq based on lies and ignoring the war restrictions of the U.S. Constitution, the U.S. has now adopted a new role. Many nations and their people no longer view the United States as a leader in the fight for peace, but rather a juggernaut, stomping through the world for her own selfish gain. Because Saddam Hussein did not have weapons of mass destruction, sat atop the second largest oil reserve in the world, and was previously trained by the Central Intelligence Agency, many suggest that the war in Iraq was initiated because of completely different motives than those that were presented to the American people.

Iraq's oil supply is nothing to be overlooked. In fact, according to the article, "Oil Firms Wait as Iraq Crisis Unfolds,"

Iraq has 113 billion barrels of proven reserves, second worldwide only to Saudi Arabia, which has 262 billion barrels. But because of its two decades

of war, Iraq's oil potential remains relatively unexplored. The U.S. Energy Department estimates that Iraq has as much as 220 billion barrels in undiscovered reserves, bringing the Iraqi total to the equivalent of 98 years of current U.S. annual oil imports. (Collier par. 11)

With such a large amount of oil at hand, would any oil company *not* want to loot a share of it? "Although senior Bush administration officials say they have not begun to focus on the issues involving oil and Iraq, American and foreign oil companies have already begun maneuvering for a stake in the country's huge proven reserves of 113 billion barrels of crude oil, the largest in the world outside Saudi Arabia. Both President Bush and Vice President Cheney's long-standing ties to the oil industry have prompted this notion" (Prignitz par. 7). And the looting itself is pretty easy to accomplish. The only obstacle standing in the way of billions of dollars is one man and his army. Although Saddam Hussein kills and tortures his own people, his absence being preferred by many, entering Iraq has achieved nothing but economic distress for America.

However, many will argue that the Iraqi people are now better off as a result of the Iraq war. Nobody's word concerning this argument, though, should be valued as highly as that of the Iraqi people themselves. According to polls in 2007, led by BBC, ABC News, and NHK,

About 70% of Iraqis believe security has deteriorated in the area covered by the US military 'surge' of the past six months, which suggests that the overall mood in Iraq is as negative as it has been since the US-led invasion in 2003. Only 29% think things will get better in the next year, compared to 64% two years ago. Nearly 60% see attacks on US-led forces as justified. ("Opinion Polls in Iraq")

Obviously, based on the results of these polls, U.S. stations in Iraq are not seen by Iraqis as beneficial, but rather damaging to the security of their country, and do not see it getting any better. Even more frightening is the fact that, generally, Iraqi people don't want American soldiers in their homeland and see attacks on U.S. forces as justified. But, Iraqis have plenty of justification to be angry at American forces. "At least 100,000 Iraqis have

been killed through violence in the more than 6 1/2 years since the invasion, according to [iraqbodycount.org](http://iraqbodycount.org) ("Iraqi Civilian Deaths Drop To Lowest Level Of War" par. 13).

Aside from the obstacles of angry Iraqi civilians, Saddam Hussein and his military, the biggest, likely even more so, obstacle in beginning a war with Iraq was the American people. A nation cannot have a military without soldiers. It becomes the issue, then, as to whether or not a nation and its people support the reasoning and justification behind a war. Although there was high demand among oil companies for the billions of dollars in potential profit from Iraq's oil reserves even before the war, a war based on oil would never be backed by the American people. If oil tycoons were to profit off of Iraq, justification to enter was needed. Thus, on came the stream of lies that intimidated the American people and gave reason for the preemptive war that would last for countless years.

Many would argue that the entire war was based on lies; they have a strong argument. The biggest lie, and thus false threat to our nation, though, was the statement that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. Vice President Cheney stated on March 16, 2003 on "Meet the Press" that, "We believe [Saddam] has, in fact, reconstituted nuclear weapons." However, "There was and is absolutely zero basis for this statement. CIA reports up through 2002 showed no evidence of an Iraqi nuclear weapons program" (Scheer par. 11-12). But why, though, does the U.S. feel so threatened by Saddam Hussein? Even if he did possess nuclear weapons, Saddam Hussein was formerly trained by the CIA. In fact, his association with the CIA dates back several decades. Why was America intimidated by a former ally more so than the actual terror network, al Qaeda, that was supposedly directly linked to 9/11? "While many have thought that Saddam first became involved with U.S. intelligence agencies at the start of the September 1980 Iran-Iraq war, his first contacts with U.S. officials date back to 1959, when he was part of a CIA-authorized six-man squad tasked with assassinating then Iraqi Prime Minister Gen. Abd al-Karim Qasim" (Sale par. 3). However, at 2 a.m. on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1990, 100,000 Iraqi troops invaded its neighbor, Kuwait, ending the U.S. and Iraq alliance (Sale par. 32). The conflict arose for several reasons. First, Saddam Hussein considered Kuwait to be

the rightful property of Iraq. Second, the Iraqis believed that Kuwait was illegally tapping into Iraq-occupied oil fields. The U.N. ordered the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait, while U.S. forces were summoned to Kuwait's side, bombing many of Iraq's military units.

Despite the heated tensions that arose between the U.S. and Iraq, though, no direct threat was made by Iraq to the U.S. In fact, Saddam Hussein was baffled by the continuous threats America made to Iraq on the basis of lies. In a letter to the U.N. General Assembly, Saddam Hussein wrote, "The U.S. administration wants to destroy Iraq in order to control the Middle East oil, and consequently control the politics as well as the oil and economic policies of the whole world" (qtd in Collier par. 20). Because the United States has found none of the premises of the war to be true, and has consequently found no weapons of mass destruction, it appears as if Saddam Hussein was speaking out against America's false accusations and true desires, to control Iraq and its natural resources.

But even if Iraq did have weapons of mass destruction, would the United States then be justified in waging war? Not according to the U.S. Constitution, which strictly prohibits pre-emptive wars, or wars of aggression, from occurring. "On March 19, 2003, at 2200 hours (EST), the United States launched a full-scale military attack against the sovereign state of Iraq. Iraq had neither attacked the United States, nor was it in the final stages of preparing for such an assault. Thus, for the first time in the 214-year history of our country, America had begun a Preemptive War" (Mitchell par. 1). By straying away from the Constitution, the U.S. risks endless, pointless wars, such as that of the war in Iraq. It was the Constitution's aim to protect the United States from tyranny, to prohibit wars based on profit, and to only allow *Congress* to authorize wars that are both in retaliation to an attack on America and in response to a risk to the safety of its citizens. Iraq fit neither of these requirements. "Constitutionally speaking, 'war' is a very specific set of legal relations between two or more independent nations... Thus, according to strict constitutional logic, a 'war on terror' is an existential impossibility—if only because 'terror' is a tactic, not a country; and 'terrorists' do not constitute one or more independent nations" (Vieira, Jr. par. 4). The "war on terror" is a breach of the Constitution. It redefines how

## The War of Deception

the U.S. should go to war and has created a war that has no boundaries, since “terror” is nothing more than a tactic that many nations can be associated with. Theoretically, under these newly found standards, the U.S. can accuse any nation of terrorism and then wage war against it.

The result of all of the deception, the breach of the Constitution, and the history of Saddam’s mysterious relations with the CIA, concludes that the citizens of America have been lied to, manipulated, and cheated. The tax dollars of every American have been used to support a war that does not serve the people who are indebted by it. The American people are not safer, but actually more endangered as a result of the slipping away of Osama bin Laden and the increasing degree of hatred toward America that spreads across the world because of the United States government’s new, arrogant perception of just war. Because the motives for waging war on Iraq seem to fall solely into those of corporate interests, the war in Iraq is one that should have never been waged, for any war waged by the U.S. that goes against the interests of its own citizens, regardless of whether the citizens of other nations benefit or not, is a war that prioritizes the interests of others, likely corporations, over the freedom and security of its own people.

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Evaluation: *Brian uses sources well to make a convincing claim about the truth of the war in Iraq. This is not an easy topic to research or write about, as it can be overwhelming, but Brian was up to the job.*

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# Happiness

Julie Provenza

Course: Philosophy 105  
(Introduction to Philosophy)  
Instructor: John Garcia

Assignment: *Students are asked to write a final paper for the course, which is to be driven by their own original thesis and must deal with a philosopher we have discussed throughout the semester.*

Pain, fear, weakness, and misery. These are feelings we generally try to keep out of everyday life. Most people wish for happiness every day. There are many things that we think make us happy. Possessions entail good feelings that we describe as happiness. Today's world is obsessed with material goods. Who can have the most? The best? The biggest? In order to get goods, we must have money from our jobs. People will do anything by any means just to get a little more money or to acquire, for example, an iPod. They believe that one item will bring them happiness because now they are like other people. Perhaps the iPod will bring satisfaction for a while, but the feelings will eventually wear away. We can easily lose these items and no longer believe we can be happy, or, we are never happy because we want something bigger and better. People often resort to "the grass is greener on the other side" philosophy. To most people, happiness is an emotional attachment.

Aristotle came up with a new way of thinking about happiness. Aristotle says that instead of an emotion, happiness is a way of life. Happiness should be a life-long goal that we are constantly striving for. Aristotle says, "'to live well' or 'to do well' is the same thing as 'to be happy'" (Aristotle 3). Essentially, happiness is living a human life well. In this paper, we will explore what it means to "live a human life" and how to live it "well" so we can end all illusions of happiness, and learn to focus on what is truly important in life.

First, we must understand why what most people think is happiness is not really happiness. There are many

notions of happiness that are illusions of true happiness. Aristotle points out the most common illusions of happiness people have. Most people associate money with happiness. We feel important and superior when we possess lots of money. Aristotle proves how money cannot bring happiness. Money only brings other possessions or items. Aristotle explains, "money is merely useful, as means to something else" (4). We might think that possessions bring us happiness, but this is not the truth. Possessions can become obsolete, depending on our age. We easily outgrow toys or break things. After this happens, the happiness is gone. Also, we are constantly getting new. The feelings for the old possessions disappear while we think we are now happy with the new things. Following this pattern would eventually lead us to never being happy because we have everything and want nothing. Money is not happiness because the feelings are not generated from inside us; the feelings are generated by objects.

Another common misconception of happiness comes from honor. Aristotle notices how people look for leadership positions or to be politically prominent. Most people are egotistic and care most about reputation. People want to *appear* good. They think that with the attention or the admiration of others, they will feel happiness. Again, honor does not bring happiness. Aristotle writes, "honor seems to depend more on the people who pay it than on the person to whom it is paid" (4). Aristotle says that the problem with honor is other people determine the title of honor. We do not become truly honorable overnight or because of something great we did. Honor is merely an opinion. Since we cannot control what other people think of us, once we no longer appear honorable, we no longer feel happiness. Again happiness is just an emotion. Since we understand how true happiness isn't what we think, we need to look at what true happiness is. Aristotle says that to understand happiness, we must live a human life well.

In order to live a human life *well*, we first must explore what it is to live a human life. To live a *human* life, we must find the one characteristic that is unique to humans. In other words, we need to find what the human function is. Every thing has a different function in life, and in the world. When he discusses function, Aristotle is referring

to any given thing's role. Essentially, our function is our job in life, not our career, but rather our purpose in life. It is easy to find the function of a shoemaker, says Aristotle, for his purpose is to make shoes (5). Again, it is easy to find the function of the eye, for it is to see. Each function is unique to where it comes from. The eye cannot make shoes; only a shoemaker can make shoes. Therefore, humans must have a specific function, since everything has a specific purpose in the world. Aristotle says, "for, as with a flute player, a sculptor, or any artisan, or in fact anyone who has a definite function and action, his goodness seems to lie in his function, so it would seem to be with man, if indeed man had a definite function" (5). If we can find one function specific to man, we can find how this function can be made excellent. Since we know man has one unique function, we must figure out what that function is.

When looking for our purpose, Aristotle points out that many people would say the function of humans is to live. But, according to Aristotle, "it is not life; for life is apparently something that man shares with the plants, and it is something peculiar to man that we are looking for" (5). Since we share life with trees and flowers, life is not unique to humans. Aristotle challenges us to think of something else that might be unique to humans. Next, we might think that sensation is unique to humans. It seems that only humans have feelings. Again, Aristotle shows us we are wrong, because "this too is apparently shared by man with horses, cattle, and all other animals" (5). Sensation is not unique to human beings, either, since animals experience the five senses as humans do. Finally, Aristotle says, "the function of a human being, then, is an activity of soul in accordance with reason, or not independent of reason" (6). The only thing unique to humans is reason. No other being is able to reason. The function of humans, then, is to live out life using reason to guide us. If we neglect our purpose, we are not living a human life. We now know how we can live a human life, but we must also define what it is to live a human life *well*.

When we think of how to live well, Aristotle points us to living virtuously. Virtue is the same as excellence, so this is a way of saying we must live our human life excellently (7). This means we must reason to the best of our ability. Since only we can reason, we need to use

our ability to reason, and become excellent at reasoning. When we use reason to live life, we can consciously make the right decisions that help us choose good character traits. To become virtuous, or live well, we need to develop excellent character traits that we can call virtues. If we constantly act with the right character traits, or virtues, we are living life well. Human excellences and admirable character traits are virtues (7). Aristotle is saying there are virtuous character traits that we want to acquire. If we have these traits, we are living well, which Aristotle believes is happiness.

It is important to strive for certain character traits instead of the emotion of happiness in our lives. We often envy people with admirable character traits. We don't envy people with sunny dispositions who are always smiling. Although it appears they are happy, we know they can't be. We always admire the people who have great character traits. We look at them and claim that they have lived fulfilling lives. We wish that we could look at our lives and say the same. That is what Aristotle wants us to do with our lives. We need to use these virtuous character traits and live well, to always be excellent people. When we focus on being excellent, instead of just being happy, we get a deeper meaning of what happiness is, and we feel fulfilled.

Virtues are not something we innately know by nature. It takes hard work and practice to behave virtuously. Once we know how to act with excellences, they must become habit, in order to be an excellent person. Aristotle says, "it is clear that no moral virtue is implanted in us by nature, for law of nature cannot be altered by habituation" (7). Aristotle is saying that we cannot change things done by nature. If we throw a stone up, by nature, the stone falls back down. We cannot teach the stone we throw up to keep going up (7). People can change their level of moral value. Since we can change our behavior, we must focus on perfecting our behavior. Finally, we need the virtuous act to become a fixed disposition. The more we act in a courageous manner, the more we become a courageous person. As Aristotle says, "Similarly, it is by doing just acts that we become just, by doing temperate acts that we become temperate, by doing courageous acts that we become courageous" (8). The more we constantly practice virtues in everyday life, the

more virtuous we will become. Once we are a virtuous people, we are living well, which is happiness.

We need to develop admirable character traits so that they become habit, but, without the right mind-set, our behaviors are not virtues. First, Aristotle says part of having the right mind-set is, "he should know what he is doing" (9). Simply responding to a situation the right way, as if reacting, does not help us become virtuous. The decision to respond must be a conscious decision. This way, we are aware that what we are doing is the way we should always act. Along with intentionally acting on the traits, Aristotle explains, "he should deliberately choose to do it, and for its own sake" (9). If we are being courageous just to be recognized, we are letting reputation become an obstacle to reaching happiness. The desire to be courageous needs to come from within us, with the intentions of just being a good, excellent person. If we do things for a reward, we don't understand virtue. We are not acting excellently if we don't do the excellences in the right manner.

We know *how* to act the right, excellent way, and why it is an important part of happiness, but how do we know what the right actions are? Aristotle defines the right actions as, "the equal part is a mean between excess and deficiency" (9). When thinking of the political spectrum, to the left are liberals, to the right conservatives, and in the center are the moderates. The right actions are found in the middle of the spectrum, where the moderates are. When looking at characteristic traits, we can be extreme on either side as well. Take courage, for example. One can act in fear or one can act in confidence. It takes a wise person to recognize that the virtuous character trait is to act in courage, which lies in the middle of these two extremes. We know we possess courage, but we also know the appropriate time to use our skill. This "mean between the extreme" is how we should find the virtuous character trait in all that we do. Now we can recognize what the right actions are, the right mindset to have while behaving, and how when they become habit, we are living a human life well.

Another piece of a well-lived or fulfilling life is having true friendships. People have friendships, but they are friendships with the wrong motives. The two most common types of friendships are based on utility and

pleasure. A friendship based on utility is when we are friends with someone because they give us things or they are useful. When we are benefitting from the friendship, we have a friendship based on utility. Friendships based on pleasure consist of enjoying yourself and feeling good when you are around someone. Aristotle says that we have both these types of friendships because they give *us* a sense of good and pleasure (16). Friendships should not be because we want something out of the relationship. The problem with these friendships, Aristotle says, is that, "such friendships are easily dissolved if the persons do not continue always the same, for they abandon their love if they cease to be pleasant or useful to each other" (16). If the good feelings change, we will no longer want to be in some of our friendships. Our emotions make us feel good, but just as quickly can make us feel bad. We need to figure out how friendships can be meaningful and help us live a life well.

The most meaningful kind of friendship is friendship based on virtue. To have a friendship based on virtue, Aristotle says, "the best friend is the one who, when he wishes the good of another, wishes it for the other's sake, and wishes it even if no one knows his wish" (25). Meaningful friendship is about what you want *for* your friend, not what you want *from* your friend. We can have meaningful friendships if we possess the admirable character traits that lead to virtue. Aristotle explains that, "the forms of our friendly relations with our neighbors and the defining characteristics of friendship seem to derive from our relation to ourselves" (22). The type of people we are reflects the type of friendships we have. If we habitually act with good character traits, and strive to become virtuous, we will have virtuous friendships. Having meaningful friendships means we are living a human life well; we are happy.

In our current society, I wonder if we can even define friendship the same as Aristotle did. We now have "facebook" that give us an illusion of having five hundred friends. If we looked through the list, how many do we consider good friends? If only three or four, then how come we have to have five hundred, and how come we feel happier having more "friends" than others? We have relationships with people, but they are temporary and often sugar-coated. These are friendships based on utility

and pleasure, as Aristotle would say. In these types of friendships, we *want* something from our friend, whether it is objects or feelings. We expect them and like them only when they provide us with these things. If we focus on becoming virtuous people, our friendships will become friendships based on virtue. We will have more excellent character traits, and live well. If we follow Aristotle's advice, we will understand that our real friendships based on virtue help us live a happy life.

Happiness is the ultimate goal in life. Aristotle says the only way we can reach happiness is if we learn to live a human life well, if we apply reason to choosing character traits, and if we practice these traits until we eventually become a virtuous person. We see how different Aristotle's view is from what people today attribute to happiness. We don't want to be happy for the sake of anything else. Happiness is the final goal, the final end. If you have happiness, you don't need anything else in life. The amazing thing about Aristotle's formula is that through all the work of striving to be happy, we are equally becoming a good person, by nature. But, we often mistake being a good person with being honorable or donating to charities. Although these are good acts, they do not make us good people. Our mindset is what separates these good acts by average people from good acts by good people. Life becomes about being something bigger than yourself. When we reach out to others, and put our heart and our soul into our work and our decisions, we will be doing great things for the world and for ourselves. For it is only then that we will find true, pure happiness. I take Aristotle's formula as a challenge for me, and for each person in the world. It is a challenge to do good in the world, live more excellently, and to ultimately find happiness. Aristotle says that, "We conceive happiness to be the most desirable of all things, and not merely as one among other good things" (5). Since we all want happiness above all else, we must understand the illusions we are faced with and develop virtues to live well.

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*Evaluation: This paper does a nice job at elucidating a difficult text, Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, in an organized way. Aristotle's explanation of the connection between happiness and what it is to be a human being can be confusing, and Julie does well to explain this clearly as well as to relate Aristotle's views to our world today.*

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## Is Profit > Safety?

Lindsay Quid

Course: English 101 (Composition)

Instructor: Kris Piepenburg

*Assignment: After completing a group research project on a controversial issue, each student was to write an essay defending a claim of policy, value, or truth related to the issue.*

There have been dozens of articles written, numerous front-page stories, and thousands of angry complaints. One small device has had an astounding impact on the lives of drivers in the Chicagoland area, and all it does is take a picture. Red-light cameras are popping up all over the city of Chicago and taking the suburbs by storm. It's hard to drive within a ten-mile radius without passing at least one intersection that has a camera installed. These cameras are sold to the public as being new measures of safety for the community, but is that really the case? The amount of revenue that these cameras generate leads to a very convincing argument that these cameras are not all that they are advertised to be.

In December 2006, one of the first red-light cameras was placed in the suburbs of Chicago in the town of Bellwood, just six months after new state law approved the use of the cameras in the suburbs (George and Sector par. 24). Chicago had been using the cameras for almost three years prior and experienced booming success. It was only a matter of time before they trickled into surrounding communities. The camera placed in Bellwood was no exception to the success Chicago encountered. Almost immediately after installation, the camera became more than a traffic control device, it became a revenue machine. Bellwood's comptroller, Roy McCampbell, declared at an Illinois Municipal League seminar in 2007 that the one device generates a guaranteed \$60,000 to \$70,000 a month in traffic fines (George and Sector par. 2). Since that December, Bellwood has added seven more traffic

cameras, making a grand total of eight cameras for their 20,000 person population (par. 26).

Bellwood was a major lobbyist when it came to getting the law passed to allow the cameras in the suburbs. They claim that the driving force behind their support was a major crash their town experienced in July of 2005. The sad outcome of the accident was the death of four young people due to running a red light (George and Sector par. 25). Of the eight cameras that Bellwood has currently installed, not *one* is placed at that location. Where are the cameras placed? They are (what some may call strategically) placed in areas that have the heaviest traffic flow and the greatest amount of cars making right turns (George and Sector par. 26).

This, what seems to be misplacement of red-light cameras, is a trend that seems to be growing throughout most Chicago suburbs. According to a *Daily Herald* investigation, numerous cameras each month are being installed at intersections where few crashes occur due to red-light running (Ryan and Pyke par. 6). In fact, most tickets issued are for failure to make a complete stop before a right turn on red, not for blowing through an intersection (George and Sector par. 8). RedSpeed is one of the main distributors of red-light cameras to the suburbs. In June of 2009, River Forest forced a RedSpeed salesman to calculate on average how many tickets were issued for right turns on red. The salesman estimated that about 90 percent of the violations his firm flags are for making rolling right turns on red (George and Sector par. 9).

Now that's not to say that drivers should be allowed to roll through a right turn on red; the law states that a complete stop is required before the driver is permitted to turn. There *is* an impending safety issue if all drivers fail to execute the requirements, but federal safety experts claim these maneuvers are of the least likely to cause serious damage or injuries (par. 5). According to a July issue of the *Chicago Tribune*, RedSpeed lobbyist Al Ronan feels there's no issue to debate the purpose of the cameras. He's quoted as saying, "If the General Assembly in its wisdom believes that people should be allowed to slide through right turns on red, change the law," said Ronan. "And if not, then Redspeed cameras, Redflex cameras or



cameras from any other company out there are providing public safety” (qtd. in George and Sector par. 10).

Are they really providing public safety, though, if the number of accidents reported from such violations is almost insignificant? Or are these cameras just finding an underhanded way to take advantage of local drivers? Some areas are adding additional fines to the tickets issued. Bellwood has started to use the cameras to ticket drivers with expired license plates (“4 of 6: Best Practices for Utilizing Red-light Cameras”). The bill passed allows communities the ability to fine violators of red lights up to \$100, and almost every community that has a camera employs the \$100 limit fine. Why not get the biggest bang for your buck? Furthermore, once the ticket is issued, you are allowed a certain time frame in which to pay; if you fail to pay on time, your fine is essentially doubled, and the driver now owes the city \$200. Now, issue in a second ticket for having expired license plates, and the city tacks on another \$100 fine. Common practice in Bellwood, and now the majority of the cities that house red-light cameras, is to add an additional \$40 for what they call an “Administrative Fee” for all drivers that choose to contest the hearing (“4 of 6: Best Practices for Utilizing Red-light Cameras”).

So, if a driver potentially rolls through a right turn on red with expired license plates, they are issued two tickets totaling \$100 each. They then fail to pay their traffic ticket on time because they would like to figure out the process to try and contest their ticket, which brings their total to \$300 dollars. After they go to court, they are found guilty of rolling through the red light and now owe the city a total of \$340 for a tire being too far across the white line. All the while, if a driver fails to pay the ticket on time, it is considered a debt, and each month that goes by without payment, it effectually lowers the driver’s credit score. The system is geared to put as much pressure on the driver as possible to keep their mouths closed and their checkbooks open so they can pay their fines in the quickest manner possible. It’s effectually like a constant running ATM, collecting money as quickly as possible and sending people on their way. If that doesn’t sound like a process specifically geared towards generating profit, I don’t know what is.

Some cities have actually opted to take their cameras down due to the excessive amount of complaints and threats to business placed on the city. Schaumburg is one of the most recent to remove its cameras. After only being

installed for a few months at an intersection near the busy Woodfield Shopping Center, the camera generated nearly \$1 million in revenue, nearly all in right-turn violations. The complaints that the city received were so severe that they feared they would lose major business due to the camera and ultimately decided that the camera was not worth it. They removed the camera, even when opposed to *heavy* objection from the distributing company after only a few months of use (Pyke par. 10).

Red-light cameras have been a hot-ticket item for many Chicago suburbs in recent months. These simple devices have caused such an uproar in the sponsoring communities, it is truly difficult to ignore the impending moral issue behind it all. Are these cameras being used for profit or are they really strictly for safety measures, as village leaders would like their residents to believe? The overwhelming evidence in the matter seems to tip the scales in one direction, and that direction is profit. The profit of revenue gained simply outweighs the *minimal safety standards* gained from their installation.

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Evaluation: *Lindsay’s argument about photo-enforced traffic intersections is well supported with statistical information. She definitely shows us a truth about this issue.*

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## On Immigration

Jaimie Quintanilla

Course: Spanish 205

(Spanish Intensive Oral Practice)

Instructor: Antonio Iacopino

*Assignment: Students were asked to read a variety of positions on immigration, pick some to respond to, and write about them in Spanish.*

Los Estados Unidos llevan muchos años con la reputación de ser un país lleno de diversidad. Culturas unidas por diferentes razones como religiones y tradiciones respetadas por generaciones de personas que de familia en familia llegaron a este país. Los motivos por cuales muchos dejan su hogar son innumerables, tales como el deseo de ser alguien de importancia en la vida, otros por curiosidad de viajeros y otros para cumplir los deseos que se prometieron de niños. Aun así mientras la diversidad creció, también el racismo y las leyes aumentaron entre la gente.

El orgullo de representar a nuestros países ahora solo vive en las sombras de los que se esconden por falta de "números de identificación." A aquellos que les falta igualdad por solo haber nacido en otra tierra, crecen no solamente aprendiendo otro lenguaje pero otra vida.

Estoy de acuerdo con la idea que la diversidad no existe si las personas de distintas culturas no comparten un mismo salón de clases, el lugar de trabajo o el mismo vecindario. Los niños que forman nuestro futuro, deberían crecer en un ambiente en donde reconocen sus habilidades como todos los demás. Muchos estudiantes que son capaces de hacer lo mismo o más cuando se los compara con otras personas nunca tienen la posibilidad de asistir a la universidad por no tener evidencia de haber nacido en los Estados Unidos. Por otro lado, muchos inmigrantes que si pueden asistir a la escuela no pueden recibir la ayuda financiera del gobierno.

¿Cómo les van a demostrar a sus padres que todo el sufrimiento que pasaron para llegar aquí valió la pena? El apoyo y la motivación de ser alguien en la vida viene de nosotros mismos, pero también de la gente que nos sigue y guía por el buen camino. No estoy de acuerdo de que los inmigrantes que se aferran a la tierra tendrán conflictos de interés. Hay muchos inmigrantes que ayudan a esta pobre economía a crecer.

Nadie más que los inmigrantes saben lo que es el poder de trabajar con las manos. Demasiadas personas no aceptan o no quieren hacer los trabajos que los inmigrantes corren para solicitar. ¿Por qué no justamente darles la opción y pagarles lo que se merecen? También, porque no dejarlos llegar a ser gente de gran poder y posición. Ser administradores, contadores, arquitectos, doctores. Gracias a que la gente ha luchado por sus derechos, es que han llegado al punto en donde están ahora. Han conseguido reformas migratorias, pagado sus impuestos y tratado de vivir lo más normal posible. ¿Que daño hay en querer ser parte de nuestra sociedad?

Conozco a una familia entera que el potencial que tienen de llegar muy lejos en esta vida les ha llegado a un alto por falta de seguro social. El miedo es la principal emoción que experimentan a diario. Conducir un vehículo es como una misión suicida con riesgos de ir a la cárcel, y a veces deportación inmediata. Son estas situaciones que dividen a familias y quiebran corazones. ¿Cuántas lágrimas tienen que brotar? ¿Cuántas familias tienen que separar? ¿Cuántas vidas perdidas ahogadas por tratar de vivir mejor? ¿Cuántas vidas más quieren? Sé que les resulta fácil tener coraje a los que tienen el poder, pero el poder no consigue nada ignorando todas las caras que esperan su palabra.

En mi opinión es gracias a todos estos inmigrantes que muchos aún tienen su empleo. Gracias a los inmigrantes que los supermercados están llenos de comida sabrosa, y que yo misma conseguí trabajo por hablar más de un solo idioma.

Qué gran oportunidad si en vez de tener que gastar tiempo y dinero viajando por el mundo podemos tener un crisol cultural viviendo en paz en los Estados Unidos. Ver niños crecer aprendiendo y enseñando sus tradiciones, culturas, celebraciones es algo tan hermoso y eso compartido genera aún más diversidad cuando esos niños deciden crear sus propias familias. ¿Es que no se han dado cuenta que la diversidad nunca va a acabar? Solo hacen falta dos personas de diferentes partes del mundo que se enamoren... y sin embargo, en nuestros gobernantes, aún no son capaces de apreciar dicha diversidad.

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*Evaluation: Ms. Quintanilla is vigorous and powerful in her use of language and in the development of her ideas. Her arguments are poignant, reaching the core of the immigration debate: the humanity of the people affected by political judgments and social injustice.*

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## Eden Again

*Nathan Rapp*

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Barbara Butler

*Assignment: Write a literary research paper. Incorporate eight or more secondary sources in your analysis.*

Rarely does a writer produce such a high-caliber story so packed with depth and so influenced by the era in which it was written as Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown." This short story allegorically displays a man's decay of faith and path toward evil, paralleling what took place in the Garden of Eden, all the while hinting that mankind has fallen into sin and is incapable of self-attained salvation. In the story, the protagonist, Goodman Brown, is tempted by a man symbolizing the devil to attend a witchcraft gathering in the forest. Because of the omniscience of the narrator, readers can place themselves in Brown's position and are given the uncanny ability to see themselves as Goodman Brown. Lea Newman, a critic of Hawthorne, said it best when, after considering it to be one of the greatest American stories ever written, she said that it "transports each reader simultaneously to seventeenth-century New England and to the unexplored depths of his own soul" (348). Hawthorne's decisive story, combined with his salient theme, religious symbols, and allegorical portrayals of the universal battle of good and evil at the core of the human heart, edify the reader, leaving those interested hungrily wishing for more.

To effectively analyze the story's characters, allegorical depictions, theme, and symbolism, the setting, which plays a crucial role in the development of the story, must be described. The story is set in Salem village in New England, Massachusetts, where the religion of the New England Puritans, affected as it was by Calvinistic theology, heavily influences the theme and the story's purpose for publication. Critic Michael Colacurcio believes that Hawthorne's story was written to ridicule the Puritan church on the basis of their judging who

was eternally elect (49-54). In support of Colacurcio, Selina Jamil clearly articulated that: "for although the official discourse in this story concerns the human heart's encounter with evil as the 'horror' that shows a surrender to gloom and 'despair,' the...discourse of freedom concerns Hawthorne's use of irony and parody, first, to ridicule the power of the Puritan word of official virtue and, ultimately, to ridicule the power of evil itself" (143). In this light, the reader is able to look upon the story with new eyes and see its elevated meaning intertwined with a unique theme.

The story begins with Goodman Brown planning to take off on his journey as he is wishing his wife goodnight. His wife, who is symbolically named Faith, pleads with Brown to spend the night with her: "Pray, tarry with me this night, dear husband, of all nights in the year!" (549). However, she fails to persuade him, and Brown takes off into the night. This choice of Brown's to leave his wife behind is symbolic of him leaving his own faith behind. Brown's wife is seen, by her beautiful outer appearance arrayed with pink ribbons, to symbolize faith in the goodness of mankind. This symbol is clearly made manifest as the story unfolds. Thomas F. Walsh, in writing his critique on the story, mentions that "Faith is symbolic of Brown's faith, which he gradually loses as he doubts more and more the existence of any goodness in man" (332). Goodman Brown, after his departure from his wife, sets off on his journey into the forest.

At the beginning of the story, Hawthorne intentionally fails to mention the purpose of Brown's journey, but as the story develops, the purpose becomes apparent. A slight forecast of what is to come is revealed through the thoughts of Brown, as he resolves to leave his wife for only this one night. "... After this one night, I'll cling to her skirts and follow her to Heaven. With this excellent resolve for the future, Goodman Brown felt himself justified in making more haste on his present evil purpose" (549). Brown, as he enters the forest, is afraid of what lies within and is filled with apprehension of what is to come. He is ashamed of his present course, bearing evidence that he knows what he is doing is wrong (or sinful). Neal Doubleday proposes the view that Brown does know he is going to sin as he enters the forest. This is consistent with the text. Brown is drawn into temptation and thinks he can return to grace after a brief indulgence of sin. Brown has left his wife for a night in the woods, hinting of a sexual

sin to come (203). This dreary, dark road that Brown takes into the forest is a symbolic portrayal of a path toward sin and evil.

Immediately upon entering the forest, Brown is accosted by a man symbolizing the Devil himself, and the temptation begins. This man who meets Brown in the forest is described in a distinct way: "But the only thing about him, that could be fixed on remarkable, was his staff, which bore the likeness of a great black snake, so curiously wrought, that it might almost be seen to twist and wriggle itself, like a living serpent" (550). Hawthorne takes great care to point out that this devil of a man is similar in appearance to Brown, emphasizing Brown's own innate sinful nature. Paul Hurley touches upon a unique point when he says ". . . This personage [the devil man] is so curiously described that he is indisputably Goodman Brown's own personal devil" (413). The symbolic undertones of the whole temptation scene immediately bring to mind what happened in the Garden of Eden. Just as Adam and Eve fell into temptation by gazing wistfully at the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Brown also falls into temptation by his initial failure to resist the evil one. This allegorical scene of Brown in the forest, linked as it is to the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, gives the reader a clue as to what happens next.

At first Brown, just like Eve, shows a resistance to the temptation by the devil. Feeling uncomfortable with what is to come, Brown tells the serpent he will not continue into the forest. But the devil, an expert in deception, counters Brown's resistance to sin by striking at the heart of Goodman Brown. He brings Brown to despair. Thomas F. Walsh, in his interesting analysis of Goodman Brown, suggests that Brown's journey into the forest is actually a journey into his own dark soul (332). The devil tears down Brown's opposition to sin by pushing him to confusion and depression. Brown thinks that because he and his relatives "have been a race of honest men and good Christians," he should turn around and flee the forest (550). However, the devil retaliates by telling Brown that his ancestors were wicked, too, and that they all, at some point, did what the devil compelled them to. Hawthorne cleverly uses this opportunity when Brown, in his hopeless introspection, begins to doubt the existence of good in any man, to reveal a fragment of the overall theme—all men are sinners.

When Brown travels deeper into the forest, it is

as if he is traveling deeper into sin, thus symbolically sealing his fate. Hawthorne, to further enhance the theme, introduces a few symbolic figures into the story as Brown is headed to his doom. The characters introduced are the spiritual teachers of Brown—his pastor, a deacon of his church, his catechism teacher, and finally his wife. Brown believes these people to be free from sin or error, yet these characters, much like Brown, are shown to be corrupted. Whether or not these characters are a ruse of the devil to further Brown's despair remains a mystery to the reader, but these characters add an entirely new level of complexity to the story.

The first out of four symbolic characters Brown sees in his journey into the forest is a woman named Goody Cloyse. This woman is described as a "very pious and exemplary dame, who had taught him [Goodman Brown] his catechism, in youth, and was still his moral and spiritual adviser" (551). As Brown and his fellow traveler (the devil) forge ahead into the forest, they stumble upon Goody Cloyse. Brown is visibly startled that he should see his moral advisor in so filthy a place as this, and he attempts to hide himself: "But, with your leave, friend, I shall take a cut through the woods, until we have left this Christian woman behind" (551). Brown thinks that Cloyse is a strong Christian, and he does not want to be spotted in the forest. Brown hides himself in the shadow of the trees, just as Adam and Eve did from God when they knew they had sinned. Critic Hurley expounds this when he states "The fact that he [Goodman Brown] is aware of the sinfulness of his trip destroys any belief we may have in Goodman Brown's 'simple and pious nature'" (411). Brown successfully hides in the forest, and from the darkness spies on Cloyse and the devil as they converse. On overhearing their conversation, Brown learns that Cloyse is a witch, travelling to the demonic celebration in the forest, and this is the very same place to which he is bound. Immediately following this realization, Goody Cloyse, through some power of the devil's staff, disappears, bearing evidence that her whole appearance was a façade meant to drag Brown deeper into depression or, symbolically, the forest. Although Brown fails to identify the devil's ruse, he becomes stubborn and refuses to travel farther: "Not another step will I budge on this errand. What if a wretched old woman do choose to go to the devil, when I thought she was going to Heaven! Is that any reason why I should quit my dear Faith, and go after her?" (552). Here, the devil abandons Brown to his

gloom, but he [the devil] leaves his staff, symbolic of his power, in his [Brown's] hands.

For a brief moment, Brown finds encouragement through his resistance of the devil, and he resolves to turn from his present evil course and return to his wife, Faith, or, symbolically, his own faith. However, the type of faith Brown trusts in is the epitome of foolish faith. He has faith in the goodness of mankind—not in Christ—so it is not substantial. Meanwhile, Brown, in carrying the devil's staff, is blind to the devil's stratagem. Just as a staff serves people on a journey, so the devil's staff assisted Brown. Yet Brown, in his confused state, remains unaware of this symbolic aid from the devil himself. Hawthorne's narrative expertise allows the reader to know, or at least to guess at what happens next, for just when the reader hopes that Brown may yet save himself, the devil strikes again, causing Brown to doubt his own goodness and the purity of others. When Brown hears, or at least thinks he hears the voices of his minister and a deacon of his church in the forest, his faith is brutally shaken to its already feeble foundations. Goodman Brown finds his fill of despair and seems upon the brink of collapse: "Young Goodman Brown caught hold of a tree, for support, being ready to sink down on the ground, faint and overburdened with the heavy sickness of his heart. He looked up to the sky, doubting whether there really was a Heaven above him" (553). Critic Michael Tritt believes that Brown's journey slowly reveals his own sinfulness, thus leading him to this utter despair (114). In a vivid episode of struggle, Brown, inspired by thoughts of his wife Faith, summons what remains of his strength to defy the devil.

In a final effort to fight back the devil and regain his faith, Brown looks into the sky above the forest and lifts his hands in prayer. Critic Hurley believes that Brown makes the mistake of thinking that true faith can be adopted and discarded at will (412). But before Brown can begin to pray, a terrible black cloud sweeps through the night sky, blocking Brown's view of the heavens. This ominous, black cloud, which seems to symbolize hell itself, is filled with voices of people Brown recognizes: "Once, the listener fancied that he could distinguish the accents of town's-people of his own, men and women, both pious and ungodly, many of whom he had met at the communion table, and had seen others rioting at the tavern" (553). Brown is thrown into deep confusion here in the story because who he once thought was saved now seems damned. Brown's preconceived notions that gave

him the ability to identify the elect from the cursed are now faulty and useless. Terry Martin expounds this point clearly when she states "In response to his [Goodman Brown's] Calvinistic heritage that is 'allegorical in its antithetical division of the world into '[the domain of]' God and '[the domain of]' the devil,' Brown expects to be able to distinguish the elect from the damned" (35-36). Hawthorne takes this great opportunity to unveil another clue to the overall theme. No man can ultimately determine who is saved, for this is God's jurisdiction and not men's.

Brown's terrible confusion stems from his inability to separate the elect from the damned, so he takes his verdict to the extreme by supposing that all mankind is now damned with no hope for salvation. Harold Mosher, in his pertinent criticism of the story, states, "Brown, at any rate, comes to an assurance that the world is evil, not good . . ." (15). As the apocalyptic cloud passes northward in the story, leaving the night sky clear, Brown's confusion and pain become acute. To seal Brown's fate, a pink ribbon, previously worn by his wife, falls from the sky. This unfortunate circumstance, regarded as an evil omen, produces a cataclysmic change in the way Brown views humanity. As the ribbon representing his wife, who symbolically pictures Brown's faith, falls to the ground, so does Brown's faith. "'My Faith is gone!' cried he, after one stupefied moment. 'There is no good on earth; and sin is but a name. Come, devil! For to thee is this world given'" (554). Not only is Brown's entire demeanor changed in this one instant, but his lust and passion for evil are rejuvenated. "And maddened with despair, so that he laughed loud and long, did Goodman Brown grasp his staff and set forth again, . . . with the instinct that guides mortal man to evil" (554). The devil is victorious in his temptation of Goodman Brown, for Brown completely resigns himself to sin and runs off into the forest to partake of the witches' meeting.

Hawthorne, to intensify the climax and further draw out the theme, packs the symbols into the story as Brown is dashing through the forest. The trees and rocks of the forest are continually described as on fire, and the entire forest, metaphorically described as a desert, is an unquestionable symbol for hell. This picture of hell is described as either red from the fire, or black from the night shadows. Critic Selina Jamil allegorically summarizes these descriptions when she states "For, as an allegorical representation of the vacillating mind,

Goodman Brown passionately desires evil (signified by the color red) despite a profound horror of it (signified by the color black). As the color Brown is a mixture of red and black, so the protagonist's name is 'Brown'" (144). As Brown runs straight into the forest, the readers see him running headlong into hell, where he eventually nears the scene of the diabolical witches' meeting. At this meeting, people from all over the world, whether good or bad, saint or sinner, are gathered. The theme, in its complexity, is revealed through Hawthorne's effective descriptions and use of symbolism. Mankind has fallen from grace and is incapable of saving itself.

Hawthorne uses the witches' meeting, in all its creepiness, to build on the theme in describing the wickedness of mankind. The meeting begins with a hymn, which parallels the beginning of many Christian worship services: "Another hymn arose, a slow and mournful strain, such as the pious love, but joined to words which expressed all that our nature can conceive of sin, and darkly hinted at far more" (555). Critic Jamil suggests that these evil practices of the witches' meeting in the forest allegorically represent or strangely mimic the liturgy of worship in the Puritan church (143). This is an accurate assumption because the leader of the ceremony is described by Hawthorne as a "grave divine of the New England churches" (555). Hawthorne, by using a Puritan minister to conduct the witches' ceremony, demonstrates that sin, in all its forms, is found among all people. As the satanic meeting continues, Brown and a young unidentified woman are called to the front of the congregation. The man leading the perverted worship service promises to the two "proselytes" a greater knowledge into the "mystery of sin" (556). This whole scene draws a strong allegorical parallel between the serpent's temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden, where Satan promised Eve knowledge of good and evil, and the temptation of Brown and the woman to sin by this devilish fiend.

Immediately following the minister's spoken temptation, the proselytes are told to look at each other. "They did so; and, by the blaze of the hell-kindled torches, the wretched man beheld his Faith, and the wife her husband, trembling before that unhallowed alter" (556). Brown's own wife is shown to be evil, and subsequently, his faith in the goodness of mankind, represented by his wife, is shown to be of the devil. This awful realization forces the reader to understand that no created human being

is good; all are evil. As the ceremony reaches its pinnacle of tension, the minister shouts forth the theme: "Evil is the nature of mankind. Evil must be your only happiness. Welcome, again, my children, to the communion of your race!" (556). Brown and his wife Faith stand in the midst of this terrible congregation, "hesitating on the verge of wickedness" (556). With his hope in man's goodness gone, and no Christ to save him, Brown is doomed to die. As the wicked minister is preparing to lay the mark of baptism, or symbolically the mark of the beast, upon the couple's foreheads, Brown screams out to his wife Faith: "'Faith! Faith!' cried the husband. 'Look up to Heaven and resist the Wicked one!'" (556). Brown's realization that a higher power is needed for salvation comes much too late. Hawthorne never specifically gives the reader a chance to see if Faith obeyed her husband's command, but from the ending of the story, the unexplained is ascertainable.

Instead of resolving the story as the readers expect, Hawthorne brilliantly relieves the tension in the story with an anticlimactic ending that vividly portrays the theme. The whole demonic scene in the forest is left behind, as Goodman Brown awakes from a dream. Although Brown is in the forest when he awakes, Hawthorne seems to clue the reader in by hinting that the story is only imaginary. Jerome Loving agrees that Brown, for most of the story, is wrapped up in an apparition or dream. But this seemingly fake dream, Loving believes, affects the characters as if it were real (220). It is rather amazing how Hawthorne is able to still bring the theme and moral of the story across in a serious way. As Brown awakes from his frightful dream, he makes his way back to Salem village. Although the day is bright and new when Brown arrives in the village, his soul is utterly black. Brown feels no sorrow or guilt after his visit to the forest, bearing evidence of his complete corruption (Easterly 21). As Brown meets the townsfolk who had earlier been in his dream, he shrinks from them in fear. Critic Hurley states, "Goodman Brown does not become aware of his own kinship with evil; he does not see sinfulness in himself but only in others. (That, perhaps, is his most awful sin)" (419). Brown seems unable to conceptualize man's hypocritical nature, even though he is a hypocrite himself. Brown is a deeply confused sinner, and his inability to admit he is a sinner cuts him off spiritually from not only his wife, but the rest of Salem village. Just as Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden of Eden for their sin, so is Brown symbolically cut off from Salem village because of his

own sin. Punishment for this sin is death, and Brown dies at the end of the story.

Hawthorne's rich theme, in all its complexity, points out that all mankind is sinful and in need of a higher power for salvation. No one is perfect in this world, and it is impossible to reach heaven by doing good only some of the time. Ultimately the heart, not just the outer form, must be regenerated. In writing her critique on "Young Goodman Brown," Jane Eberwein effectively states the theme:

Man, in his natural condition, is depraved, even if he behaves responsibly and is thought of, by himself and others, as a good person. Without grace, a person deserves nothing but damnation from God and is incapable of performing any meritorious action; the best he can do by way of helping himself spiritually is to recognize his worthlessness, confront his sin, and attempt to atone—always inadequately—for his evil condition. (20-21)

The curse that descended upon mankind in the Garden of Eden is still the center of the cosmic battle. Humanity by nature is hypocritical, but there remains a distinguishable line between good and evil. Goodman Brown, in his experiment with despair and doubt, lost his faith, bringing forth death and damnation. The theme, which parallels the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, demonstrates that all mankind has fallen and is in need of a higher power for redemption. This is the first step to salvation and the moral of the tale. Hawthorne's short story, influenced as it was by Calvinistic doctrines, shows that faith apart from good works is meaningless, and to diverge from doing good is to do evil. This story of Eden reborn, packed with theological and religious implications, arrayed with symbolism and allegory as it is, has truly withstood the test of time. "Young Goodman Brown" is a genuine classic that will remain off the shelf, influencing the way society thinks and acts for ages to come.

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Evaluation: *A brilliant scholar and sophisticated writer, Nathan, who was home-schooled by both his parents, offers a powerful analysis of "Young Goodman Brown." "Rarely does a writer produce such a high-caliber" research paper "so packed with depth."*

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## Einstein: Icon or Average Man?

Sarah Sagredo

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Pearl Ratunil

Assignment: *Write an eight- to ten-page research paper that uses at least eight to ten secondary sources. Your paper may consider not only the literary aspects of a work, but also its intersection with historical, social, or cultural contexts.*

People tend to have a certain perception of Albert Einstein. Culturally, he is associated with  $E = mc^2$  (though most people do not understand what the world's most famous equation means) and white, unkempt hair. Einstein has largely been characterized as a mad-scientist-turned-hero. He has become a character in many fictional movies, books, and television shows. The name Einstein is synonymous with genius. "He is no Einstein" is a phrase well-known to most people. People love an idealistic version of Einstein; pop culture has made him legendary. This begs the question as to what Einstein was really like. Einstein is seen as famous, but "Throughout his life Einstein was a man alone" (Balibar 100). Alan Lightman, physicist and author, focused his first novel, *Einstein's Dreams*, on the famous scientist and his ideas. In the novel, a different, less recognized, side of Einstein's life is represented. In his novel, Alan Lightman uses facts about Einstein's relationships and discoveries to characterize him as an average man who made scientific achievements, rather than the celebrated icon with whom people are familiar.

*Einstein's Dreams* is different than most novels written for the general population in that the format and content is more complex. Lightman himself is not a typical author. He has received degrees from prestigious institutions such as Princeton University and has been a professor at Harvard University and is currently Professor of Science and Writing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Sorensen 249). As both a physicist and writer, Lightman is able to offer a unique perspective in his novel. *Einstein's Dreams* is a work of fiction that is

based in scientific fact, making it imperative to understand the difficult and mystifying theories that Albert Einstein discovered and published. Lightman's background in physics made it possible for him to write a novel grounded in science while maintaining artful creativity.

*Einstein's Dreams* is about the relativity of time, and each detail of the novel supports this central idea. One element of this book that sets it apart is its unusual format. "...Lightman calls it a novel, although it takes a broad definition to fit the work into that genre..." (Shuman). The main reason it does not neatly fit the definition of novel is the arrangement of the different sections of the book. Novels may have a prologue and epilogue, but few, if any, have these in addition to three interludes. These five sections contain Albert Einstein as a character along with his friend Michele Besso. The prologue and epilogue take place a mere two hours apart, signified by the clock tower chiming six times and eight times. The content of the book, however, does not take place in a mere two hours. The interlude sections take place around the same time as the prologue and epilogue, as evidenced by the discussion of Einstein's work on his theories, but not during the two hours as the time is indicated as later on in the day. The chapters, as well, do not take place in this time frame. Each chapter is short, only a few pages, and is a dream of how time might work in another world.

The first relationship Lightman describes is that of Einstein and Michele Besso, his best friend and colleague. Besso appears in all three of the interludes, interacting with Einstein. He only appears with Einstein, and they are always relaxing comfortably together as friends do. In the first interlude, Besso and Einstein are walking together, sometimes discussing time or their families, sometimes in silence (Lightman 39-41). In the second, Besso and Einstein sit in a café. Besso is concerned for his friend's well-being, as his work has kept him from caring for himself well (75-78). In the third, Besso and Einstein are in a fishing boat on the river, eating lunch, and watching the clouds (113-15). Each of these scenes shows a close bond between friends, as evidenced in the casual chatting and pleasant silences. Though this is a work of fiction, the scenes are incredibly realistic. In his biography of Einstein, Isaacson writes, "Over the years, Besso and Einstein would share both the most intimate personal confidences and the loftiest scientific notions" (61). This idea is reflected quite plainly in these sections:



“‘Did you see the paper by Lorentz that I left on your desk?’” (76). Lorentz was a contemporary scientist during the time in which *Einstein's Dreams* is set. In this section, Besso and Einstein are discussing a paper that he had written. As Isaacson suggests, Besso offers Einstein not only friendship, but a sort of intellectual stimulation and sounding board. In the novel, Besso fulfills his role as a caring friend by watching out for the welfare of his companion. He goes so far as to tell Einstein that he does not look good, partially because of the circles under his eyes (Lightman 75). These scenes, though fabricated, were written by Lightman to help his audience understand Einstein. His ability to get lost in his work is obvious. Einstein is portrayed as a man who is distant, even when he is in the same room. Einstein, like many people in today's society, was in love with his work. It consumed his life. He thought about it all the time. Einstein's hard work is represented in this novel as an unhealthy obsession.

Also, the interludes include evidence of Einstein's strained relationship with his first wife, Mileva Maric. Many people know little or nothing about Einstein's love life. It was during the same time that Einstein was experiencing success in his professional life that he was experiencing failure in his marriage. Mileva Maric was a student at the polytechnic in Zurich at the same time as Einstein. “Although well matched in their intelligence, temperamentally Maric and Einstein seemed poles apart” (Feldman 29). Maric was able, like Besso, to help Einstein in his scientific endeavors, but they were very different people. Isaacson suggests that she created an “emotional field” that greatly impacted Einstein. He continues, “It would alternately attract and repulse him with a force so strong that a mere scientist like himself would never be able to fathom it” (Isaacson 42). Here, a scientific metaphor of a magnetic field is used to describe Einstein's relationship with Maric. Their relationship was like the poles of a magnet—sometimes they lined up properly and were attracted to each other, and other times they utterly repelled each other. Such was his real-life relationship with his wife. He loved her desperately, at times. At others, he would avoid her. Einstein's parents were disapproving of their relationship, but Einstein seemed determined to marry her; he did in 1903. Even after two children, their marriage was not a pleasant one (Hoffman 39). Later, Einstein would reflect on his marriage. “He had felt an ‘inner resistance’ to marrying Maric, he later claimed, but

had overcome it out of a ‘sense of duty’” (Isaacson 85). This “sense of duty” could have been the fact that Maric was, in fact, pregnant with their first son at their wedding. Einstein and Maric had an interesting relationship that is complex. Einstein's love seems to come and go like the tide, while Maric desperately tries to hold on to him and keep the family together. Lightman writes Maric into conversations between Einstein and Besso, though she does not actually appear. “Even at home, he sneaks away from Mileva in the middle of the night and goes to the kitchen to calculate long pages of equations...” (Lightman 41). Here, Lightman again emphasizes both Einstein's devotion and love of work, and this aversion to his own wife. The word “sneaks” highlights the sort of marriage he is in, as sneaking connotes a double life or affair. In this case, he has a life where he is married to Maric and another where his only love is his theories. Insights such as these further offer a picture of Einstein's character. His genius is admirable, but his rejection of his family is not. He is a man who can devote twenty-four hours a day to pages of equations, but not to the woman he supposedly loves. Like many marriages today, Einstein and Maric's ended in divorce.

In addition, Lightman uses clues about Einstein's discoveries to emphasize the importance of his theories. The headings of each chapter are dates that represent a certain time in the life of Albert Einstein. The first date is April 14, 1905, and numbering continues through June 28, 1905. Not every date in this span is covered, and there are a total of thirty chapters. Sorensen makes a connection of these headings with the title of the novel. He writes, “...these hypotheses are presented in chapters that are carefully labeled with dates as their titles, as if they were entries in a diary, or more accurately a dream log, since they each present a night's dream-work in Einstein's mind” (250). While the content of these dreams is fictional, the reader is meant to believe that they could be something that really happened in Einstein's mind. Because they need to come from the mind of an actual person, the selecting of the dates themselves would be vital. This novel, as mentioned before, revolves around Einstein's theory of time. The dates selected, from April to June, 1905, coincide with the actual dates of Einstein's discoveries and publication of his famous papers. During that year, Einstein submitted five papers to the *Annalen*

*der Physik*. He sent papers in March, April, May, June, and September of 1905. The June paper is of particular importance. It is in this paper, "On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies," that Einstein effectively changes how scientists think about time. Ridgen writes:

Indeed, after June 1905, our understanding of our common-sense three-dimensional world was transformed to include Nature's strange four-dimensional universe in which the dimension of time is somehow merged with the three dimensions of space. (95)

This Theory of Special Relativity, as it is called, had to do with the relativity of space and time. The dream sequences in the novel are meant to show different possibilities of time that Einstein could have been thinking about. The dates could be actual dates that Einstein was, in fact, thinking about time. His article on special relativity was received by the *Annalen der Physik* on June 30, 1905 and was printed in Volume 17 (Ridgen 73). The last dream entry date is June 28, a mere two days before Einstein's paper actually arrived on the editor's desk. The novel fits into the timeline of history perfectly. In this way, Lightman was able to emphasize the importance of the paper written at this time without actually using Einstein's name. As a physicist, Lightman understands how crucial this discovery was for science, but chose to highlight it in a way that did not mention Einstein.

Furthermore, Lightman makes use of Einstein's discovery of the nature of time so that the audience can comprehend the breakthrough it truly was. While many people can quote  $E = mc^2$  or know that Einstein discovered the theory of relativity, few know what exactly that even means. Einstein had the task of dismantling a view of time and space that had been put in place for two hundred years: "...Einstein argues effectively that although virtually all of our experiences suggest that Galileo and Newton were correct, unification of different branches of physics demand a new theory: special relativity" (Hawking 264). Einstein was essentially trying to prove a concept that people could not understand because it did not fit with their perception of life. Galison writes of the June paper, "For its enduring echoes, Einstein's 1905 article on special relativity, 'On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies,'

became the best-known physics paper of the twentieth century, and his dismantling of absolute time is its crowning feature" (14). Discovering the relativity of time was truly groundbreaking for the scientific community, though its implications may not impact average people in any monumental fashion. Einstein saw implications for time-keeping and even the very definition of simultaneity. Lightman, as a physicist, also understands the importance of this theory. For this reason, he focuses on this idea throughout his novel. The dream sequence labeled 5 June 1905 is about a world where time is completely dissimilar from each person's perspective:

For example, one woman sitting on the banks of the Aare sees the boats pass by at great speed, as if moving on skates across ice. To another, the boats appear sluggish, barely rounding the bend in the whole of the afternoon. (88)

Though this dream is not about relativity specifically, it is clear that this is the main idea behind this world. Time is different relative to each person's view. By including this section and others like it in the dream sequences, Lightman is able to support the idea that the relativity of time is important.

Each section of the novel works to emphasize the scientific achievements without emphasizing Einstein. The sections that mention Einstein by name are very humanizing rather than praising. They show his flaws, like his neglect of his wife, and his tendency to overwork on a constant basis. Lightman's praise of Einstein's theories is just as strong, though represented in a more subtle manner. Most of the book is dedicated to the dream sequences that emphasize Einstein's work with time. The carefully selected dates work to further point the audience toward the significance of the discovery. Writing about Einstein and his theories can prove to be difficult, according to John Ridgen, an author who chose to focus on the "what" and "how" of the discoveries in his book (vii). He writes:

Einstein has grown to almost mythic proportions, which challenges any author writing about him to avoid expanding the myth by making more of him than is justified, but also to avoid contracting the myth by yielding to the seductive temptation to

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bring greatness down to size. Both giant makers and giant killers respond to their respective tasks with enthusiasm. (vii)

Ridgen would suggest that the majority of writers tend to either support the image of the pop icon or attempt to shrink it. While Lightman is by no means a “giant builder,” he does not necessarily “bring greatness down to size.” His goal with this book was not to demean Einstein. However, Lightman did choose to show a side of Einstein that many people do not know. It is true that the “myth” of Einstein was not “expanded.” Lightman did not seek to add further praises to Albert Einstein. Rather, adding these details to show Einstein’s humanity enabled the audience to feel that they, too, may be able to achieve greatness.

Lightman’s use of facts about Einstein’s relationships and discoveries help readers to banish the idea of the pop culture icon they are familiar with and replace it with a more realistic picture of Albert Einstein. Many people would likely assume that they were unable to understand the Theory of Relativity. They would likely say they lacked the intelligence or that they are not an “Einstein.” Lightman was able to use his background in physics to write a novel that included complex theories in a masterfully written novel. Indeed, reading *Einstein’s Dreams* helps

average men and women begin to understand concepts that perplexed the minds of generations of scientists.

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Evaluation: *Sarah’s paper does a fine job of understanding the contemporary novel Einstein’s Dreams. The challenge here was to understand the literature and the science. Sarah was able to integrate the research on Einstein’s life and research with her close reading of the novel.*

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# Elvis in Africa: A View of Western Influence in Nigeria

Gloria Ufheil

Course: Literature 208 (non-Western Literature)

Instructor: Kris Piepenburg

Assignment: *One option for writing a paper about an African work of literature involved evaluating the quality of life and the state of culture in Lagos, Nigeria, as presented in Chris Abani's 2004 novel GraceLand.*

For centuries, people have immigrated to the United States in a quest for a life of opportunity while escaping a life filled with hardship. Western culture has flourished with its ideals of reason and individualism, using the thread of capitalism woven throughout. Many Westerners view culture ethnocentrically, believing in the superiority of Western ideals. However, do all people benefit where Western culture has seeped into society? Elvis, the main character of a novel called *GraceLand*, dreams of being a dancer. Despite the reference to an American icon, this novel is not of Western origin, but was written by Chris Abani, a native of Nigeria. *GraceLand* is set in 1983 in Lagos, Nigeria, and shows the daily travails of sixteen-year-old Elvis as he tries to navigate a Nigerian society that has rampant corruption under military rule and is heavily influenced by Western culture. Abani intersperses the novel with flashback scenes of Elvis during his time growing up in Afikpo prior to arriving in Lagos. Abani's novel scrutinizes the pervasive Western influence and its detrimental effect on the people and the culture of Lagos.

Elvis lives in Maroko, a slum area of Lagos. There are few traces of Elvis's native Igbo culture in Lagos. It is a bustling city with skyscrapers, hotels, traffic, fancy affluent neighborhoods, and slum areas, just like one would find in a Western city. The narrator describes how Lagos is a city composed of imitations: "There were beautiful brownstones set in well-landscaped yards, sprawling Spanish style haciendas in brilliant white and ocher, elegant Frank Lloyd Wright-styled buildings and cars that were new and foreign" (Abani 7-8). Lagos mimics the bad as well as the good. There are also tenements, such as the one that Elvis lives in. Elvis grew up in Afikpo and had moved to Lagos when he was fourteen. He is unprepared for the realities of life in this Nigerian city: "He hadn't known about the poverty and violence of Lagos until he arrived" (7). Elvis describes how many people return to visit their ancestral towns, flaunting the trappings of Western culture. They "wore designer clothes and threw money around...The women in flashy clothes, makeup and handbags that matched their shoes, daring to smoke in public...and the men, sharp dressers...let you take sips of their beer and shoved a few naira into your shirt pocket" (7). Having put on a façade of success to their families, they then return to

the reality of life lived in a ghetto. The vast majority of people in Lagos face a very uneven distribution of wealth along with the violence and poverty that are prevalent in many western cities.

In contrast to the city, Afikpo is a small town eight hundred miles away from Lagos. Elvis's home was a family compound shared with kin such as aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents, unlike the tenement in Maroko, where Elvis and his father are isolated away from family members. Traces of his family's native Igbo culture still influence their life in Afikpo, despite the numerous Western influences that have leached into the countryside of Nigeria. It is here that Elvis experiences his Igbo culture's initiation into manhood.

This first step to manhood occurs when Elvis is five years old. His father and uncle put a grass skirt on him and paint designs on his body. He is told he will make his first "kill" as part of a ceremony where he is joined by his cousins, other young men from the hamlet, and the male elders of the community. While the Igbo tradition remains, this ceremony is a watered-down version of tradition. The boys that attend "were only there because they hoped they would all be treated to good food and plenty to drink" (18). Elvis's kill, a chick, was handed to him "on the end of an arrow, pierced through its side..." (18). When Elvis asks if it is an eagle, his uncle replies, "No, it is chicken, eagle is too expensive" (19). Economic considerations factor into this Igbo ceremony, which, while performed, does not receive the reverence instilled in it in generations past. Both Sunday, Elvis's father, and Joseph, Elvis's uncle, are anxious for the ceremony to conclude so they can finish their whiskey, and the boys that attended had Western "towering afros and platform shoes" and were merely acquaintances of Elvis. (20) Even in this community that attempts to honor its past, tradition is usurped by encroaching Western ways.

The influence of Igbo culture affects the women after the death of Elvis's mother, Beatrice. The family adheres to the traditional year-long mourning period. The women wear drab clothes, do not do their hair, and do not attend parties. Once the year has passed, the women excitedly prepare for weekend festivities: "The girls plaited their hair into wild and wonderful shapes..." (60). They put on makeup and dress up with hopes of finding love.

This tradition of Igbo culture is still important in Afikpo, especially for women, although once the mourning time ends, the women prepare for a fun-filled weekend, much like many Western women would.

The women in the novel tend to have more ties to their Igbo heritage, yet embrace the trappings of Western culture. Beatrice writes down numerous Igbo recipes and herbal treatments in her journal, which is given to Elvis after her death. Oye tells Beatrice that after she dies, "we'll call you back to be reborn into the lineage again" (37). Beatrice, acknowledging the patriarchal society of the Igbo, declares that she would like to be born a boy in her next life. Despite her links to Igbo culture and her progressing illness, Beatrice loves dancing while playing American music on her record player. Abani portrays this when "Beatrice laughed and set the plastic disk on the record player...then launched into the throaty call of Elvis Presley" (44). Beatrice loves this American icon so much that she even names her son after him. Elvis is certainly not a name one would expect to encounter in traditional Igbo circles. Beatrice has been heavily influenced by American pop culture. Sunday's life is heavily influenced by Western culture, as well. He explains to Elvis, "My father was a houseboy to de white priests. We were nobody. To de whites we were servant's children, mini-servants. To de traditional world, we were white people's slaves, a curse, so we were disinherited of land, clan, everything" (187). He grew up in between cultures, never fitting in. Consequently, Sunday worked to bring honor to his family and his name, so that he would have the respect of others. He is a respected man in his Afikpo community, and he is convinced by friends to run in an election for congress. Sunday had been a representative during an earlier attempt at the democratic process. The Western ideal of a representative republic appeals to many who want to improve their government and many who simply long for power. The campaign itself is laughable, with candidates making outlandish promises and dropping gifts and money from helicopters. Sunday's opponent says on a loudspeaker, "Chief Okonkwo is an erudite son of de soil educated in de USA, and his money is uncountable" (177). Being wealthy and educated in the United States is highly regarded by the people. Promises of money and gifts overshadow Sunday's campaign,

which he tries to run with dignity and honor. Traditional honor has lost its importance in a society that is struggling under capitalism and new political ideas. Sunday tells Elvis, "You don't understand de difficulty of trying to be a man in dis society. So many expectations, so much pressure" (186). Sunday loses any control over his life because he gives up his job and uses all of his funds for the campaign. Without financial means, Sunday's life begins to mean little. He moves to Lagos because he does not have the kinship support of family that existed in traditional culture in the past. Similar to many Westerners who lack financial success, Sunday turns to alcohol to numb the powerlessness he feels in Lagos society.

Additionally, Elvis's friend, Redemption, lives life on the edge of the law in order to gain the financial means necessary to survive in a society that is heavily influenced by Western ways. Redemption dreams of leaving the chaos of Lagos in order to achieve success in America. The reader learns this early on as "Elvis hung on his every word, listening as Redemption told him, at every opportunity, of his plans to leave for the United States" (26). Redemption is constantly searching for a way to get ahead in society. He gambles at checkers to earn rent money, he packages drugs for pay, gets Elvis a job as an "escort" for female tourists, and even finds himself in a scheme to kill people in order to sell their organs for transplantation. He explains to Elvis, "Dis world operate different way for different people. Anyway, de rich whites buy de spare parts from de Arabs who buy from wherever dey can" (242). The Western economic ideal of supply and demand is applied to human organs, benefiting the wealthy white people at the expense of the many "disposable" people in Nigerian society. Redemption also alludes to a disregard for traditional values when he rescues Elvis from the wrath of the Colonel after their collision on the dance floor. Redemption defends Elvis to the Colonel by saying, "He just came to Lagos; he is suffering from bush mentality, sir" (119). Western culture has become the ideal for this society; Igbo culture is viewed as inferior. Redemption recognizes that in order to survive, he may have to do things that are not legal. Redemption succeeds in getting a passport to leave Nigeria and does what he must in order to earn money to make the journey a reality.

Elvis has some ties to Igbo culture, but they are few and focus on his time in Afikpo and his relationships with his mother and grandmother. Elvis treasures his mother's journal after she dies. It is not only a connection to his mother, but also a connection to a different way of life that seems to be dying. Elvis's life in Afikpo with his grandmother Oye is another connection to Igbo culture. Many were frightened of Oye because they thought that she could do magic. Even Aunt Felicia, when telling Elvis that Oye forgave him for all of the tricks he played, said "Of course she knew. She was a witch" (169). Elvis was happy when with his mother and grandmother, and these relationships are symbolic of better times when ties to their native culture were stronger.

Elvis's ties to his native culture are overshadowed by pervasive signs and influences of western culture. He is raised as a Christian and has a "Jesus Can Save" sign in his room in Maroko. (4) Elvis also learns to speak English at school and can often be found reading an American novel, such as "Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*" (5). He is named after an American icon, listens to American music while growing up in Afikpo, and in Lagos, Western music is often heard in the background, such as the Bob Marley "Natural Mystic" song on the radio that Elvis sings along to (4). In Afikpo, Elvis saw many classic American movies while growing up. Many people are drawn to the local motor park where "the films were shown courtesy of an American tobacco company, which passed out packets of free cigarettes to everybody in the audience, irrespective of age" (146). Not only are the American movies a source of Western cultural influence, but American companies are influencing the locals to become addicted to tobacco through the distribution of free cigarettes. This addiction benefits the American companies who stand to profit from increased sales of cigarettes to Africans. Other American companies operate in Nigeria. Abani describes how "empty bottles were valuable because the local Coca-Cola factory washed and reused them" (244). Redemption makes Elvis return the Coke bottles because they would get the bottle deposit money returned to them. Coca-Cola is a symbolic representation of Western capitalism that has successfully installed itself in an African country. There are many other times in the novel where a character drinks a refreshing Coke or Fanta. In addition, Elvis's

friendship with the King of the Beggars leads him to hear his speech at Tinubu square: "He was talking about the beauty of the indigenous culture that had been abandoned for Western ways" (155). This area is nicknamed Freedom Square, and the whole scene is reminiscent of any number of rallies that may have occurred in America during the 1960s. Although the King is lamenting the loss of Igbo culture, it is ironic that the methods used are modeled on Western methods of inciting people with the hope to further change in society. This strange confluence of Western culture leaves Elvis lost in Nigerian society. Elvis is a good person who wants to do what is right, but is utterly confused about how to survive each day while upholding his morality. The only way Elvis can survive is by abandoning his homeland for America.

The picture painted by Abani of an African boy powdering his face white, wearing a wig, and dancing like Elvis on the beaches of Nigeria is somewhat ludicrous, yet portrays the pervasive influence of Western culture, even on the slums of Africa. The omnipresent influence of Western ways has left the state of culture in Lagos in disarray. Capitalism has created a very uneven distribution of wealth, with few achieving a middle-class standard of living and a wide disparity between the few who have attained great wealth and the many that live in poverty. Money has become the primary concern, because without it, one easily ends up powerless, begging on the street. Attempts at imitating Western democracies have been unsuccessful as power, greed, and corruption have thwarted those who long for a legitimate government. Additionally, good people are forced to break the law to survive, as the people of Lagos are symbolically represented in Western action films by "Actor," who by the end of the novel has become a hero by acting outside of the law to achieve his ends. The demise of traditional Igbo culture has left many alone, on their own, without the kinship and collective community that enabled people to care for one another during good times and bad.

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Evaluation: *This paper really gets down into the details of this novel, making a very effective analysis of the hybrid of cultures contributing to the difficulties of life in Lagos, Nigeria.*

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# True Tolerance

Corey Yarbrough

Course: English 101 (Composition)

Instructor: Richard Middleton-Kaplan

Assignment: *Write a personal narrative of an encounter, or a potential encounter, that you have had with violence. Describe whether you responded violently or nonviolently, and discuss whether you think your response was for the best.*

Former President John Kennedy once said, “Tolerance implies no lack of commitment to one’s own beliefs. Rather it condemns the oppression or persecution of others” (“John F. Kennedy Quote”). Tolerance stands as one of the most powerful ideas in democracy. Tolerance allows for the coexistence and equal recognition of many different ideas within one group, even when these ideas don’t represent the ruling majority. History shows that in the absence of tolerance, racism, discrimination, hatred, violence, and even genocide emerge to shut out the people and beliefs that society declares intolerable. One could easily argue that tolerance wouldn’t have stopped any of the past genocides in history and it doesn’t end the bombing of abortion clinics, or even stop people from bashing sexual minorities in the streets; however, one could also argue that if these murderers and abusers had known what tolerance was, they wouldn’t have taken these hateful actions. Had the ideas of some groups been tolerated and acknowledged before, they may not have resorted to killing those who don’t believe what they believe. I have had my own experience with tolerance, both giving and receiving it, and one particular instance shows just how important tolerance is at all levels.

It was June 29, 2009. My high school years had come and gone, and the growth that I had experienced in those years had led up to this day. On this day, my friends and I were going to Chicago’s gay pride parade. It would be my first pride parade, being that I had only come out as a gay man one year earlier. I had been looking forward to going to this event ever since I’d come out. This was Chicago’s gay day. This was the day when the members

of the gay community could celebrate being who they are. This was the day when one didn’t have to worry about being discriminated against. Arriving on the parade route, my friends and I eagerly waited for the show to begin. In a matter of minutes, the parade started. Booming dance music filled the air, and rainbow flags were visible in every direction. Everyone cheered as different politicians walked down the parade route surrounded by drag queens, gay rights activists, and even a troupe of lesbian bikers. The crowd of parade onlookers lining the parade route was filled with messages of acceptance. People wore shirts saying “I love both my moms,” and “I’m straight and I believe in gay rights.” The atmosphere seemed saturated in pure ecstasy. Laughter and cheers filled the air as the parade continued. In this happiness, though, there was a slight tint of sorrow. It was as though everyone knew that no matter how hard they wished, this day wouldn’t last forever. It saddened me that I would have to leave only to return to my religious right suburbia, where I was essentially still in the closet. Finally, my friends and I decided to leave and began walking to the train station.

On our way back to the train station, we laughed joyously at all of the crazy things we’d seen. Never before had we seen such outrageous drag outfits, or such flamboyant behavior. This would be an event I knew I wouldn’t forget. Then, our laughter and joy was shattered by a loud yell. “Repent,” a man screamed. My friends and I looked over at the parade starting point to see a group of people holding signs protesting homosexuality. I had seen pictures like these many times before. They were always of people referencing God saying that homosexuality was a choice, that it was an abomination, that it was something we needed to repent for, and of course, the ever-so-memorable message of “God hates fags.” In the past, I had never let these messages affect me, since I’d learned at an early age not to care what others thought of me, yet this time, things seemed different. This time, these people were attempting to ruin the one day out of the year that any sexual minority could stand proudly and proclaim who they are. This crowd was reminding us of the pain and anguish that many members of the gay community suffer from discrimination. Anger instantly boiled up inside of me. My face felt like it was on fire, and I could hear the blood rushing through my ears. I wanted to stop this



message, and I wanted for these people to feel all the pain that any sexual minority feels. I wanted them to know the deep depression and sorrow of every gay teenager who had committed suicide, thinking that they couldn't live in this world being who they were. I wanted them to feel the pain and violation of every gay or transgendered person who had been gang-raped for being different. I wanted them to feel the physical wounds of every victim of a gay bashing. I wanted them to have their rights to happiness robbed from them. I wanted them to be called abominations and be told that they were going to hell for being what they are. I wanted them to know the fear of every sexual minority, having to word their sentences and plan their actions so that their sexual orientation isn't given away, all just so that they can live like everyone else. I wished so much that great misfortune would happen to them, and I found myself thinking, "I could do it. I could make them regret every single word and thought they have. I could take them to the edge of death and make them scream how they were sorry." Who would stop me? Surely, no one in the parade crowd would object, and the police were busy keeping order over the parade route.

Then, I stopped and thought about what I was wishing, and I realized that in an instant, I'd become the very people I hated so.

By wishing that these protesters would be put through hell for believing something, I was practicing the same discrimination they were against the gay community. Having grown up in a politically active family, I knew that one of the most basic rights in the United States is the right to believe and say what you wanted; "but what about hateful speech or hateful beliefs," I asked myself. Then, I realized that if one were to take away the right to freedom of speech from someone, one would violate the very foundation that the United States was built on. The anger inside of me then vanished, almost as though it were a match tossed out into a torrential downpour. These people had every right to make their views known, even if I didn't agree with them, and it wouldn't be right for me to attempt and silence them, because then I would be even more hateful than they were. Upon realizing this, I turned away from the crowd of protestors and went home. As my friends and I walked back to the train station, I saw a sign in the window of a nail salon that read "Closed

for the parade. Equality for all!!!" I couldn't help but smile as I realized that I had done the right thing by giving equal rights to those who opposed me. Hopefully, when they are given the opportunity, they will give me the same tolerance I gave them.

Part of me still wishes that I had done something to the crowd of protesters, even if it was just yelling at them or doing something completely feminine, but I always remind myself that were I in their position, I wouldn't want that done to me. The non-violent approach to this situation was undoubtedly the best. I respected the crowd's right to say what they wanted, and I also used my right to ignore them. I would never become that crowd. I would never take away someone's right to freedom or discriminate against someone for having different beliefs than I. Tolerance of others' beliefs and actions has allowed for humankind to exist to this day, not making everyone's beliefs the right ones. It is tolerance that has brought peace between nations and has allowed for so many civil rights movements to be successful. Gandhi once stated that "It is the law of love that rules mankind. Had violence or hate ruled us, we should have become extinct long ago" (qtd. in Merton 59). I couldn't agree more with this statement.

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Evaluation: *Mr. Yarbrough writes about this topic with admirable eloquence, self-insight, awareness, honesty, fair-mindedness, and humanism. His thought process as described in this essay stands as a model for peaceful, nonviolent tolerance and resolution of conflict.*

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## Contact with a Feminist

Nicole Zapata

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Pearl Ratunil

*Assignment: Write an eight-to ten-page research paper that uses at least eight to ten secondary sources. Your paper may not only consider the literary aspects of a work, but also its intersection with historical, social, or cultural contexts.*

The perception that feminist science fiction is filled with green lesbians is one with little substance. What makes a feminist novel one with meaningful content is one that explores the idea of pushing past perceived gendered roles and exploring new philosophies. Whether Carl Sagan's intent was to write a feminist novel or not, he used many techniques to emphasize that he was writing from a feminist woman's point of view. By using a woman's voice, he tapped into his readers' perceptions of sexual characteristics and led them into a discussion on the future of science. In the novel *Contact*, Carl Sagan uses a feminist voice to appeal to his audience's perspective on gender, in order to persuade his audience that diversity among scientists helps expand knowledge.

Carl Sagan's personal life might help one to understand the feminist views that influenced the writing of *Contact*. In *Carl Sagan: A Biography*, Ray Spangenburg acknowledges that, "Sagan exhibited sexist attitudes that were common at the time, but, to his credit, he gave more thought than the average 1950s husband to his wives' goals outside the home" (34). Spangenburg is referring to Carl Sagan's first marriage to biologist Lynn Margulis, which ended up failing despite both Sagan and Margulis becoming successful. Given that Sagan was a man of the 1950s, he was deeply influenced by the beliefs of that particular period, which could have made it difficult as a writer for him to completely shed all prejudice. In an analysis of the biography *Carl Sagan: A Life*, it is stated that "in the light of his very traditional attitude toward

his first two wives, to whom he left the responsibilities for housework and child rearing, it is perhaps ironic that Sagan later in his life under Druyan's guidance became a 'consistent and fervent feminist'" (Humphrey par. 4). Sagan's first two marriages reflect a time when male dominance was the norm in the household setting, a way of life that is by today's standards extremely old-fashioned, outdated, and sexist. In order to critique Sagan's writings, one must not become tempted to judge one time period by another.

One question that does arise, though, is can a man be a feminist? In the article by Mandy Van Deven, "Is Feminism Men's Work Too?" the author concludes, "the idea of a male feminist as either mythic or oxymoronic persists today" (17). Van Deven also reveals, "the reasoning seems to be that since feminism is a struggle about women gaining rights there is no legitimate role for men in that struggle" (17). Sagan's beliefs that can be associated with male feminism bring up the concept of "male privilege." Van Deven writes, "because institutional privilege is largely invisible to those who have it, men must be rigorous in their attempts at self reflection" (18). It seems through the novel *Contact* and his lasting third marriage that somewhere along the way, Carl Sagan became more conscious of himself as gendered. By recognizing one's gender, one is able to also recognize the advantages or disadvantages that society places upon gender.

Our planet is one of gender specificity. One cannot grow up without being reminded daily that they are either a boy or a girl or need to choose to be a boy or girl. In *Contact*, Ellie is constantly reminded that she is a woman. During her free time in high school, she would attend shop, where "there were lathes, drill presses, and other machine tools which she was forbidden to approach, because no matter how capable she might be, she was still 'a girl' (18). Carl Sagan's obvious association of gender and professions is a technique that he uses throughout *Contact* to portray Ellie's hardship as a woman in science, hardships that are reoccurring and prevalent in the lives of many women. The author Sandra Harding stresses that:

In virtually every culture, gender difference is a pivotal way in which humans identify themselves as

persons, organize social revelations, and symbolize meaningful natural and social events and processes. And in virtually all cultures, whatever is thought of as manly is more highly valued than what is thought of as womanly. (18)

In Londa Schiebinger's "Has Feminism Changed Science?" she concludes "gender in the style of science is significant because women's long legal exclusion from scientific institutions was buttressed by an elaborate coding of behaviors and activities as appropriately masculine and feminine" (69). This fact that masculinity has more influence in our world makes femininity, a trait usually associated with being a woman, undesirable. What makes a feminist critique on science so beneficial is that it helps to uncover existing and future prejudice. Knowing this, Carl Sagan chooses to emphasize that Ellie steers away from what is feminine and therefore breaks the stereotype of women. In *Contact*, John Staughton says of her, "her style of dress was deteriorating. Military fatigues were inappropriate for a girl and a travesty, a hypocrisy, for someone who claims to oppose the American intervention in Southeast Asia" (19). By describing her in fatigues and giving her opinions on war at a young age, Sagan is describing Ellie as a rebel against expected gender roles. Sagan also recognizes the need for female representation in science and in male-dominated fields. Although his methods may prove to be effective, his approach to shedding gender stereotypes leaves the novel with oversimplified techniques to emphasize women's abilities. By highlighting the capabilities of women, Sagan is able to charm his readers, which in turn allows him to move away from gender issues to discuss the lack of knowledge within science.

In a world where the president is female and the person finding extraterrestrial life is also a woman, one cannot help but hear a hint of feminist voice cheering for equality throughout the novel *Contact*. But is this cheering forced for the benefit of the reader? In the article "From The Female Man To The Virtual Girl: What Ever Happened To Feminist SF?" the author Frances Bonner points out "The majority of sf is set in the future and a very easy way to indicate that the future is different has long been to place female characters in positions or roles

that are usually reserved for men" (104). The upsetting truth to this writing technique is not that women do not exist in "male" fields, it's that they are underrepresented, making a literary practice like the one of placing female characters in male roles so effective. Because of the lack of representation of women in both SF novels and in scientific careers, when a female character is developed, it creates a sense of hope for the reader, a hope that women and the diversity of people will start to get more recognition within science as well as in science fiction. In *Contact*, Sagan describes Ellie's anticipation to meet the president: "she had never met a President before, and by the late-twentieth-century standards, this one wasn't half bad" (91). Sagan follows this with multiple "Ms. Presidents" to introduce and emphasize to the readers that the President is female and that not only is she a woman, but she is also good at what she does. This gives the reader a sense of hope that discrimination will end, and with hope comes trust. Sagan uses Ellie and Ms. President, two strong and intelligent women, and places them into professions that are mainly associated with masculinity, to gain trust with his readers.

Among the professions that women are underestimated in is science, which our heroine character Ellie claims as her passion. Toward the end of the novel, Ellie explains her findings on the trip to Vega to Kitz, and his response is:

Come off it, Arroway. Don't insult our intelligence. You don't present us with a shred of evidence, and you expect us to believe the biggest cock-and-bull story of all time? You know better than that. You're a smart lady. How could you figure to get away with it? (379)

By including this response, Sagan is introducing the fact that in science and in society, if new ideas are perceived as outlandish or different, people will tend to disregard them entirely. This practice is evident when referring to the roles of women within a culture. For many people, equal opportunity is a fairly new concept in a young society. With Kitz's response, one can make the connection between society's views on women and the exclusion of many new ideas in the science field. In the book *Feminism*

and *Science*, by Nancy Tuana, she asserts “one of the problems with science as it exists now is that scientists narrowly circumscribe [those] allowed to learn about nature and reject deviations as deviance” (129). Holding on to outdated facts can lead to misled interpretations by a society. One of the main reasons why cultures may hold onto gender identities is that social liberation is seen as “deviance” rather than an important part of the future.

By taking the female perspective in science, Sagan comments on the current system regarding how scientific facts are being produced. Schiebinger discusses the views of science in the time of high romanticism and how the belief was “that men and woman display distinctive scientific styles: men search to uncover the causes underlying appearances and to discover laws in life and nature; women search nature for expression of love” (22-23). Carl Sagan reflects that very belief in the character Ellie by having her passion driven by the search for love. He concludes the novel with, “she has studied the universe all her life but had overlooked its clearest message: for small creatures such as we the vastness is bearable only through love” (430). Sagan then expresses that “She found what she had been searching for” (431). The fact that Carl Sagan wrote through a woman’s perspective makes his ideas more plausible to the general public, because stereotypically, people are used to women being associated with the search for love. Sagan plays off of gender associations to move his audiences toward his views on gender.

By writing through a female perspective, Carl Sagan allows himself to reach a wider audience. One of his main goals throughout his career was to teach science to a larger audience. By reaching this audience, he is also encouraging more people to become interested in science. Harding reveals, “Movements for social liberation make it possible for people to see the world in an enlarged perspective because they remove the covers and blinders that obscure knowledge and observations” (24). She continues, “the women’s movement produces not only the opportunity for such an enlarged perspective, but more women scientists, and they are more likely than men to notice andocentric bias” (25). Sagan may have homed in on this idea as well, considering his endless effort to explain perspective to an audience other than fellow

scholars. As an astronomer, his search for knowledge is infinite. He also understands that in order to obtain more knowledge, there have to be changes in current scientific facts. Harding acknowledges that:

Scientific facts must fit the worldview of the times. Therefore, at times of tension and upheaval such as the last two decades, some researchers always try to prove that the differences in the political, social and economic status of women and men, black and white, or poor and rich people are inevitable because they are results of people’s inborn qualities and traits. (121)

From this, one can see that scientific facts can be ultimately very limiting. By limiting scientific knowledge, one is actually increasing the discrimination in our world. If science does not allow itself to expand, worldly views will stay unchanged, along with injustice. Harding writes, “we must broaden the base of experience and knowledge on which scientists draw by making it possible for a wider range of people to do science, and to do it in different ways” (129). By forming social groups like feminists and having more people involved in these groups, science will be more prone to know what knowledge they receive is subjugated. In the biography *Carl Sagan: A Life*, it is explained that Sagan “took a sincere interest in the scientific careers of female colleagues...and tried hard to boost their chances of making it in the male-dominated world of the physical sciences” (qtd. in Humphrey par. 4). Sagan, regardless of past sexism, knew the benefits of minorities in science. Through *Contact*, he was able to express to an audience these benefits. He understood that in order for scientific knowledge to expand, people first had to enable scientists to represent a vast amount of people and experiences, not just a chosen few. With more diversity comes various ways to look at science, and those different ways can breed more efficient scientific insight.

Throughout the novel *Contact*, one is able to relate Carl Sagan’s ideas on science and perspective to the common interests of his readers. He employs many techniques, some more obvious than others, to captivate an audience in order for him to teach his views on life. As an avid feminist, he is able to evoke topics of social movement throughout the novel. At times, he is overly

gender-specific and uses simplified writing styles such as placing women in “male” roles, but his main purpose seems to be to shed light on the discrimination that is within the scientific field. Sagan also reveals that scientific facts are at a minimum because of the immense discrimination. As far as science fiction is concerned, Sagan was able to describe a world on the verge of change, which is relatable and exciting. As far as feminist science fiction is concerned, he did a poor analysis of how women fit into that world.

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Evaluation: *Many of the books in this English 102 section dedicated to science and literature are not widely represented in literary criticism. Thus, much of the literary analysis Nicole wrote in this paper was from her own original insight. On a personal level, she has a commitment to understanding gender issues, and her passion shows in her paper. She was able to bring together the research on science and feminism and use it to clarify her understanding of Carl Sagan’s Contact.*

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## Afterword: Harper Students on Writing

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### Andrea Azzo

I never thought that I was good at anything until I discovered writing. As a young and timid girl, I had trouble expressing my thoughts aloud. That is why I found solace in my writing abilities. It opened a new world to me, and it allowed others to understand who I was in a deeper sense. More generally, writing provides an opportunity for those like myself who are too shy to communicate face-to-face. This is a huge advantage, and considering that our generation relies on text messages and social networks like Facebook to speak our minds, writing can boost someone's self-esteem. It can be somewhat therapeutic to vent on daily issues or question occurrences in our lives. Some have argued that the decrease in personal interaction is a bad thing. However, with the boom of the Internet, we are communicating more frequently than ever before. The public can finally comprehend the feelings that introverts keep bottled up inside. In this way, writing unleashes our true personalities.

People tend to be more honest when they are writing something. Perhaps this is because of the relationship that comes with a simple pen and paper. When I am writing something, I don't feel the burden of skepticism or rejection, like I sometimes feel when I'm talking to someone. I don't worry about my writing, because I feel security with the absence of people's judgment. Some may get the impression that I'm insecure, but I argue that writing is just a method of expression. In the essay that I wrote, I tried to do just that: inform others about the complexity of attending college. In it, I describe the mental and social struggles of picking a major and eventually getting a job. This is something that every student at Harper can relate to.

Writing has a lot to do with relation as well. If people can empathize with and understand the writer, then the writer has done a good job of honoring his or her intentions. You don't need to be a great writer to do this; you just need to be relatable. If you can write a story that others can identify with, then you stand a greater chance in being successful. This, I feel, is the true beauty of writing.

### Ronald Chilcutt

It is almost a comic irony that I am writing or you are reading this piece or much less my article published later in this anthology. The assignment, a foreign policy platform, was an oral presentation where no formal paper was required but just our notes and our thoughts on the subject. With the presentation and semester over and some undergraduate deficiencies finished, I was on my way back to graduate school without giving the paper a second thought. Some six months later came the e-mail informing me of the submission, and I was flabbergasted. Many times in my past, I had tried to get short works published, which led to more denial letters than I would like to admit, and then voila, a piece that I did not plan out or submit is published.

That, my friends, is the beauty and essence of writing. Removal of the constraints and formality lets the ideas flow. There is less worry about structure and more emphasis on substance, and much like an athlete, you are in the zone. The subject, in my case, was one of my passions, making my opinions strong and my defenses of those opinions stronger. What was meant to be little more than notes to follow a Powerpoint presentation evolved into a cohesive essay arguing a point and inspiring another (thank you Professor Summers) to share it with many.

A lifetime ago, my freshman composition professor, Juliet Garver, told me the secret to writing well. It is the same secret that I teach to my son and daughter and what I will teach to my students as well. It is elegant, yet simple and to the point. When followed, eventually good will come, and I am the proof. I practice it, and it strengthens like muscle memory; the more I do it, the easier it becomes. The secret, so obvious it now seems: to write well, you must write, and eventually you will touch another. It may have taken twenty years, but I did.

### Kim Daniel

Writing is time where all thoughts can be unveiled through the words written down on a page. Writing is important for me to be able to expose my true feelings and my knowledge, not only to myself but to the entire world. I often find myself reflecting through a journal consisting of poems, stories, and/or pictures. Whenever I begin to write, I always have the "painted picture" in my mind of what the writing piece will look like. The opening always starts with an interesting fact, story, question, or onomatopoeia

## Afterword: Harper Students on Writing

to engage the readers. From there, I let my mind go wild and wander off to discover new places. I try to keep the sentences simple and not too complex, to make it easy and enjoyable for the audience. Depending on the piece, the word choice is particularly chosen to make it more serious, humorous, insightful, knowledgeable, or simply creative. The beauty of writing is that words can be shaped to any mold that is created, which makes writing remarkable. As I leisurely write, the writing process doesn't take effect, but for any important document, the write, edit, edit, and edit process always occurs before any final product. I truly feel that anybody who can express themselves can be a talented writer because they have all the necessary tools: a working, spectacular, creative mind.

### Shari Emme

For myself, I find that writing is the most effective method in which to communicate, no matter whether it is by means of an essay, letter, short story, poem, or other written work. It allows a person to elaborate one's thoughts, feelings, fears and hopes, those things we might otherwise be too self-conscious to say aloud. It is a means of learning about the past, as well as leaving a legacy for future generations. Without the written word, we would not know of the classic masterpieces penned over the centuries. There would be no holy books to study, or a Declaration of Independence to inspire us. There would be none of the letters between Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Shakespeare's works would have no voice. Robert Frost's words would be lost, and Henry David Thoreau's ideals merely little known concepts. We might not know of others who share our values throughout the ages, or gain a respectful understanding for those whose views differs from ours. While there are many forms a piece of writing may take, each piece is a gift to be treasured for its ability to communicate, enrich, inspire, and share.

### Richard Guth

Writing for me is a way to slow down my thinking and to organize my thoughts. I can always find something that can be improved each time I look at my rough draft. In our high-paced lifestyle where e-mails and texts are all composed in shorthand and slang, we tend to forget how beautiful a thoughtfully arranged composition can be.

I have had the good fortune of having two great

professors: Richard Middleton-Kaplan and Xilao Li. Both have had a huge impact on how I look at writing and how I compose my thoughts. They have introduced me to literature that I normally would not have read. Each professor has been supportive and also critical when needed. It is important to realize constructive criticism is a vital part of the writing process.

### John Hauger

For me, writing has to have a purpose. And I'm not talking about communicating an idea from me to some reader. That goes without saying. I'm talking about some tangible need that has to be fulfilled. You will not find me on Facebook announcing to the world at large what toothpaste I just used. You won't find me in the corner of my bedroom endlessly jotting down my feelings into a journal, trying to delve deeper into my own soul. You will, however, find me tackling whatever assignment I've been handed with every ounce of intelligence and panache that I can muster. I think that if more people kept this goal in mind, society as a whole just might become a better place.

### Tiffany Kahn

I feel that writing is an important skill that requires thought and time. It is important in our lives because we learn so much either through our personal writing or from the writing of others.

Writing is an "everyday use" just as the quilts were meant to be in the short story by Alice Walker, which I wrote about in the essay published in this collection. Every day, we read and/or write something, whether it is for school, work, or enjoyment. In the story, the quilts were intended for use on a daily basis instead of for show. Similarly, writing is used to convey information; it has a purpose and can be compared to quilting because it requires thoughtful planning and time.

I always put a lot of time and effort into my writing because it reflects me. Providing enough time to write a paper is essential, especially for research papers. Better outcomes result from following a step-by-step process.

I am excited that my paper was chosen for this edition of *The Harper Anthology*. I felt honored that Dr. Barbara Butler asked me to submit it, but I never thought it would actually be chosen. I am very grateful to her for helping me toward this achievement.

### **Brittany Manning**

Writing is whatever you make it out to be. It can be an outlet to express yourself, letting a rush of emotions pour out on a piece of paper. It can be a way to let your voice be heard and make an impact on someone's life. It can also consist of a blank sheet of paper that you stare at all night in the hope that it will magically write itself by the time class begins the next day. For everyone, though, writing is individuality at work, where individuals are capable of leaving an imprint of themselves in the minds and hearts of their readers. It can be both frustrating and challenging, as are most tasks worth completing, but the joy of writing comes in the satisfaction and triumph one feels at its conclusion.

Writing allows me to organize my jumbled thoughts into a more coherent manner. Sometimes I have to wait for that "right moment," and once that moment comes, I find myself incredibly engaged in my writing. One idea flows into another, and I get in a deep state of mind, almost as if I am in my own bubble. Writing allows me to escape for a little while and go on an adventure like no other. I get to be in charge of where the story goes. I can choose the story's journey. It allows me to be creative, express myself, and reflect on my experiences.

Writing doesn't always come easily. I've been taught that it's just better to start jotting down ideas, no matter how ridiculous they seem. It's easier to come back to something that was started than never started at all. As I learned from my own experiences, you may be surprised what those seemingly ridiculous ideas are capable of; deep within them may lie the foundation of an essay.

You should also never feel like you have to use big, "intelligent" words to make a paper worth reading. In fact, sometimes the clutter of unfamiliar words can take over your paper, ultimately taking away the underlying message and baffling most of your readers. If those words do not come naturally to you, they may seem artificial. Nothing is wrong with using simplistic, familiar words, since ideas will be better expressed with them. Think about what message you are trying to convey. The reader should be able to get inside your head and sense what you are trying to express or what you felt as you wrote your paper. Good writing should speak for itself. Words should form ideas, and ideas should form mental images.

While I understand writing may not be the most joyous activity, even verging on torture for some, with a little hard work, everyone is capable of good writing. For those who despise writing, give writing a chance. You may even find yourself enjoying it. Writing is all around us, so we all have to call a truce with it at some point.

### **Bergen Maurstad**

When I was in high school, it always seemed like such a chore to put together a two-page research paper. I hated it. I guess at that time completing any assignment was the last thing on my mind. Girls always took precedent. When I came to Harper College, I chose to take the required English 101 and 102 classes during my first two semesters. While taking those classes, I discovered that I was actually pretty good at putting together sentences that conveyed information while incorporating my own personal ideals. I was proud of myself because it seemed effortless, and somehow I ended up convincing myself that I knew what I was talking about. This sparked my interest in writing. Since then, I've created song lyrics, poems, and ideas for children's books. I think that when you write, you are not only creating the characters in a story, but you are also developing your own personal character. One thing I love about writing is trying to use words to tell a story that can be interpreted in different ways. For me, it is important to include an underlying meaning in a story that is not obvious on a quick read but becomes clear when analyzed, like in the song lyrics of Bob Dylan: "Now your dancing child with his Chinese suit. He spoke to me, I took his flute. No I wasn't very cute to him—was I? But I did it because he lied, because he took you for a ride, and because time was on his side, and because I. I want you...."

### **Brittney Mulé**

Writing has always been difficult for me. However, when I get a topic that interests me, the ideas come to me quickly. I have found that when I write about personal experiences, the writing becomes more focused rather than jumping from topic to topic. I can write experiences in the order they happen. It is sometimes hard to share life experiences, but they make the best stories. My advice to others is "write from your heart."

### **Brian Neistein**

Possibly the most important aspect of the writing process is the planning stage. In fact, I remember spending hours merely trying to determine the topic of my paper, the direction which to take it, and whether or not I was passionate enough about the topic I was pondering. My passion for the many writing topics I've chosen has fueled my success in that it made writing enjoyable and personal. Instead of simply writing strictly about a topic I wasn't intrigued by, I would find an angle at which the topic would spark interest in me. Preferably, I could find



ways in which a topic could, in one way or another, relate to my passions or interests. When I've succeeded in doing this, the paper would not only be very enjoyable for me to write, but the passion and courage I had when writing it, in an effort to move or compel a reader to view something in a new perspective, would make the writing that much more interesting to read.

### Julie Provenza

Expressing my thoughts has always been a difficult process for me; however, when I took my first philosophy class, I found a passion for writing. I learned how to write, engaging in a dialogue with the philosopher. I also learned the importance of the process by which we should write: spit all your ideas out on paper, then work through your thoughts to make it flow, and take the time to explain new concepts or background information so that the reader has an easier time understanding. Keeping these techniques in mind, I have been able to enjoy writing papers. I look at every essay as a challenge to defend my thoughts, to strengthen my beliefs, and to challenge myself.

### Jaime Quintanilla

As college students, we can only imagine what life will bring when we walk away from those high school doors. For me, the journey one takes begins with writing. Through the enchanting power of words, I no longer find myself sitting in front of a computer or gripping a number 2 pencil. It takes the mind where there are no barriers, just the freedom to explore our imaginations and ideas. These are the same ideas that provoke differences and give the opportunity for voices to become heard when no one will hear them. I have learned that writing molds individuals, all of whom become part of a life we all take turns breathing in. There is no such thing as good or bad writing. There's just writing. So what if there are fragments or misplaced commas? That's the beauty behind it all; you become your own author. You make the rules.

For this specific piece on immigration, I knew emotion had taken over a simple assignment. However, it was as if my fingers created the anger and disappointment of families desperately waiting for the day he promised, a day that many are still waiting for. As soon as my piece was finished, the word "controversy" flashed in bold red

letters across my eyes. Deleting it seemed like betrayal, and regretting it felt inhuman, so I faced it. This same courage told me there would be hundreds who would roll their eyes and argue over the words written in the paper. I'll admit it; this is one story that will never have an ending everyone will like, but it will have an ending.

A big *gracias* to Mr. Antonio Iacopino, a teacher who went beyond a syllabus. A true blessing was having the chance of growing as a person in his class without fear of losing individuality. Our discussions have led to the pieces of a puzzle I can now consider complete.

### Nathan Rapp

The ability to write effectively, or the ability to communicate with clarity, is the most important skill in life. In the world today, a failure to write or communicate well is synonymous to warfare. Any breakdown in communication, whether oral or written, causes friction between two groups. Imagine that the United States has tried every way to communicate with China, but whatever writing or speech that was attempted was a failure. A lack of understanding between these two nations would create friction and anger. And taking only a few more steps in this direction, one would find bullets flying. It is then reasonable to assume that communication is necessary to living peaceably.

Yet, writing is not easy; it is hard, mental work. Writing well requires great organization, coherence, logic, and knowledge of the receiving audience. But writing is precious; it is a worthy pursuit! With it, one has the key to unlock the secrets of this world. If a person could not read or write, the wonderful fields of mathematics, physics, history, logic, and music (to name a few) would remain closed forever. Take away writing, and life loses its spice and color. Take away writing, and life loses its meaning. Practice writing, and you become educated. Practice writing, and you build the future. Practice writing, and live.

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